

Britain: March for Change, a Missed Opportunity

Saturday 27 July 2019, by [Socialist Resistance \(Britain\)](#) (Date first published: 26 July 2019).

The March for Change [1] could have made July 20th 2019 one of the most significant days in recent British political history writes Andy Stowe. Instead of a contingent of Cornish nationalists having a more visible and coherent presence than the Labour Party and the socialist left, hundreds of thousands of anti-Tory activists, trade unionists and young people could have taken to the streets days before Boris Johnson becomes prime minister, serving him notice that they wouldn't rest until he's kicked out of office.

// EU / Labour Party // 0 Comments
Labour Party banners on the march

What we actually got was the smallest, most passive, least combative of the anti-Brexit demonstrations to date. The one on October 2018 attracted about 700 000 people [2] and almost one million took to the streets in March [3]. July's numbered in the low tens of thousands.

This is to a limited extent the responsibility of the organisers. It just wasn't as well publicised. It may also be that a sense of resignation to a hard Brexit is setting in.

A much more serious failing is the strategic blindness of the Labour leadership. Less than a week before the main public face of the reactionary Brexit project becomes prime minister it was presented with a gift-wrapped political opportunity to get its supporters onto the streets of central London. When the history of the Corbyn leadership is written July 20th will be seen as the moment when it threw away a chance to pick up the keys of Downing Street.

Irrespective of whether or not the organisers would have allowed Jeremy Corbyn to speak, he should have been at the demonstration. The perceived lack of clarity about his position on the central issue of British politics today is doing huge damage to his support among party members, young people and anti-Brexit voters. It's become much more common to hear formerly loyal supporters saying that he either needs to change on this or be replaced. Irrespective of the tactical wisdom of that view, it is one that is gaining ground among the Labour left.

The timeline for Johnson's entrance to Downing Street has been known for weeks. Labour could have been using that time to get its members and supporters onto the streets. There was little in the organisers' slogans that most Labour members would object to. They were in support of the NHS, for action on climate change, the right to live work and study anywhere in the EU and opposition to Johnson.

Corbyn, Diane Abbott and John McDonnell walking in front of countless party and union banners would have given the demonstration an insurrectionary mood. It would have demonstrated to Johnson and those on the Labour right who'd prefer to have Tory racist as prime minister that they'd be faced with a real fight. Johnson and Corbyn's Labour enemies will feel triumphant about Corbyn's failure of leadership on this.

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P.S.

- Posted on 20th July 2019:
<http://socialistresistance.org/a-missed-opportunity/17708>
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Footnotes

- [1] https://www.marchforchange.uk/why_we_re_marching
- [2] ESSF (article 46970), [Statement \(Britain\): Two steps to stop Brexit.](#)
- [3] ESSF (article 48132), [Britain: Stop Brexit and get rid of the Tories.](#)