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Britain

Britain - 10 days of political turmoil

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Since the British referendum on June 23, the situation has been moving at an unprecedented pace. The pound fell dramatically to the lowest level since 1985 and Britain lost its Triple AAA credit rating. The possibility of a recession is a very real one.

Prime Minister David Cameron resigned, as was inevitable after a victory for Brexit – but made clear that Article 50 won't be triggered before his successor is in place in the autumn. Though formally Cameron remains in post until after the leadership contest, effectively there is no government in place.

A bitter succession battle in the Conservative Party has ensued, with Boris Johnson, who led the Leave campaign for the Tories and seemed the frontrunner for the leadership, withdrawing at the last moment after attacks from other Brexiters.

There are now five contenders; leave campaigners Liam Fox, Michael Gove and Andrea Leadsom and remainers Steven Crabb and Theresa May. Conservative MPs will have a series of ballots over the next few weeks until two only contenders are left, then party membership will get to vote between them. Home Secretary Theresa May currently has far more MPs supporting her than the others put together - though only around 50% have shown their hands.

Whoever is elected will be committed to further attacks on worker's rights and whipping up further racism, blaming migrants for shortages which actually result from their austerity offensive.

Massive increase in racist attacks

Police report a fivefold increase in racist attacks – undoubtedly an underestimate – after a campaign which saw the normalisation of a vile racism, particularly but not exclusively, from the Leave campaign. Jo Cox, a Labour MP who strongly supported refugees, was assassinated by a fascist a week before the referendum.

A Polish community centre was attacked, Turkish and Spanish shops had windows broken and children are being taunted in schools and told to go back home. The communities under attack are not only those who have come to Britain under the free movement directives of the EU, but include people whose families have lived in Britain for generations.

Antiracist organisation, The Monitoring Group has received 112 reports since the Brexit vote – compared with four it would get in an average week. Campaigner Suresh Grover, the charity's director, said: "We seem to be experiencing a wave of xenophobia and racial incidents. "We've had calls about neighbour disputes, people being called the 'P' word, the 'N' word, people who have had leaflets through doors."

There has been resistance with significant protests in defence of migrants and against hate crime and acts of solidarity across communities.

Attempted coup against Labour's Jeremy Corbyn

The majority of Labour members of Parliament were never reconciled to the election of left wing leader Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the party, after an extraordinarily vibrant campaign last summer which saw a doubling of party membership – especially amongst young people.

They hoped to be able to act after an expected defeat in an important parliamentary by election in the North West seat of Oldham in December 2015. Labour won. They then expected that Labour would do badly enough in the local elections in May 2016 but the results did not go their way.

Finally they used the fact that there was a leave vote in the referendum to try to force Corbyn to resign. Not confident that they could defeat him in a leadership contest, they orchestrated mass resignations from the Shadow Cabinet and moved a vote of no confidence through the Parliamentary Labour Party.

But Corbyn is going nowhere – and as their bluff has been called. Labour membership is rising rapidly again (60,000 this week), they have not even an agreed candidate. Meanwhile huge meetings and demonstrations in Corbyn's support are taking place across the country and most trade unions are supporting Corbyn.

Meanwhile over 50,000 marched in London on July 2 in a 'March for Europe'. The politics of this gathering were undoubtedly incoherent, with many uncritical of the EU and some calling for a second referendum – which would only give the right a further opportunity to pour out their racist bile. Never the less there were slogans in defence of refugees and Left Unity's poster defending free movement was hugely popular.

Corbyn and his team are trying to lay down a number of red lines in terms of defending the position of existing EU nationals in Britain, defending workers' rights and opposing austerity as well as access to the single market. Of course this attempt is getting very little coverage with the media being much more focused on the political vacuum rather than policies to defend the rights of working people.

In this volatile situation, Labour would have had a real opportunity to take the fight to the Tories, but the right in the party are well prepared to throw all that away – not because they fear Corbyn will lose the next election – but because they think he would win.