

Final sovereignty on Brexit, Jeremy Corbyn - The Guardian, 31 Aug 19

Suggested presentation

#### Introduction

- BJ proroguing parliament – privy council meeting at Balmoral – Queen’s speech
- JC writing to the Queen – JC meeting other opposition leaders

#### Main point

- Article written following BJ’s decision to suspend parliament
- JC calling upon people to act and take back control
- Open criticism of BJ’s action – breach of democracy
- Random argumentation, passionate plea for change

#### Ideas

- BJ illegitimate: unelected; unreliable; Trump’s poodle
- The risks of a no deal Brexit: assault on democracy; economic downturn; return of the Troubles; climate change; impact on people’s lives
- Labour party: the people’s party – general election

#### Line of argument

- BJ’s decision to suspend parliament: wish to implement Brexit or an assault on democracy as JC thinks? “Stop the coup”

#### Plan of commentary

- Labour and Europe / Brexit: unclear position – JC as a controversial figure
- Sovereignty not with government nor with parliament but with people: Labour’s view of traditional clash between King and parliament
- Latest development in the past 24 hrs: the UK in uncharted territory, an unprecedented constitutional situation

#### Conclusion

- JC’s criticism of BJ confirmed by Tory rebels and the Tory press: Philip Lee; the *Daily Telegraph* reporting on Dominic Cummings

## Introduction

- A series of events of significant importance in the last few days in August: JC meeting up with other opposition leaders (Lib Dems' Jo Swinson; SNP House of Commons Group leader Ian Blackford; Change UK's Anna Soubry<sup>1</sup>; the Green Party's Caroline Lucas and Plaid Cymru<sup>2</sup>'s Adam Price) to discuss plans to stop a no-deal Brexit. On BJ's request the Privy Council met in Balmoral and examined BJ's request to prorogue parliament; request approved by Queen and Privy Council.
- This article was written by the Labour leader himself following this **shattering decision** by BJ to suspend parliament for as long as 5 weeks, thus making it difficult for MPs to discuss a Brexit deal at length when **parliament reconvenes** around 14<sup>th</sup> October.

## Main point

- JC's point here: to call upon people to act, giving reasons why they should be consulted and no one else, not even their representatives, i.e. parliament. Open criticism of BJ's action and no deal Brexit which he sees as a breach of democracy.
- Argumentation may appear loose at times, showing the article may have been written **on the spur of the moment**.

## Ideas

- BJ seen as illegitimate: unelected by British people; only elected as the leader of the Conservative party in July when Theresa May **stepped down** in May after yet another rejection of her deal by the parliament and after she suffered rebellion within her cabinet<sup>3</sup>.
- BJ seen as unreliable: making promises in 2016 (during the referendum campaign) and 2017 about dismissing the prospect of a no deal Brexit, and now doing the opposite. JC considers him as a clown, ready to endanger his country's future **for the sake of** his personal ambition – **using images** to refer to his untrustworthy character (“flipflopping”, “U-turning”). JC even goes as far as quoting the conservative press (The Spectator) to show criticism of BJ is not one-sided.
- BJ, a Trump-look-alike, Trump's **poodle**: ready to sacrifice his country's core values and ally with Trump through a no deal Brexit.
- What are the risks of a no deal Brexit indeed? It would be an economic disaster for the country and an assault on democracy (more powerful images used: “smash and grab raid”; “car crash Brexit”; “no deal crash”).
- An economic downturn: rising unemployment; food **price hikes**; collapse of public services.
- Huge political problem: a return of the Troubles with a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- This would also mean a collapse of the fight against climate change (JC's argumentation is far-fetched here, his demonstration is rather poor and he clearly wants to make use of the current news of the Amazon forest on fire). An opportunity for JC to accuse BJ of colluding with Trump presented himself **in cahoots with** the Brazilian president.
- The impact on ordinary people: EU citizens will be deeply affected by a no deal Brexit and treated by their government the same way as the Windrush generation was treated.
- As a result of these **dire consequences** JC calls upon people to act and oppose BJ's decision. The message that lies in the background is that the Labour party is people's party: Labour is close to ordinary people, listens to them and protests with them.

**Commentaire [SW1]:** The point is not to comment on the article from a literary point of view but if quoting a few words can be useful to confirm an idea, you can do it.

<sup>1</sup> Resigned from the Conservative Party in Feb 2019 and founded Change UK with other independent MPs

<sup>2</sup> Aka (also known as) The Party of Wales

<sup>3</sup> People have been quick to notice BJ's dictatorial attitude these past few days as a number of Tory rebels have had the whip removed, i.e. they will not be able to stand as conservative candidates in a future election. Some have defected for other parties like the Lib Dems.

- Ultimate solution: a general election which will be an opportunity to give people control over the whole issue, including the possibility of a second referendum – ironical mention of “taking back control” since it was a slogan used by the Leavers during the referendum campaign.

#### Line of argument

- In view of the content of JC’s article I am wondering whether BJ’s decision to suspend parliament turns out to be a real wish **to implement Brexit** or an assault on democracy as JC thinks? Part of the answer could be found in a slogan often heard in the protest of the past few days, “Stop the coup”.

#### Plan of commentary

- I will first examine the position of Labour towards the Brexit issue, showing their position is not as clear-cut as JC seems to suggest.
- Then since JC mentions sovereignty lies not with government, nor with parliament, but with people, I will take the opportunity to recall some past clashes between Crown and Parliament, which have been present in people’s minds these past few days and weeks.
- Finally it is essential to say a word about what has happened since JC wrote this article, which will show the UK is going through some unprecedented constitutional situation.

#### Labour and Brexit

- Unclear attitude during the 2016 referendum campaign as the party **was marred by** divisions over Brexit – not as badly as in the conservative party, but the Labour party is not a totally pro-European party as the Lib-Dems are. When in 1972 there was yet another application to join the EU (then the EEC) the party was split.
- JC, a controversial Labour leader: too left-leaning<sup>4</sup> for some to be accepted as PM, therefore not much chance of a multiparty coalition with the SNP and the Lib Dems. He voted to leave the Common Market in 1975 and opposed the Maastricht Treaty; in 2016 he took part in the campaign on the Remain side but with **efforts that were deemed half-hearted**.
- Labour party, pro-European on the whole except for a handful of senior members, including JC and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell. They both come from the Bennite Left wing of the party, i.e. influenced by Tony Benn<sup>5</sup>’s vision of Europe. Tony Benn was a senior member of the Labour party who died in 2014. He was hostile to European integration and viewed Europe as a capitalist club not sharing the Labour party’s left-wing ideas. His ideas which were not favoured by Tony Blair’s New Labour<sup>6</sup> are still **popping up** here and there among the more radical members of the party.
- And yet some attempts within the Labour party to stop the UK crashing out at the end of October as planned: JC meeting up with other leaders, as I’ve already said, and the Benn bill (so-called because proposed by Hilary Benn in the early days of September) to prevent a no-deal Brexit. More will be said about it in my last part about the latest developments.

JC insisting on the people having a say in the Brexit matter, disregarding the roles of government and parliament in this decision process, is a reminder that in its past history the country has experienced clashes between its King and parliament, and I will say a word about it now.

#### Clashes between King and parliament

<sup>4</sup> Check out how he was elected leader of the Labour party in 2015

<sup>5</sup> A Labour MP with an aristocratic background (viscount Stansgate). Father to Hilary Benn, himself a senior Labour MP.

<sup>6</sup> TB became Labour leader in 1994 and revamped the party, moving it towards the center left away from socialism, along the lines of what has been referred to as “the Third Way”.

- In view of what is happening right now with BJ having prorogued parliament and denying MPs the right to discuss any Brexit deal, everyone was reminded of what happened back in the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup> on two occasions, because of conflicts to do with religion and finances.
- The first occasion was the 1605 Gunpowder plot which was an attempt by some Catholics to blow up the House of Lords during the State Opening of Parliament<sup>8</sup>. At the time Catholicism was marginalised following Henry VIII's secession with the Church of Rome in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> c and the foundation of the protestant-oriented Church of England. James I who came to the throne (following Elizabeth I's death – she was childless; James I was the son of her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots whom she had had executed) was believed by some to be favourable to the Catholic faith<sup>9</sup>, but the opposition of Parliament forced him to act differently and Catholics felt betrayed by their king, hence the (failed) Gunpowder plot set by Guy Fawkes, Robert Casteby and other conspirators.
- The second occasion was of course the Civil War, which **has loomed large in people's minds** in the past few weeks and months, if only because of the bitter divisions created by Brexit. Here again religion and finances were in the background. Charles I then on the throne (from 1625 onwards) had married a Catholic against the wishes of Parliament and people believed in a royal plot to restore the Catholic faith in the country. Finances were also **a moot point** because of the rising costs of government and the wars abroad. Therefore between 1625 and 1629 Parliament was dissolved 3 times by the King and from 1629 the King ruled alone<sup>10</sup> – something which clearly people thought of when BJ suspended Parliament. To raise money the King used non-parliamentary means which were unpopular. The opposition between King and Parliament was also increased by the influence of an anti-Puritan churchman, William Laud, whom Charles I made Archbishop of Canterbury to promote the high church<sup>11</sup> party. **The conflict escalated** when the King attempted to impeach his enemies in Parliament by entering the House of Commons to arrest them – he failed as they had already fled. The King had no other option but to flee London and to raise an army, setting up headquarters in Oxford – this marked the beginning of the Civil War in 1642, with two armies opposing one another, the King's (known as the Cavaliers) and Parliament's (known as the Roundheads<sup>12</sup>, led by Oliver Cromwell). Charles I was defeated in 1645 at the Battle of Naseby, tried and executed in 1649. The period that followed was called the Commonwealth, a Republican regime with Cromwell as the Lord Protector<sup>13</sup>.

As I have already said, what happened in late August, early September was so exceptional that some people thought the country looked very much like mid-17<sup>th</sup> c England. And what has happened in the past few days confirms it a bit more with BJ behaving in a way deemed by many as unconstitutional.

#### Latest developments

- Tues 3 Sept: MPs vote on a motion in order for a cross-party alliance of opposition MPs and Conservative party rebels to take control of the parliamentary agenda (voted by 328 to 301 with 21 Tory MPs rallying against BJ's Cabinet. Thus they are able to discuss a bill (the Benn bill) on Wed 4

<sup>7</sup> So much so that on **some placards** held by demonstrators there was mention of the Stuart monarchs (starting with James I)

<sup>8</sup> This is why still nowadays during the State Opening an MP is sent to Buckingham Palace as a 'hostage' while the Queen is present in Westminster delivering her speech.

<sup>9</sup> He tried to relax the Penal laws by which Catholics could be imprisoned and fined.

<sup>10</sup> The 1629-1641 period was referred to as the Eleven-Year Tyranny.

<sup>11</sup> A part of the Church of England whose practices are very close to the Catholic church.

<sup>12</sup> Because of their helmets and hairstyle

<sup>13</sup> He died in 1658, was replaced by his son ; the Republic fell apart and 1660 marked the Restoration with Charles II.

to make it unlawful for BJ to take the UK out of the EU without a bill. Tory MPs who rebelled were kicked out of the party.

- Wed 4 Sept - PMQs: BJ claiming there was “substantial progress” in talks with the EU over a new Brexit deal (then denied by some EU negotiators and by Ireland’s foreign minister; nothing has happened in weeks); BJ accusing the Labour party-led plan to prevent a no-deal of being a ‘surrender bill’. During the PM’s speech a Tory MP, Philip Lee crossed the floor in order to join the ranks of the Lib Dems, thus showing his opposition to the government’s handling of Brexit. Bill to block a no-deal Brexit passed the Commons; BJ tried to call for an early general election (on 15 Oct) but failed to get 2/3<sup>14</sup> of the House to back him. JC and others not in favour of general election until it is absolutely sure that the threat of a no-deal Brexit has been removed.
- Thurs 5 Sept: anti-no-deal bill passed by the House of Lords. Bill will be given Royal Assent on Mon 9. BJ’s speech in Wakefield, Yorkshire delivered with policemen and women<sup>15</sup> in the background: said he would rather be “dead in a ditch” than ask the EU for an extension. BJ’s own brother, Jo Johnson resigns as a junior minister.
- Fri 6 Sept: High Court rules against claim that BJ was acting unlawfully by suspending parliament for 5 weeks ahead of Brexit. Claim had been made by Gina Miller<sup>16</sup> (with the support of former Tory PM John Major). House of Lords approves Benn bill.
- Sat 7 Sept: Amber Rudd (work and pensions minister) resigns and quits as a Conservative MP (following BJ’s decision to expel 21 Tory MPs).
- What is planned next week: 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt to call for an early general election. Benn bill to be given Royal Assent (and become law).
- Some major figures among the 21 Tory rebels expelled from the Conservative party<sup>17</sup>: Philip Hammond, Theresa May’s former Chancellor of the Exchequer; Ken Clarke, a highly senior member of the party, a strong Europhile; David Gauke, May’s former justice secretary; Dominic Grieve, former attorney general (when interviewed on Sat said if BJ could go to prison if he did not comply with legislation); Justine Greening, the former education secretary; Rory Stewart (had stood against BJ in the leadership contest); Sir Nicholas Soames, Winston Churchill’s own grandson.

## Conclusion

- A word about the person who stands in the wings and who has repeatedly been referred to as BJ’s Rasputin<sup>18</sup>, i.e. Dominic Cummings, his special advisor<sup>19</sup>. He was the campaign director of Vote Leave and he is said to have invented the “Take Back Control” slogan – hence JC’s ironical touch in his article when he reuses the phrase for his own sake. Also said recently to consider EU negotiations a ‘sham’, according to the conservative-leaning Daily Telegraph.

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<sup>14</sup> According to the 2011 Fixed Term Parliament Act a general election is planned every 5 years (1st Thursday in May). It can be called earlier if there is a vote of no confidence in the government and 2/3 of the House of Commons agree to the election.

<sup>15</sup> Further sign of his dictatorial attitude could be seen when a policewoman collapsed feeling unwell and yet he went on with his speech for close to a minute.

<sup>16</sup> She had taken the government to court in 2016 claiming that parliament needed to be consulted over Brexit. The High Court ruled that parliament had to legislate before the government could trigger Article 50.

<sup>17</sup> Deselected = unable to stand as Conservative candidates in the next general election

<sup>18</sup> So much so that some Tory MPs have been heard to say they do not blame BJ for what is happening, but Cummings.

<sup>19</sup> Or ‘spin doctor’