

# Brown government promotes patriotism and militarism

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Faced with intractable problems, the Labour government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown has embarked on an attempt to promote British patriotism and militarism.

Domestically, the government confronts growing social inequality and an impending economic crisis that threatens to devastate living standards, while overseas Britain is still mired down in Iraq and Afghanistan. Such military setbacks have in no way lessened the British bourgeoisie's ambitions internationally. Competition for strategic resources has rather seen the government reiterate its support for military intervention overseas.

Such a policy requires the silencing or marginalisation of dissent. To this end, together with the armed forces and the media, the government has set about trying to manipulate and intimidate public opinion.

Immediately prior to the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, the British Army launched a £2 million recruitment drive. The military is faced with a 10 percent drop in troop numbers because of a chronic inability to retain trained soldiers that has been brought on by the unwillingness to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. The army also retained the services of a public relations company some 18 months ago.

Chief recruiter Brigadier Andrew Jackson is responsible for the launch of the new "One of the best" recruitment campaign, supported by Rugby Union England international Jonny Wilkinson. This is the first interactive campaign for army recruitment, and the public are encouraged to express their support for British troops. Conscious of the widespread opposition to the Afghanistan and Iraq occupation, the army is playing on sympathy for soldiers over their poor wages and substandard housing and the chronic lack of protective equipment for combat to legitimise militarism.

The campaign was spearheaded by the media's lauding Prince Harry as a hero for his brief spell of duty in

Afghanistan. Earlier this week, it was announced that Princes Harry and William are to host a party to raise funds for soldiers wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq. The "Help for Heroes" appeal, backed by the right-wing *Daily Mail*, is to take place in London on May 7. The princes, serving army officers, are to be joined by former SAS soldier Andy McNab and head of the Army, General Sir Richard Dannatt. Open to wealthy celebrities and individuals, the party is to be held at a secret location and will feature a military display and marching band.

The event was announced at the same time that the government set aside plans for a further withdrawal of UK troops from Iraq due in May. Last year, Brown had pledged that UK forces would be cut from 4,100 to 2,500 by next month. This has been delayed indefinitely as British forces in the south of the country prepare for a major offensive against insurgents.

The last weeks also saw a concerted campaign of official outrage and indignation over the supposed harassment of military personnel at RAF Wittering, near Peterborough. Service personnel had been instructed not to wear their uniforms in public because of alleged verbal abuse. The Conservative MP for Peterborough, Stewart Jackson, has since admitted that "The police don't have records of any serious problems. My understanding is that it's a small number of incidents of verbal abuse." But this did not stop Brown from making a statement to the press that soldiers should be able to display their uniforms with pride and that civilians must respect and defer to uniformed service people in public for their "sacrifices" and their "public service." The palace also issued a statement of concern.

The media campaign around RAF Wittering dovetails with the upcoming report Brown commissioned to be presented by Quentin Davies, a former Tory defence spokesperson who defected to New Labour, reviewing ways in which to improve the public's attitude towards

the armed forces. It is understood the report will encourage British military personnel to wear their military attire at all times in public. The aim is to condition public opinion to the sight of combat-ready troops on the streets.

In addition, the report is expected to recommend that local councils should organise homecoming parades for units returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Soldiers wounded in conflict should be awarded Purple Heart-style medals at public ceremonies wearing full military regalia and with a full military band, to recognise their sacrifice. Football clubs and other organisations should also give free entrance to the military when dressed for combat. Other suggestions emanating from within the establishment include an Armed Forces Day, backed by the former chief of defence staff, Lord Guthrie.

Another Brown-commissioned report on “Citizenship: Our Common Bond” has been unveiled by Lord Goldsmith. The former attorney general, who legally sanctioned Britain’s role in the US-led invasion of Iraq, focussed on inculcating patriotism amongst school children, with a proposal that they be required to pledge allegiance to the Queen.

The proposed pledge would involve declaring “true allegiance” to “Her Majesty,” continuing, “I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfill my duties and obligations as a British citizen.”

Goldsmith’s report also proposes ending the right of Commonwealth citizens residing in the UK and Irish citizens not resident in Northern Ireland to vote in British general elections. Incentives are to be given to students and young people to do volunteer work on behalf of charities, which the government is increasingly pushing as a replacement for state provision.



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