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Britain

Labour movement begins to face down the coup

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Jeremy Corbyn encouraged people to take to the streets on Saturday 31 August to protest against Boris Johnson's attempt to shut down Parliament. A massive crowd filled Whitehall blockading Downing Street vocally demonstrating their opposition to what is widely perceived as a coup by the extreme right of the Tory party.

Corbyn was at another event in Glasgow but the Labour leadership was represented by Dawn Butler, Diane Abbott and John McDonnell. The London event was dominated by pro-remain, pro-Corbyn supporters. This felt like the day that Labour both put itself at the head of the anti-Brexit movement on the streets and energised its supporters for what will be a ferocious general election campaign.

Demonstrations took place in several towns and cities, including places like Windsor, Bournemouth and Clitheroe which don't usually feature on listings for radical political activity. A national protest movement was born.

TV coverage of the event switched back and forth between the demonstrations in Britain and the inspiring, increasingly militant protests happening in Hong Kong. It was a good juxtaposition. In both cases people were on the streets in defence of their rights opposing governments they see as corrupt and anti-democratic. And just as the Hong Kong protests have become more intense so too the British assemblies have changed gear. In London calls for civil disobedience, direct action and daily protests were met with resounding cheers.

Michael Chessum, one of the demonstration organisers told the crowd "we're here to force him (Johnson) to back down. That means civil disobedience and being willing to disrupt things."

A hint of things to come was a semi-spontaneous transformation of the static protest into an impromptu march through central London. Extinction Rebellion have done this sort of thing but it is a new tactic for the Labour and anti-Brexit activists. People understand that the situation needs new methods.

Siân Berry spoke for the Green Party. Given that the slogans on the backdrop behind the speakers were "fight for democracy, defend migrants and stop the coup" it wasn't too much of a surprise that figures like Anna Soubry and Chukka Umunna weren't there. This was the sort of politics they just don't understand. When they hear organisers like Alena Ivanova of Another Europe is Possible saying what we need to organise in defence of freedom of movement and take to the streets in defence of migrants or a London demonstration starts singing Bella Ciao, they know they don't belong there.

So, while we thank them for their work in fragmenting the Tory party, we know we don't need them. Saturday 31 August was when the labour movement began to respond on the streets to Johnson's coup. It's also shown him that he is much more vulnerable than he thinks in the election. The essential thing now is to keep up the tempo of actions in England, Scotland and Wales to exploit a constitutional crisis which has revealed the Brexiteers' underlying weakness.

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