

UK: Johnson government orders review of “left wing extremism”, targeting Socialist Workers Party and “far-left entryism”

Laura Tiernan
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Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Conservative government has announced a review into “left-wing extremism”. The review will be led by former Labour MP John Woodcock, now Baron Walney, in his post as UK Special Envoy for Countering Violent Extremism, and will spearhead efforts to criminalise left-wing and socialist activity in Britain.

What amounts to a dragnet against the left was announced on Monday as a front-page “exclusive” in the pro-Tory *Telegraph* under the headline, “Far-Left influence on Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion to be probed”.

Ordered by Johnson, the review will investigate alleged “Attempts by far-Left activists to ‘hijack’ movements”, the *Telegraph* reported. It will probe “the extreme fringes of the hard-Left and far-Right in the UK”, the *Telegraph*’s Deputy Political Editor wrote, and will make recommendations to the prime minister and to Home Secretary Priti Patel in May.

The review of “left-wing extremism” marks a new stage in the campaign that began in July 2019 with the publication of a report commissioned by the UK government’s Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE), titled, “Violent extremist tactics and the ideology of the sectarian far left”. That report, written by academics Daniel Allington, Siobhan McAndrew and David Hirsh, sought to brand entire swathes of left-wing and socialist opinion as tantamount to terrorism.

The current review is dishonestly framed as a response to the international growth of the far-right, with Woodcock warning, “the UK must heed the growth of the far-right in the US, which culminated in the storming of the Capitol last month”.

But Woodcock’s disclaimer that his review will not draw “an equivalence of threat between the far-Left and the far-right” is worthless. This is the review’s central thrust, with the Socialist Workers Party bracketed with fascist paramilitary groups—including the Oath Keepers, Boogaloes, and Proud Boys—that helped plan and execute the January 6 coup attempt in Washington DC, backed by large swathes of the Republican Party, the military and police.

While the right-wing is mentioned, the real target is alleged “left-wing extremism”, with the *Telegraph* noting Woodcock’s “alarm” that “permissive attitudes to intolerable activity on the

hard-Left may be more likely because people perceive admirable objectives and are then liable to ‘submit to a conscious or often unconscious bias in overlooking the strategies to get there’”.

In media coverage of the government’s review, there was no mistaking the focus on “far-left extremism”. The *Daily Mail*’s headline declared, “Boris Johnson orders probe into attempts by far-left activists ‘like the Socialist Workers Party’ to ‘hijack’ movements including Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion”.

The *Mail* quoted Woodcock’s statement to the *Telegraph* warning “we must be vigilant” against a “blind spot in Britain to the prospect of progressive extremism—that is, unacceptable disruption or even violence carried out in the name of progressive causes to which the political establishment and large majority of the population have great sympathy, like climate change and racial injustice.”

The Orwellian reference to “progressive extremism” points to what the state is seeking to accomplish, as it moves to recast views shared by broad sections of the working class and youth in a criminal light.

Woodcock’s targeting of the SWP for “far-left entryism” speaks volumes. He told the *Telegraph*, “I want to look at the way anti-democracy, anti-capitalist far-Left fringe groups in Britain, like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), tend to have much more success hijacking important causes and mainstream cultural activity than the far-right, and the harm that may do’.

The designation of the left as “anti-democratic” turns reality on its head. In Britain, large sections of the Tory party are enmeshed with far-right organisations. The Conservative Party has already spawned the United Kingdom Independence Party, with Johnson last year defending his party’s links with neo-Nazi and far-right parties across Europe. Had Trump’s January 6 fascist coup succeeded, there is no doubt that Johnson and Patel would have lined up to endorse his theft of the election. As in the 1930s, the source of authoritarianism is decaying capitalism.

The SWP, Britain’s largest nominally socialist organisation, is being branded “extremist” for its “entryism” and for seeking

to influence “causes and mainstream cultural activity”. This definition of “entryism” would bar socialists from any involvement in public political, intellectual and cultural life. Such an agenda cannot be enforced peacefully. It would mean the proscription of left-wing, socialist and democratic organisations and the imposition of a police state.

The SWP is being attacked for “far-left entryism” into Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion. Both organisations are petty-bourgeois organisations politically hostile to Marxism and the working class. But the SWP is doing what *all* political parties seek to do: exercising its democratic rights to influence, through its press, social media, leaflets and meetings, protest movements it decides are relevant to its aims. In Woodcock’s red-baiting language, the SWP is “hijacking”, when it is merely engaging with those who choose to listen and perhaps recruiting sympathetic members.

If such activity is to be branded “left-wing extremist” the implications are far-reaching. Socialists will face criminal sanctions and proscriptions for leading or even supporting strikes and mass protests against austerity, war and a range of pressing social issues which the working class confronts in the midst of a pandemic that has already claimed more than two million lives.

The Socialist Equality Party’s political differences with the SWP are fundamental and unbridgeable, but we unequivocally condemn the state attack against its organisation and membership. The Johnson government’s targeting of the SWP as “violent” and “extremist” is a slander, aimed at preparing state repression against the working class and the entire left.

Woodcock’s identification of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Extinction Rebellion as supposed victims of SWP “hijacking” is not accidental. BLM leaders have already participated in a media witch-hunt against the SWP. In June 2020, BLM leader Dr Remi Adekoya, a political science lecturer, told Rupert Murdoch’s *Times*, “SWP involvement is a threat to the Black Lives Matter movement. The SWP will be hoping this turns into something bigger than race relations in Britain—they will want to take into something broader, like bringing down capitalism, on the wave of support for the BLM movement.”

Adekoya’s statement points to the real fears of the state and of the upper middle-class layers within BLM: that the radicalisation of broad sections of youth, students and the working class, against police brutality, racism, social inequality and environmental destruction, will develop in a socialist direction. It is precisely for this reason that the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties internationally have met with sustained censorship from Google, Facebook, and other social media platforms in recent years, in direct collaboration with the intelligence agencies.

In Germany, the Verfassungsschutz (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) has listed the Socialist Equality Party (SGP), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, as a “left-wing extremist”

organisation. The SGP has been identified as extremist and in violation of the German constitution’s Basic Law, despite the state’s acknowledgement that its activities are entirely legal.

In its 2019 report on “far-left violence”, the CCE warned that small “far-left sectarian” groups might soon win a mass following for their anti-imperialist, anti-war and anti-fascist views. Amid a widening radicalisation of working people, the revolutionary socialist theories of Lenin and Trotsky would lead in these circumstances to the “weaponisation of the working class”, the report warned. The Johnson government is acting on this threat.

The SWP acts as a stalking horse for attempts by the British state to blackguard and ultimately illegalise the socialist movement. In the process, organisations such as BLM and Extinction Rebellion that threaten to arouse broader social resistance will also be targeted, notwithstanding their own petty-bourgeois, pro-capitalist and anti-Marxist politics.

With its choice of Woodcock to lead the government’s review of “far-left extremism”, the manufactured campaign against “left-wing anti-Semitism” has come full circle. Woodcock’s role is mirrored by that of Blairite John Mann who resigned from Labour under Corbyn, was appointed Baron Mann of Holbeck Moor by the Tory government and made its Anti-Semitism Tsar in October 2019. Woodcock, a former member of the Defence Select Committee, was also a key player in the Blairites’ vicious witch-hunt against Corbyn, seeking to purge him and his thousands of supporters from the party. In the 2019 election, Woodcock called for a Tory vote “to stop [Corbyn] getting his hands on the levers of national security and defence.”

In return for services rendered, Woodcock was ennobled by Johnson in September 2020 and appointed to the House of Lords. Patel appointed Woodcock UK Special Envoy for Countering Violent Extremism in November 2019, saying he would bring ‘a range of skills and experience to the role.’

On Monday and again on Tuesday, the WSWS wrote to the Home Office to demand further information about its forthcoming review of “far-left extremism”. “Which organisations on the left are to be investigated? How will intelligence be gathered and by what agencies?” we asked. No reply was forthcoming.



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