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Britain

May resigns and Brexit moves to the right

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So May, with her cabinet falling to pieces around her and the 1922 Committee pulling the rug from underneath her, has at last accepted the inevitable and announced her resignation. She chose to do this as the Commons goes into recess and in advance of the European EU election results on Sunday that are going to be devastating for the Tories.

She will resign on Friday 7 June and the election campaign for the Tory party leadership will open on Monday 10 June. She will remain as a caretaker PM until this process is completed, probably in early August and will still be there to look after Trump.

There is a frenzied race for her job amongst up to 20 contenders, with little to indicate who is likely to win. What is clear is that the right-wing trajectory of Brexit will accelerate and that the new leader will be a hard line Brexiteer looking as much like Nigel Farage as possible and pledging to deliver a no deal exit.

Does this make a no-deal Brexit more likely by the end of October, given that May's deal is gone and a legal default is now there for a hard line Brexiteer to drive through? Not necessarily. There are two things to consider. The first is that the issue of the British border in Ireland will not go away just because a new hardliner, who is self-deluded on the issue, starts banging the table in Brussels. The harsh reality is that if Britain leaves the EU without a deal, the British border in Ireland becomes the border between the EU the UK under WTO rules, and a hard border becomes inevitable however much rhetoric is expended to the contrary.

The second thing is how to get a no-deal Brexit through at the end of October. It would involve by-passing Parliament under conditions where the Parliamentary arithmetic on all this is unlikely to change. This would be very difficult without splitting the Tory Party even further and bringing about yet another constitutional crisis, which would result in either a general election or a second referendum.

In other words it is still possible to stop Brexit but Labour would be the key. It would involve Labour coming off the fence, ending talk of negotiating their own Brexit deal, and backing a second referendum with the option of remain. The same applies if a general election is called with Brexit remaining as the central issue. Labour must recognise that that there is no such thing as a soft or jobs friendly Brexit. It must appeal to the growing remain vote as a part of a programme based on clear anti-austerity demands: "For the many – not the few".

Friday 24 May

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