

Stop the Political Games: Britain Needs a New Government Now!

By [Alexander Mercouris](#)

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Britain urgently needs a coalition government to negotiate Brexit and likely Scottish secession.

Britain's political class are letting the British people down.

Whatever one's view of the merits of Britain leaving the EU, the British people voted by a clear margin to leave. None of the various arguments that are being made to re-fight the referendum or to set its result aside are in the least convincing. Those putting them forward are showing a contempt for the people and for democracy.

A point made by many people is that the EU regularly ignores or sets aside referendum results it doesn't like and that this one is no different. I cannot agree with that view. It is certainly true that the EU regularly ignores or sets aside referendum results it doesn't like. However none of those referendums was fought on the straight issue of whether the nation wanted to leave or stay in the EU. That was the simple question put to the people in this referendum and they have given an unambiguous answer that they want to leave.

To set aside this result either by calling a second referendum or by hiding behind procedural problems would not merely be profoundly undemocratic. It would further damage the legitimacy of a political class which already hangs by a thread. That would create a situation unknown in Britain since the 1640s with ominous consequences for the future, putting the long-term survival of the British state in question.

What this situation urgently calls for is not recriminations about the result or attempts to re-fight the referendum after it is over. It is to move forward purposefully to carry out the will the people have expressed in a referendum where they were invited to express their view. Undoubtedly there will be many problems along the way but to do anything else is dangerous folly.

The proper way forward is not to engage in political games – such as the parliamentary factions of the two major parties are currently engaging in – which are a frivolous and dangerous distraction in this situation. Nor is it to hold a new election, which would be legally difficult and unwise at a moment of crisis. It is to create a government which will without delay carry out the will of the people by invoking Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty – as was promised to the people during the referendum campaign – and to negotiate the best possible deal for Britain with the Europeans and with the Scots, who may want to secede.

Such a government formed in a moment of crisis ought logically to be a coalition government drawing its support from all the major parties: the Conservatives, Labour and

(since they have a direct interest in the outcome) the Scottish Nationalists. Logically it ought to be headed by Boris Johnson and include both Michael Gove and Theresa May, with Jeremy Corbyn – Labour’s constitutionally and democratically elected leader – as deputy Prime Minister fulfilling the same role in relation to Boris Johnson that Clement Attlee did in Churchill’s wartime government. Nichola Sturgeon, the SNP leader, should of course also be given a major role, perhaps as Scottish Secretary.

Whilst some of us may have doubts about the fitness and competence of some of these individuals to carry out these roles, the positions they now occupy in public life means that there is no immediate alternative to them. If they prove incapable of performing their duties once appointed, then will be the moment to remove them. Until then it is both a distraction and a waste of time to thrash around looking for alternatives when at the present moment there are none.

I would add that in May 1940 – the last occasion when Britain found itself in a situation that bore any resemblance to the present one – Winston Churchill like Boris Johnson was widely considered to be an unscrupulous charlatan whilst Clement Attlee like Jeremy Corbyn was widely considered to be a colourless and useless mediocrity.

In the meantime if the two big political parties want to waste their time holding leadership elections that is for them to do. However that should not interfere with the overriding priority and duty to the country, which is to form a government to take this process forward now. To be clear, there is no constitutional rule in Britain that the Prime Minister must be the leader of either of the two big parties, and there is no reason to wait for Boris Johnson to become Conservative party leader before he becomes Prime Minister. In May 1940 – in a moment of still greater crisis – Churchill was appointed Prime Minister and formed a coalition government in a process that lasted just two days whilst his erstwhile rival – Neville Chamberlain – remained Conservative party leader until his death a few months later.

Needless to say once the crisis is out of the way – a process that might take as long as two years – the coalition should end, normal political processes should resume, a general election should be held (as it was in similar circumstances in 1945) and the Scots should be given a second referendum on whether or not they want to secede from the UK.

Instead what we have is a situation where because of factional feuding within the two big parties and a crisis of legitimacy on the part of a political class that has lost its connection to the people neither the government nor the opposition are functioning and where the country finds itself leaderless and adrift.

That is intolerable and is an abdication of the responsibility Britain’s political class owes to the people. Needless to say if this situation persists for much longer then the consequences for the country could be dire.

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Articles by: [Alexander
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