

# Boris Johnson Could ‘Face Jail’ if He Ignores UK Parliament

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*Just when one thought Brexit could not get any more dramatic, the UK Brexit crisis took on a more serious tone when Prime Minister Boris Johnson was warned he could face jail time if he refuses to respect the law passed by Westminster last week. The legislation requires the PM to ask the EU for an extension to the Brexit negotiation period, if no deal has been agreed by 19th October or MPs have not endorsed a No Deal divorce. However, according to The Daily Telegraph, Mr Johnson has said he ‘will not’ carry out Parliament’s instruction and will seek a legal loophole in order to pursue his No Deal strategy.*

This caused outcry amongst politicians and the commentariat, with former attorney general Dominic Grieve warning that Johnson is “under an obligation” to abide by the law after it has received royal assent on Monday. He added that if he didn’t, he could be taken to court and end up in prison. Former director of public prosecutions, Lord MacDonald concurred with this, stating in an interview with Sky News that any refusal to delay Brexit in the face of a court order would result in contempt of court ‘which could find that person in prison’.

This latest development comes as Boris Johnson lost another cabinet member this weekend – Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd – who spoke out against the government, saying that 80-90% of government effort was going into preparation for a No Deal, and very little work going into getting a deal, which for her, was unacceptable, given the need to find a withdrawal agreement with the EU. Only last week Johnson’s brother Jo, another cabinet minister, resigned, citing the clash between family loyalty and the ‘national interest’. The other reason Rudd gave for resigning was action taken against 21 of her colleagues last week after they voted for the bill designed to avoid a No Deal Brexit. The rebel MPs, which included the esteemed Ken Clark and former Chancellor Phillip Hammond were expelled from the Conservative party, in what was considered to be an off-hand, offensive way, as some only received a voicemail message to the effect.

It’s therefore clear that the Conservative party itself is also facing an unprecedented crisis. With accusations of it having transformed into the ‘Brexit party’, and having lost so many key, moderate Tories as a result of its No Deal strategy, its future as a party is looking increasingly uncertain. The government however remains at present, defiant. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, a Johnson ally, tried to calm fears on Sunday in an interview with Sky news, as he assured people that the government would not break the law. However he did say that they would ‘test very carefully’ what the law did and didn’t require. Labour’s Baroness Chakrabarti on other hand spoke for many MPs when she said Mr Raab’s words were “irresponsible and elitist” and stated ‘Every tin pot dictator on the planet throughout history has used the excuse of having the people on their side to break the law to shut down

parliament and all the rest of it – it's absolutely extraordinary and very un-British'.

Concerns over No Deal were reiterated by the Irish leader Leo Varadkar on Monday morning in a press conference, as he said that there was 'no such thing as a clean break' and that it was vital for the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland that a withdrawal agreement was crafted. Johnson for his part appeared to backtrack slightly as he acknowledged that No Deal would be a 'failure of statecraft'. He faced tough questions from reporters as they asked where the proposals were for a new draft of a deal.

The EU for its part have insisted that no real effort has been made from the UK side to negotiate another deal. French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian summoned up the frustration with the UK government by saying on Sunday in a radio interview: 'The British say they want to come up with alternative solutions for withdrawal and No Deal, we have not seen them, so it's 'no', we're not going to do it every three months'.

Johnson's attempt to organise a general election has also been scuppered by fellow MPs, meaning that it's unclear now what option he will have left but to try to negotiate another deal with the EU. His strategy, which was clearly to push for a No Deal Brexit 'come what may' by suspending parliament, has spectacularly failed, and short of breaking the law, Johnson will be forced to adhere to MPs' demands.

One person who must be watching the unfolding chaos at Westminster with wry amusement is Theresa May, who endured incessant criticism in the three years she attempted to negotiate a Brexit deal, taking the majority of the blame for a withdrawal agreement not being secured. Ironically, her tactics now make her look like the epitome of political savoir-faire, unlike the current PM, who in less than 2 months in office has led to the biggest crisis at Westminster for decades.

Analysts have pointed out however, that it is actually vital for the state of British democracy that parliament's authority in this case supersedes that of the Prime Minister's. He may have his reasons for trying to force through Brexit with No Deal – Brexit fatigue being the main one – but as we are living in a parliamentary democracy and not a dictatorship, it is imperative that parliament has the final say on issues of this magnitude. It would set a harmful precedent if anything else was to be the case. And yet in his words the Prime Minister would rather be 'dead in a ditch' than not have Britain leave the EU on October 31st. Time will tell just how far Boris Johnson is willing to go in order to enforce Brexit. Will he sacrifice his career, reputation, party and even his freedom? And more importantly, will he succeed in taking down the country with him?

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