

No-Confidence Survivor: Theresa May and Brexit

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Theresa May's prime ministership remains one of torment, drawn out, and weakened daily. But does it really matter? If it is true to claim that people deserve the government they elect, then there is something madly representative of the debacle of May's leadership, one where problems are sought for any possible solutions.

Steering through the waters of Brexit has been a nigh impossible task rendered even more problematic by a stubborn myopia nursed by May. She nurses dogmas incapable of learning new tricks. Her latest Brexit plan, as it headed to inevitable defeat, would have rendered Britain bound to the EU in a manner more servile than any sovereign populist would have dreamed. Benefits would have been shed; obligations would have persisted. While there is very little to recommend the views of the rabid Tory Eurosceptics, there is something in the idea that Britain would become a vassal state.

As it transpired, May lost by a colossal margin, an indication that few could stomach her vision: 432 to 202, the worst defeat by a British administration in over a century.

“In all normal circumstances,” [observed](#) Robert Peston, that legendary pessimist of matters economic, “a Prime Minister would resign when suffering such a humiliation on their central policy – and a policy Theresa May herself said today would ‘set the future of this country for a generation’.”

Such is the nature of the climate: gross failure results in bare survival rather than inevitable annihilation. Grand acts of quixotic behaviour are not richly punished but given reprieve before the next charge against windmills. So we are left with the idea of uncharted territory, suggesting, in the face of such chaos and uncertainty, a postponement of the departure date from the EU set for March 29. The Article 50 period, in other words, would have to be extended, but this, again, implies a set of hypothetical variations and ponderings.

For all that, May survived yet another no-confidence motion by 325 to 306, with Labor's Jeremy Corbyn incapable of pushing the entire debacle to an election. Not even the Tories wished that upon their own leader, whom they have come to despise in ways verging on the pathological. Corbyn might well have called the May prime ministership a “zombie” administration, but he had failed to supply the necessary weapons to finish it off, prompting colleagues in the Commons to suggest a change of approach.

The leader of the Liberal Democrats, Vince Cable, [advanced](#) the proposition that the Labour leader had to alter “his position and come behind the ‘People's Vote’ or he will just be seen, and will be, a handmaiden of Brexit.”

Despite the failure, Corbyn had his own demands. “The government must remove clearly,

once and for all, the prospect of the catastrophe of a no-deal exit from the EU and all the chaos that would come as a result of that.” The language of cross-party lines on discussing Brexit remain distant matters.

As for the zombie representative-in-chief herself, the government would “continue to work to deliver on the solemn promise to the people of this country to deliver on the result of the referendum and leave the European Union”. Same words, barely touched up – the May formulae remains incapable of changing form, incapable of elevation, but also seemingly incapable of perishing.

Wednesday’s vote of survival after the calamity of her defeated proposals suggested a change in heart from May. (Did she have any other choice?) She ventured talks with various opposition party leaders, though various news outlets in the UK insisted that Corbyn had been ungenerous in snubbing the prime minister. Labour’s leadership remains sceptical at any advances from Downing Street. As *The Guardian* [editorialised](#) on May’s proposed talks,

“It is a welcome shift in tone, but there is no indication from Mrs May’s record that she has the diplomatic skills required to make such a consultation fruitful.”

This notable lack manifested in an obsession with “red lines”, a mad faith in a Brexit plan long rendered cadaverous.

For the paper’s own worth, a new strategy of change focused on a customs union arrangement between Britain and the EU would “transform dialogue with Labour and pro-European Tories.” Fine thing to suggest, but the darkness refuses to abate. International Trade Secretary Liam Fox, for one, sees such a union as a way of ensuring that Britain will not have an independent trade policy. The ship of apocalypse, whatever it might entail, remains on course.

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