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Issues

CORBYN: A STEELY
STREAK BEHIND
A MEEK IMAGE

By James Pheby

The head of Britain's Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, projects an image of meekness, but the Brexit crisis now ripping his beloved party asunder has revealed a steely streak underneath. Corbyn is facing a revolt by Labour MPs who are demanding he resign for his lukewarm campaigning to stay in the European Union—a key factor, say the critics, in last Thursday's shock result.

More than half of Corbyn's shadow cabinet have quit, but he has stood firm, warning the rebels they face the fury of the party's grassroots if they force a leadership vote. "I was elected by hundreds of thousands of Labour party members and supporters with an overwhelming mandate for a different kind of politics," he said in a statement.

Corbyn biographer Rosa Prince says the veteran socialist's resolve must not be underestimated. "He portrays himself as a reluctant hero-but nothing could be further from the truth. For 50 years, Jeremy Corbyn has schemed and plotted to get ahead in politics," she wrote in the Daily Telegraph.

"Today, like a child tearfully clutching his football long after the other kids have gone home, he clings to the leadership with an iron grip that belies the myth he was loathe to serve."

Dizzying rise

The 66-year-old, an ardent republican, only stood for the leadership as a 100/1 outsider following Labour's weak performance at last year's general election won by Prime Minister David Cameron's centre-right Conservatives. The veteran socialist's dizzying ascent prompted dire warnings from party grandees like Tony Blair that his policies would prove too left-wing to draw wide support from British voters, driving Labour to disaster at the ballot box.

But Corbyn benefited from the party's decision to open the vote to all Labour members. He claimed a stunning victory in September's leadership election after mobilising the far-left and youth vote. His huge mandate torpedoed any attempts to halt his rise, but the prospect of a general election within months following the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron has refocused the party's parliamentarians on installing a more mainstream candidate. Party deputy leader Tom Watson has warned Corbyn that a leadership challenge is imminent, according to reports. "Those who want to change Labour's leadership will have to stand in a democratic election, in which I will be a candidate," responded the leader.

Supporters 'betrayed'

Corbyn believes he can still count on those who elected him, but the results of the EU referendum paint a more uncertain picture. Polling during the campaign revealed members to be unsure of the party's position, largely driven by doubts over Corbyn's commitment to the EU, which he long opposed as a neoliberal project.

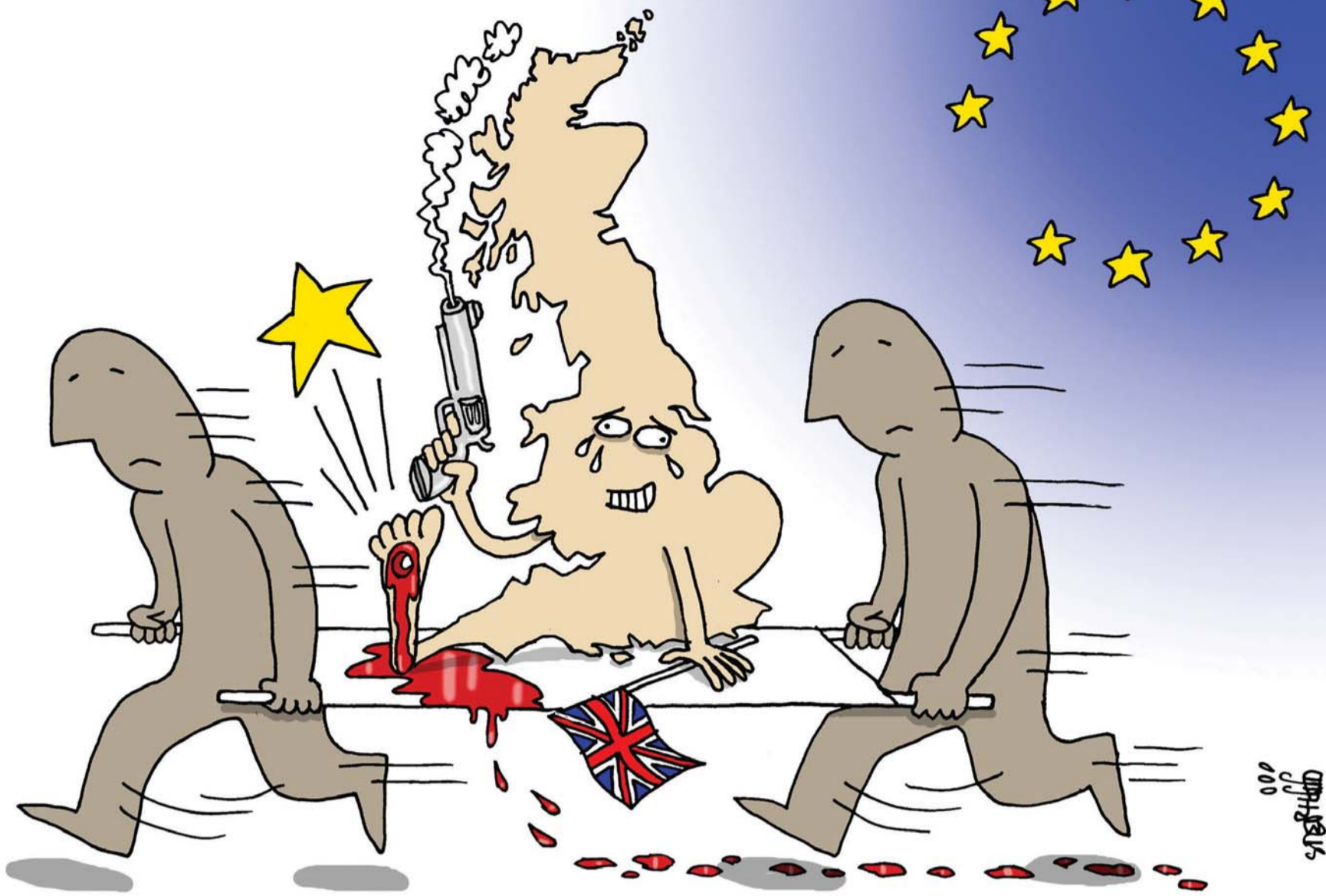
"It is fairly plain that Corbyn's emotional attachment is, as before, to Brexit, and that he is nominally for Remain solely because his party's preference demands it," wrote the Independent's Matthew Norman. "When he ran for the leadership, Corbyn's appeal was built on being that mythical beast, a different politician; someone who sticks rigidly to his principles, however out of vogue they may be. "How better to ruin that reputation, and leave the idealistic young who most fervently supported him feeling betrayed, than by pretending for reasons of political expediency to support Remain?"

Corbyn grew up in a political family—his parents met as activists during the Spanish Civil War—and worked for trade unions before being elected to the Commons in 1983.

He had never held any major office and was a serial backbench rebel, voting against his party's line repeatedly and championing human rights and policies to help the poor.

So committed is he to socialism that his second marriage reportedly broke up over his opposition to sending his son to a state-run school that selects children by academic ability rather than a school open to all. As leader, Corbyn has opposed austerity and the renewal of Britain's Trident nuclear submarine missile system, and claimed credit for forcing the government to back-track on cutting tax credits for low earners. —AFP

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AFTER BREXIT, EU FACES UNCERTAIN FUTURE

By Nawab Khan

British voters have shocked and awed the world by ignoring and rejecting all calls and pleas by political leaders right from the US to Japan, to the European Union (EU), and from famous celebrities, economists, and major western media outlets to remain in the EU. Up to 52 percent of the British voters, more than half of the population, voted in Thursday's referendum to leave the EU.

Brexit signals the depth of discontent and displeasure with the way the EU operates. The British voters appear to have accepted the arguments of the Brexit advocates that Britain will be better off in the long run outside the EU, with full sovereignty and control over immigration and economic rules and regulations.

A significant lesson to draw from the Brexit is that despite all the talk about a "European identity," people in Europe show greater loyalty toward their home countries than they do to EU.

Analysts point out that people in Europe tend to reject the EU in most referenda held so far. Denmark in a referendum held in 2000 rejected to join the Eurozone, followed by Sweden in a similar plebiscite in 2003. France and the Netherlands rejected the EU's Lisbon treaty in 2005. In 2015, the Greeks rejected the EU bailout conditions to resolve the country's debt crisis. Now it is the Brexit.

These developments support the arguments of those who say that the EU is an elitist project controlled by an

unelected bureaucracy in Brussels which is totally detached and isolated from the ordinary citizens. On the other hand, EU supporters have been proclaiming that the EU is a very attractive project as other countries are eager to join the European club. However, the fact that the UK votes to leave, is the first case of this process being put in reverse gear.

Michael Emerson, a Senior Research Fellow at the think-tank Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels, explains that a long-term anti-EU bias of the tabloid press in the UK, perceived failures of the euro and Schengen zones (even if the UK was never a member of either of these), the immigration crisis, and the rise in nationalist populism are some of the reasons behind the Leave vote. The Brexit places the Union before unpredictable implications and a crisis of confidence in the European integration process. Analysts are of the view that the vote has dealt a serious blow to the unity and integrity of the EU.

"Brexit represents nothing less than the partial splintering of the world's largest political union and trading bloc, a \$18 trillion economy. Many fear that other European countries will now hold their own exit referendums," opines Tim King, a writer for the Brussels-based publication Politico.

Anti-EU parties in France, Italy and the Netherlands are already calling for a UK-like referendum on EU membership in their own countries. On top of all, Emerson warns that Brexit threatens disintegration of the UK itself, with the prospect of a second referendum on Scottish inde-

pendence, and possible destabilization of the fragile peace in Northern Ireland.

The UK is made up of four countries, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The EU has been dominated by the three big countries, the UK, France and Germany. Now as the UK is out, the German-Franco axis will sway over the economic and political policies of the EU, and in particular fuel the fear of a growing German control over Europe.

The Brexit will also seriously affect the EU's foreign policy agenda. The UK has historical links and influence in Asia and the Arab World and is a major player in world affairs, and hence its exit from the Union will curtail the EU's global influence. Besides, the EU will be so busy in putting its own house in order for several years to come, that it will have little time and appetite to deal with foreign issues.

Janis Emmanouilidis, Senior Policy Analyst at the think tank European Policy Centre in Brussels argues that the Brexit will affect the domestic policies in many EU member states.

He thinks the mainstream politicians and governments will be even more under pressure from populist right-wing parties which will make it difficult for them to operate and to forge compromises. The EU member states will struggle in finding compromises and implementing them, he said in a TV interview. But for now, the EU and the UK will have to begin the difficult and complicated "divorce process" which has to be completed within two years under article 50 of the EU treaty. —KUNA

ON BRITISH BORDER, BREXIT BREEDS UNCERTAINTY

By Douglas Dalby

On Britain's only land frontier with a fellow EU state, the talk is about shopping for bargains as the Brexit crisis drives the pound down-but worries for the future are never far away. When the United Kingdom quits the European Union, the shutters could come down once more between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, some residents fear.

If so, this would reverse decades in which controls on the 500-kilometre (310-mile) border progressively disappeared-and trade, movement and friendships flourished as a result. One big worry is the prospect of the return of customs controls abolished in 1993. Out shopping in Dundalk, on the republic's side of the border, Paul McDonagh, 37, said there could be a return to cross-border contraband that was once synonymous with the area.

"We could be going back to smuggling butter again across the border," he said. Around 4,500 people around Dundalk and Newry, a town just over the border in the UK's Northern Ireland, cross back and forward to work every day, according to local estimates.

"Can you imagine the disruption it could cause if they were stuck behind a line of traffic at a customs barrier?" said Paddy Malone, who runs an accountancy practice in Dundalk. For shops along the border, Britain's vote to leave the EU has had an immediate adverse effect—customers on the republic's side are heading north to take advantage of sterling's decline.

"Uncertainty is always bad for businesses and towns south of the border would obviously suffer if sterling continues to fall," said Shane McArdle, a 19-year-old resident of Dundalk.

Conversely, businesses 10 minutes' drive away on the northern side have seen an uptick. The pound dropped to a two-year low against the euro yester-



A woman uses a mobile phone next to a catering van which is parked on the border between England and Scotland, near Berwick-upon-Tweed in northern England close to the border between England and Scotland yesterday. —AFP

day. "There were more people than usual paying with euros," said Jamie McAteer, an 18-year-old student who works part-time in the high-end Belleek household goods store in Newry. The euro-sterling exchange rate can mean the difference between business success and failure, such is the porous nature of the market in this area and the close proximity of the two main towns.

Many residents remember the situation a few years ago when the euro also rose sharply against the pound and

Dundalk became a virtual ghost town.

Jenny Browne, 36, a store assistant at Diamonds Jewellers in Dundalk, said: "If we were that wee bit further away from the border it would help us an awful lot. "It is much more difficult for someone to go over the border from Dublin whereas here it would take you 10 minutes.

A 'hard' border?

Some commentators say that a return to the "hard" border of the 1970s and 80s could be so traumatic for

Northern Ireland that it could push the British province towards reunification with the south. McAteer, in Newry, was among those who reflected on how his life could be turned upside-down by what had happened on June 23 2016. He said he had voted to stay in the EU—and was now considering applying for an Irish passport. "I am hoping to study Spanish, but I don't know that I would qualify for the Erasmus European student exchange program that would allow me to study in Spain if I am not an EU citizen," he said. —AFP