

Green Party calls for modernisation of British armed forces

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In a debate last week among the main bourgeois parties running in the UK general election, focused on the issue of military policy, the Green Party indicated its support for the modernisation of Britain's armed forces.

On the BBC's "Daily Politics" show, Green defence spokeswoman Rebecca Johnson complained that the British army was no longer equipped to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century:

"Our naval forces are very much about the nineteenth and twentieth century. Fighter planes by and large also. They are [from] a different era. Large warships or nuclear weapons in the wrong place are worse than useless."

Johnson's comments reveal the dishonest character of the Greens' attempt to present themselves to voters as a left alternative to the major parties, which intends to use savings on military spending and a fairer distribution of wealth to expand public services and social programmes.

A key lie being fostered for this purpose is the assertion that the Greens, along with the Scottish National Party, are an anti-war party due to their opposition to Trident nuclear weapons. This ignores the fact that even within military circles, there are those who reject the renewal of Britain's nuclear deterrent—advancing instead proposals to spend the money on a broader range of conventional weaponry. As *Financial Times* commentator Gideon Rachman wrote in a recent piece, "Buying Trident would weaken British defence":

"(T)he Tories' commitment to spend upwards of £30bn on renewing the Trident submarine-based missile system is not a demonstration that they are serious about defence. It is actually a frivolous decision to waste billions on a symbol of strength—rather than to spend the money on the conventional military muscle Britain needs."

The Green Party's opposition to Trident is in line with such considerations. The party fully upholds the interests of British imperialism, concluding that these can best be served by modernised armed forces with a wider variety

of conventional weaponry.

This is illustrated by the party's commitment in its manifesto to maintain defence spending at its current level. Commenting in March on the reasons behind this, Darren Hall, a Green candidate in Bristol and a former Royal Air Force engineer, told BBC Radio 4's "Today" programme, "Defence is a primary role of government and it's incredibly important that we're able to play a full and proper role in a Europe-wide capability that can resist attacks here and abroad."

In the current election campaign, the Greens have presented themselves as a potential ally for a Labour minority government. This would mean backing a party that oversaw British involvement in one military conflict after another, from the NATO-led war in Yugoslavia in 1999, to the Afghan invasion of 2001 and the illegal Iraq war in 2003.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the Greens' manifesto drops all reference to NATO, a shift from previous claims of opposition.

The abandonment of any criticism of the US-led alliance follows the Greens' full backing for its aggressive policy towards Russia. In a motion adopted at its spring conference in 2014, just two weeks after the fascist-led coup orchestrated by the US and Germany in Kiev that toppled the elected president of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich, the Greens, ignoring all of this, instead criticised Russia for violating international law and demanded that sanctions be imposed if it failed to comply with Western demands.

"The Russian Federation must be put under pressure to abide by international law and respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence. If it fails to respect international law it must expect diplomatic and economic consequences, and the international community needs to unite in agreeing and implementing those consequences," party leader Natalie Bennett said following discussion of

the motion.

At a time when the involvement of extreme right-wing forces in the newly-established coup regime in Kiev was clear for all to see, the Green motion urged, “support for the constitutional majority formed in the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament),” which offered the basis for “a national dialogue involving all the democratic components of Ukrainian society.”

The document went on to call on “the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the OSCE/ODIHR to provide immediate support to the Ukrainian Parliament during the current crisis to support dialogue with the Russian Federation and to ensure that new elections can be held according to the highest standards to produce a fully legitimate result.”

This was essentially the policy that Europe’s rulers adopted, with the European institutions in alliance with Germany and the US giving their unwavering support to ultra-nationalist and fascist forces like Svoboda and the Right Sector. The “legitimate result” of the subsequent election saw the coming to power of the oligarch Petro Poroshenko, who established a right-wing regime that has fully committed itself to waging a brutal civil war against the population of eastern Ukraine, rehabilitated Nazi collaborators from the Second World War like Stepan Bandera, and decisively suppressed all internal opposition to its reactionary, nationalist policies.

The Green Party’s stance on Ukraine was fully in line with its co-thinkers in Germany, who have been among the most vocal supporters of the Western-led drive to strengthen US and German influence in the region at Russia’s expense. The Heinrich Böll Foundation, aligned with the German Greens, has even held discussions in which military confrontation with Russia was promoted (see: “German Greens press for confrontation with Russia”).

This is not an isolated episode, but reflects the social basis of the Green Party in a privileged section of the middle class. While making use of left-sounding human rights rhetoric, this social layer has increasingly been drawn into the aggressive drive of the imperialist powers to assert their geostrategic and economic interests around the globe, and defend the capitalist system against all opposition from the working class (see: “UK General Election: Green Party offers no real alternative to austerity and militarism”).

The Greens’ defence of British imperialism’s interests is exposed further by their recent record on the Middle East. In September 2013, the sole Green MP, Caroline

Lucas, voted not to sanction a military intervention against Syria, along with the opposition Labour Party. The defeat of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government on this issue, which was partially responsible for the US decision not to proceed against Bashar al-Assad’s regime, reflected divisions within the ruling elite over whether an open confrontation with Syria could destabilise the entire region and throw Britain and its allies into a costly war.

The opposition of the Greens to this mission, like that of Labour and even some Conservative MPs, in no sense represented a principled rejection of military operations in the region to advance British and US imperialist goals.

This is proved by an interview last November, in which Bennett gave her support for Western-supplied weapons to be used by regional allies to take military action to tackle Islamic State (ISIS) forces in Syria and Iraq. Bennett told the *International Business Times*, “We’ve given places like Saudi some very hi-tech, very expensive weapons. It’s not that the region doesn’t have weapons to match [the Islamic State]. Whenever you keep coming in as the outside force, we know what happens.... So I think there is quite enough military hardware in the region for the region to act.”

Subsequent months have seen what Bennett terms “the region” participate in the US-led bombardment of ISIS positions in Iraq and Syria, in a mission that has the ultimate goal of toppling the Assad regime in Damascus. Her desired policy of allowing the regional proxies of US imperialism to act to tackle security threats has also been implemented elsewhere. In Yemen, a Saudi-led coalition is currently raining death and destruction down on the Middle East’s poorest country with US-supplied bombs in a bid to displace Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.



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