

# Theresa May Days in Britain, Stonewalled in Europe and the Parliament

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*It is hard to envisage sympathy for a person who made a name as a home secretary (prisons, detentions, security and such) taking the mast and banner of her country before hopeless odds, but inadequate opponents will do that to you. Vicious, venal and underdone, the enemies from within Theresa May's own Tory ranks resemble the lazily angry, the fumingly indulgent. These are the same men, and a few women, who managed to derive enormous satisfaction from a Britain pampered and spoiled by EU largesse but questioning of its bureaucracy and demands. Patriotism has an odd habit of making one jaundiced, but manic self-interest will also do that to you.*

May remains British prime minister after a botched effort to overthrow her within conservative party ranks. She faced the unenviable situation of being stonewalled in Europe and by Parliament itself. President of the European Council Donald Tusk assured May that the deal for the UK leaving the EU is not up for renegotiation, "including the backstop".

The border with Ireland – soft, hard, or middling – is proving to be a rattling affair. Should it go "hard", Britain will find itself trapped. As *The Irish Times* [noted](#),

"It evokes genuine fear, not least in those who live near the Border or rely on trade for their livelihoods or count themselves among the silenced majority in Northern Ireland who voted Remain."

As for Parliament, May has ducked and weaved in putting the deal to its irritable members, thereby depriving MPs a hack at sinking it. May fears, rightly, defeat over a proposal that has satisfied few. What is now being run in certain circles is the idea of "[indicative votes](#)" which might throw up various Brexit models (Canada-styled; Norwegian adapted).

The May plotters, however, showed the skills and talents of marksmen who end up shooting themselves in a fit of drunken enthusiasm on a poorly planned hunt. The leadership challenge on December 12 served to demonstrate a good level of incompetence, amplified by the likes of Jacob Rees-Mogg and Boris Johnson.

The fact that May received 200 votes against 117 to stay on as PM was not enough for the righteous Rees-Mogg, [who spoke](#) as if some inscrutable victory for the rebels had been attained.

"She said in 2017 she would lead the Conservative Party if she had the support of the parliamentary party."

It was clear that a third of members voting against her suggested she did not.

“So if she honours her word she will decide in the interests of the party and the nation she will go.”

This all seems to amount to a stay of execution. May survives, but faces daggers on a daily basis. Home Secretary Sajid Javid is nipping at her heels in the hope to land a blow. Welfare Secretary Amber Rudd has made it public that she likes the idea of a UK-EU arrangement along the lines of Norway’s relationship with the union. Naturally, as with so many such ideas, the EU response is automatically assumed.

The idea of a second referendum, long seen as the ultimate betrayal of the Brexit result, has received more than a decent fanning. Vast swathes have changed their mind since the populist up swell of 2016, goes [the view](#) of conservative Dominic Grieve and New Labour’s former spin doctor Alastair Campbell on *Good Morning Britain*, a bastion of rusted reaction few can match on British television. The panel, as ever, was on the hunt for the elusive idea of democracy in Britain, and found wanting. The Remainers remain desperately confused.

If there is a good reason to be suspicious of a second referendum, former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s endorsement of it would be one. Frankly Tony, whose rule was characterised by long spells of deception and arrogance (remember the Iraq War?), had a singular contempt for democracy that should not be forgotten. He is now spending time slumming in Brussels in the hope that people will take notice, advocating for a second people’s vote. Should parliament be unable to reach agreement on each of the forms of Brexit being put forth, [he suggests](#), “then the logical thing is to go back to the people.”

To Blair can [be added](#) May’s own de facto deputy prime minister, David Lidington and chief of staff at 10 Downing Street Gavin Barwell. The latter has supposedly discussed the issue of a second people’s vote with Chancellor Philip Hammond and Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd.

May is [having](#) none of it. “Let us not break faith with the British people by trying to stage another referendum.” To do so “would do irreparable damage to the integrity of our politics, because it would say to millions who trusted in democracy, that our democracy does not deliver.”

Brexit is the great exercise of imperfection, an experiment that the EU would like to quash just as many in the UK would like to see reversed. It has been disheartening and cruel; it has divided and disturbed. It has also demonstrated levels of marked mendacity fitting for countries British citizens tend to mock. Facts have become fictions; fictions have been paraded as exemplars of truth. The dark spirits have been released, and there are not going to be bottled any time soon.

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