

UK Prime Minister May seeks alliance with Democratic Unionist Party to forestall a second general election

By Robert Stevens
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Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative government is seeking a "confidence and supply" agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in an attempt to secure a majority following a disastrous showing in last week's snap general election.

May called the election to secure a substantial increase to the Tories' slim 17-seat majority, but lost 13 seats and ended with a hung parliament. Labour under Jeremy Corbyn won 40 percent of the vote, just 2 percent less than the Tories.

The Tories need the 10 DUP MPs from Northern Ireland to secure a majority, but there is no possibility of a coalition. The aim is rather to secure a pact with the DUP to support the government in motions of confidence and budget votes—a crisis-ridden regime ruling with a tiny majority over a population that widely despises them.

On Saturday, Downing Street issued a statement that an agreement in principle had been reached with the Democratic Unionists, but this was denied by the DUP, forcing the Tories to issue a clarification. May is to meet DUP leader Arlene Foster for talks on Tuesday.

The DUP is an ultra-right wing outfit. Attention in the UK media has largely focused on its opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, while putting forward some populist policies aimed at reversing some austerity measures that would be at odds with the pro-austerity agenda outlined in May's manifesto.

Of far greater significance is the DUP's position as the main Unionist and Protestant party in the North and its ties to paramilitary groups.

The Tories' desperate attempts to secure a majority threatens the eruption of conflict in Ireland, which ended in 1998 following the Good Friday Agreement reached by the then-Labour government and political parties in Northern Ireland, at that time with the exception of the

DUP. The DUP only entered into the power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly with the nationalist Sinn Fein in 2007, after it eclipsed the Ulster Unionist Party.

The creation of a Tory/DUP government tears up the very basis of the Agreement and whatever political stability was achieved via the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Agreement states that a British government must remain impartial in its dealings with all Northern Irish parties. This is impossible with one of those parties now set to prop up the Conservatives.

In addition, one of the demands of the DUP in return for doing so is that the Tories forbid any referendum on a united Ireland. Such an agreement would be unconstitutional, as this provision is specifically allowed under the Good Friday Agreement.

Sinn Fein increased its vote in the seats that were contested in Northern Ireland in the general election, taking seven. Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams pointed out that unionist parties secured less than half the electorate's backing for the first time in the region's history, adding, "One thing we can say for certainty, there is going to be a referendum on Irish unity. I can't say when, but there is going to be."

The fact that the Tories are prepared to contemplate the resumption of conflict in Ireland, which cost thousands of lives over three decades beginning in 1969 in the "Troubles", testifies to the existential crisis they face.

This is set to escalate. In just a week's time, talks begin with the European Union over the terms of Britain's exit from the EU. The ruling elite and the Tories are split over the issue of Brexit, with the majority of the ruling class—led by the financial elite in the City of London—opposed to departing the EU and Single Market.

The hung parliament offers the pro-Remain camp an opportunity to ensure there is no hard Brexit in which the

UK leaves the Single Market. Others still seek to reverse Brexit entirely.

However, May is in greater thrall to the hard Brexit wing of her party than ever before. Her main Brexit ministers, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and Brexit Secretary David Davis, are both being touted as leadership challengers to May, and both continued in their positions as she reshuffled her cabinet Sunday. Another leading Tory Brexiteer, Michael Gove, was recalled to the cabinet.

May is only still in place because the hard Brexit wing fear that if she is forced to stand down as a result of a leadership challenge, this would lead to weeks and months of instability and then a second general election, which would likely see Labour elected.

On Sunday, a new poll found that Labour had surged six points ahead of the Tories.

May must present the new government's upcoming legislative programme to parliament on Tuesday in the Queen's Speech. Corbyn said on the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show* Sunday that Labour was ready to head a government if called upon, and would be putting forward amendments to the Queen's Speech demanding the adoption of parts of Labour's election manifesto.

The main Tory-supporting newspapers who back Brexit are insisting May remain in office for now to prevent the election of a Corbyn-led Labour government at all costs. The Rupert Murdoch-owned *Sun on Sunday* editorialised, "In normal circumstances the removal men would already have been and gone after a humiliating resignation. But these aren't normal circumstances... Every Tory MP has to remember, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, that if the Government falls there is every chance of Jeremy Corbyn taking over—and that would be an utter disaster for the country."

In opposition, the pro-Remain sections of the bourgeoisie are making their voices heard via the *Guardian* and *Financial Times*.

Following the election, the *Financial Times* editorialised that "the sheer importance of this moment in Britain's history, suggests the idea of a national unity government, made up of ministers from both parties."

It suggested that if another election was not held May could remain as prime minister but would have "to face down the hard Brexiteers in her own party."

It added, "Labour too has a responsibility to act in the interests of the country," counselling, "It is time for all sides to consider the national interest rather than the narrow party interest. Mrs. May has an obligation to do

so—or else go."

There is slim chance that Corbyn would throw away Labour's support in the working class—the main reason why it is useful to the bourgeoisie—on a coalition with the Tories. The far more likely outcome would be a second general election that could be convened as early as the autumn, with a Labour victory paving the way for a pro-EU government as a Labour majority or in an alliance of pro-Remain parties such as the Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrats.

Corbyn presently rejects such an alliance, but everyone assumes he will be pliable if called on to do so. He is already seeking an alliance with the party's Blairite right. In response to a question from Marr, Corbyn said he would be prepared to see pro-EU Blairites return to his shadow cabinet, declaring, "I'm the most generous person in the world." He added, "Of course we are going to reach out [to the Labour right], ever since I became leader I had reached out."

An alliance with the Blairites is Corbyn's political preparation for assuming responsibility for governing on behalf of British capitalism. Corbyn also made clear that he seeks the support of other opposition parties for his amendments to the Queen's Speech, which would be the basis of his heading a minority government should May's deal with the DUP fall through. Such a government would be a vicious anti-working class administration that would swiftly jettison Corbyn's social reform rhetoric.

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