

# Jeremy Corbyn's Finest Hour?

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***With Boris Johnson as UK prime minister, and his Brexit strategy crystal clear, the task of the Labour opposition is equally clear. It must expose the truth about Johnson's no-deal option – namely, that it means a Trump-deal Brexit – and put forward its own plan to end Britain's interminable ordeal immediately.***

ATHENS – Boris Johnson is the first British prime minister in a long time who is free of dilemmas regarding his approach to the European Union. For better or worse, Johnson's strategy for attaining power has left him with only one viable option: Forget about negotiating with the EU before the October 31 Brexit deadline, call a general election for that day, seek a popular mandate for a no-ifs-no-buts no-deal divorce from Europe, and then sit back and watch his domestic and foreign adversaries sweat it out.

Setting aside the obvious drawbacks of a no-deal Brexit, Johnson has no workable alternative. Traveling to Brussels to renegotiate his predecessor's Brexit deal would be a tactical error. Theresa May's failure reflected an inability to distinguish between the EU's broader interests and the specific motivation of its establishment. Given a choice between securing the profits of continental exporters and reaffirming the bureaucracy's modus operandi, the EU's chief negotiator, [Michel Barnier](#), and the political leaders behind him will unfailingly opt for the latter. Every proposal of significant changes to the withdrawal agreement negotiated by May's government, even those in the EU's long-term interests, will thus be rejected.

Johnson is unlikely to repeat May's error. To be sure, he may be tempted to try out his rhetorical skills on German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President [Emmanuel Macron](#). But Dominic Cummings, his effective chief of staff (and the cunning campaign director of Vote Leave in 2016) would undoubtedly remind Johnson that the last thing he needs is to expose the British public to another scene of their prime minister returning from the Continent empty-handed. Having exploited that sense of humiliation to become prime minister, Johnson would be foolish to perpetuate it.

In the absence of realistic prospects of a meaningful negotiation before October 31, and facing a fractious Parliament that is unable to agree on any Brexit option, Johnson can call a general election to coincide with the October 31 deadline. Doing so would simultaneously neutralize his rebellious MPs and present voters with a clear challenge: "End this dog's Brexit process now by backing me, or let this ignominy continue under a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government, one that may need the backing of the Scottish Nationalists who want to end the United Kingdom."

Opposition politicians and commentators who point out that the public are alert to Johnson's many character flaws seem to underestimate the allure of ending, once and for all, a negotiation that Britons – Leavers and Remainers alike – find mortifying. A hard-Brexit manifesto would help Johnson destroy the upstart Brexit party and re-unite the Leave constituency for the first time since its June 2016 referendum victory.

Meanwhile, Remainers remain deeply divided not only between the Liberal Democrats and Labour, but also between UK-wide and Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties. Seldom before has a new prime minister, who took over a disordered government and a divided party, had such a clear path to potential dominance.

Despite opinion polls suggesting a Liberal Democrat revival, courtesy of their unambiguous pro-Remain stance, the only impediment to Boris Johnson's bid for dominance is Corbyn's Labour Party. Ardent Remainers have lambasted Corbyn for refusing to turn Labour into the electoral wing of the campaign to reverse Brexit. They cite his criticism of the EU's inbuilt pro-austerity, oligarchic bias as evidence that he was never serious when, in June 2016, he campaigned to remain in the EU while committing to reform the bloc.

But Corbyn was right to be nuanced in his support of Remain. It was not Vladimir Putin, Facebook, or the Leave campaign's blatant lies that put Brexit over the top. And it was not the critical stance on the hustings of those of us (including DiEM25) who, like Corbyn, campaigned along the lines of: "In the EU. Against *this*EU!"

No, the best ally of the Leave campaign were establishment figures, from [Tony Blair](#) to [Christine Lagarde](#). They oscillated between Project Fear (warning of post-Brexit Armageddon) and a rosy depiction of the EU that whitewashed its anti-democratic decision-making, its misanthropic handling of the euro crisis, and its readiness to sign trade agreements with the United States that usurped parliaments and threatened some of the EU's greatest achievements.

Since the 2016 referendum, a civil war-like atmosphere has made it increasingly impossible for Leavers and Remainers to hold a civilized conversation. Corbyn valiantly tried to keep Labour's Leavers and Remainers together by seeking an honorable compromise: The UK would formally leave the EU, to respect the referendum's outcome, while remaining in as many of the bloc's structures as possible – including a customs union. Instead of applauding Corbyn for this tricky balancing act, his opponents within the Labour Party, together with a liberal establishment unprincipled enough to deliver all Leavers to Nigel Farage and Johnson, attacked him with extraordinary viciousness.

But that was then and this is now. With Johnson as prime minister, and his strategy crystal clear, Corbyn's task is to expose the truth about Johnson's no-deal Brexit – namely, that it means a Trump-deal Brexit – and put forward Labour's plan to end the interminable Brexit ordeal immediately.<sup>1</sup>

Corbyn must first show voters that a Johnson government will turn the UK into a vassal state of a Trumpian US and of the multinationals eager to usurp the country's cherished institutions (especially the National Health Service). Johnson will bind the UK to a global alliance of populist/nationalist regimes and destroy Britain's chances to lead Europe and the world with a Green New Deal that overhauls a failed UK business model based on low taxes, low wages, low investment, zero-hour contracts, and unregulated finance.

Corbyn's second task is to offer an alternative for ending the humiliation of the ongoing negotiations. That means committing to revoke Article 50 to allow a Labour government time to implement a green-investment, anti-austerity policy agenda in tune with the party's progressive internationalism, while simultaneously organizing a Citizens' Deliberative Assembly to formulate the question(s) to be put to voters in a second Brexit referendum.

A general election fought over these two unequivocal alternatives, Johnson's and Corbyn's, would empower the UK's people, at last, to determine their country's future.