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TO: ALL MEMBERS

Dear Brother / Sister

The Suspension of Parliament and the Threat of a “No Deal” Brexit

At its meeting held on 2nd September 2019, the Executive Council discussed event and developments taking place at Westminster. The Executive Council agreed the following statement.

Statement by the Executive Council of the Fire Brigades Union.

The FBU condemns and opposes the undemocratic decision of Prime Minister Johnson to have Parliament suspended.

This is clearly a step to avoid Parliamentary debate and decision making over Brexit. It is a mechanism by which the government will be able to avoid scrutiny; by which the Executive avoids being held to account.

Whatever failings there are in the Parliamentary system, this measure is fundamentally undemocratic. Whatever views are held on Brexit, the proroguing of Parliament in these conditions sets a dangerous precedent and centralises and increases the power of the Prime Minister and the executive to the detriment of Parliament.

FBU members were likely to have held differing views on the issue of the referendum as did many workers. The FBU has opposed a “No Deal” Brexit and has warned of the threat such a step would pose to jobs, to the economy, to public services and to employment rights. Johnson’s suspension of Parliament is a measure to enable a “No Deal” Brexit.

Boris Johnson’s claim that he needs the suspension so as to announce a new political programme in a Queen’s speech is ridiculous. The Tories have been in power for almost a decade (five years propped up by the Liberal Democrats). During that time they have devastated public services, attacked pensions, frozen wages and attacked the rights of workers. Boris Johnson and his supporters have endorsed each of these attacks. The country is in a mess and Johnson shares the responsibility for that.

Any failure to reach a deal with the EU is the responsibility of the Conservative government and its failed negotiations since triggering Article 50.

Brexit has divided opinion in the UK. But we live in a society with far more fundamental divisions. The main campaigns on both sides of the 2016 referendum had no interest in the needs or views of working class people, other than to seek their votes. One side wanted to exploit us within the EU, the other side to exploit us outside the EU. The FBU has consistently argued for an independent working class and labour movement approach to Brexit and has therefore opposed any political alliances **on either side** of the debate with enemies of our movement.

So workers should beware of those who talk of the “national interest”. There are very different interests between the majority of the population and those at the top; the millionaires and billionaires, the corporations, the banks and the hedge funds. Their interests are not ours.

Therefore we do not support calls for any form of government of “national unity”. Labour should not enter any such arrangement. Similarly, we have opposed any political alliances with Tories, Nigel Farage and others in favour of Brexit. We have opposed those who have made such alliances.

Any Labour government, however time-limited, could not ignore wider political issues. Labour voters and other workers would rightly expect and demand an immediate end to austerity and steps to rebuild workers’ rights, public services and decent jobs.

The FBU will work with others in the trade union and Labour movement to oppose the Johnson government, to continue to oppose a “No Deal” Brexit and to campaign for a Labour government which fights for the interests of workers.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Wrack". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MATT WRACK
General Secretary

MW/mr