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Brexit disorder: Corbyn and May

Commentary

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The British prime minister and the leader of the oppositions are stuck in cynicism and opportunism

On 23 June 2016, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn posted on Twitter a photo of himself outside his polling station with the following announcement: “I’ve just voted Remain. The EU provides the best framework to meet the challenges of our time.” This was an identical message to that from Theresa May, then home secretary in prime minister David Cameron’s cabinet. During the preceding Brexit referendum campaign, she announced not only that she would vote for Remain as “the best for the United Kingdom” and warned of the economic, security, and even territorial consequences of leaving the European Union (which, she said, could be “fatal to our Union with Scotland”).

There you have it: May was in favour of staying in the EU but decided to manage the exit in exchange for being the prime minister who would lead that exit. Like Corbyn, she was pro-Remain but has opted against defending this position so as not to close the doors to 10 Downing Street. Both leaders thought that, after the referendum, one could only be prime minister if one accepted Brexit (or, at least, did not promote Remain), as doing otherwise would lead to accusations of opposing the popular will.

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Now, they are both stuck. One due to her cynicism, which leads her to cling to power despite being unable to achieve a Brexit she never believed in and that lacks the support of her party. The other due to his opportunism: he expects the government to fall into his hands without having to

pronounce himself in favour of or against Brexit. But the reality is that neither can really be prime minister: the UK is looking into the abyss of a no-deal Brexit, the EU will have to deal with the British quagmire, and millions of people who voted to stay are orphans – lacking leaders and alternatives that represent their desire to remain in the EU.

Whether one supports the Conservatives or Labour, staying in the EU is the best option for the UK: it would benefit businesses and workers, increase the UK's influence in the world, and help keep the country united. But neither party is capable of offering this to voters. May does not want to hold an election that she would lose. Corbyn wants an election even if he does not know why. She knows what she wants, but cannot manage it

successfully. He does not know what he wants, but also wants to manage it successfully. What happens when leaders decide not to follow their beliefs? Exactly this.

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