

# The working class must mobilise to bring down the Johnson government!

Socialist Equality Party (UK)  
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There is a stench of death hanging over the premiership of Boris Johnson. The deepening scandal over the drinks parties held at Downing Street during Britain's two COVID lockdowns has provoked widespread anger and disgust, with successive revelations confirming the unbridled cynicism and hypocrisy of a Conservative government celebrating while millions suffered from severe hardship, a terrible illness and the loss of loved ones.

The well of public anger centres above all on Johnson himself, a mass murderer responsible for 180,000 COVID deaths, who is reviled by millions of working people. It is fuelling a growing strike movement against savage austerity as a devastating rise in the cost of living blows apart the pandemic rhetoric of shared national sacrifice.

The conditions exist for the emergence of a mass struggle by the working class against the Tory government, the corporations and the super-rich. But this can only be realised by workers breaking free of the political stranglehold imposed by the Labour Party and trade unions, which are working to prevent an explosion of the class struggle, thereby ensuring the Tories' crisis is resolved safely within Westminster and in the interests of the capitalist class.

Amid a torrent of official hypocrisy over Johnson's lying, no one should confuse popular sentiment with the political considerations animating the anti-Johnson "partygate" plotters now seeking his ouster. Endless articles and news broadcasts are devoted to speculation over whether and for how long Johnson will survive, and the latest utterances by Tory backbenchers. The crisis is being seized on by powerful sections of the Tory Party to engineer the most right-wing policy lurch ever carried out by a British government, with the Labour opposition marching in lockstep.

## Johnson and the Tories escalate war drive vs Russia

The most dangerous manifestation of the government's rightward turn is the escalating war drive against Russia. Johnson and his ministers are positioning the UK as the leading ally of the United States in NATO's warmongering over Ukraine. Britain is preparing to double its existing troop presence in Eastern Europe, deploying an additional 1,200 troops to Estonia and Poland, including Paratroopers and Royal Marines. A Type 45 destroyer and an offshore patrol vessel will be stationed in the Black Sea and an additional RAF squadron will be deployed to Cyprus to patrol Bulgarian and Romanian airspace. The Prince of Wales aircraft carrier has been placed on standby. They will be joined by 3,000 additional US troops, with many more to follow.

Johnson has threatened that an invasion of Ukraine by Moscow would be "painful, bloody and violent" and a war from which many Russian soldiers "won't come home." Like the Biden administration, he is responding to a desperate domestic crisis by seeking to channel discontent

outwards, against an external threat, with Putin's regime a convenient scapegoat. Johnson's diversion has assumed the most dangerous form imaginable—a provocation against a military power with close to 4,500 nuclear warheads.

The war drive is fully supported by the Labour Party, which combines declarations of common purpose with the Tories with an attack on Johnson's ability to lead an anti-Russian offensive. Starmer took to the pages of the *Telegraph* January 21 to demand the UK "stand firm against Russian aggression," while commending Defence Secretary Ben Wallace for his "moral clarity on the nature of Russian aggression."

In the face of this mortal threat, the official anti-war movement, led by the Stop the War Coalition, which in 2003 mobilised more than a million people to oppose war against Iraq, does nothing. It has issued two pro-forma statements, making no appeal to the working class while calling on "the British government and the Labour Party" to "distance themselves from the policies and priorities of the USA and develop an independent foreign policy" based on "a new all-inclusive security architecture in Europe". STWC's former leader Jeremy Corbyn issues pacifist appeals to Tory Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to reassert Britain's commitment to Ukrainian independence while urging a "new disarmament agreement with Russia".

## Herd immunity and political reaction

Militarism abroad is coupled with class war at home. The policies of the Johnson government are dictated by an escalating global crisis of the profit system, characterised by an unprecedented polarisation between the broad mass of the working class and a super-rich and socially criminal oligarchy. Capitalist society's rot was fully revealed and brought to a new pitch of intensity by the COVID-19 pandemic. Trillions were handed to the major corporations by the world's governments in a bailout that dwarfed even that following the 2008 global stock market crash—increasing the UK's national debt from £1.877 trillion to £2.223 trillion (103.7 percent of GDP) at a stroke. This must now be recouped through a brutal offensive against the living standards of the working class and trade and military war for control of global markets and resources.

The scale of attacks coming against the working class will exceed anything carried out in the "age of austerity" following the 2008 economic crash. Amid a still raging pandemic, workers face a ruling elite set on a homicidal policy of letting the virus rip, while imposing an historically unprecedented decimation of living standards.

On January 26, Johnson ended almost all remaining restrictions on the spread of COVID-19. As far as the ruling class is concerned, nothing more will be done to prevent mass infection, illness and death. The new mantra is "living with the virus". The requirement to self-isolate when

infected ends on March 24 and daily reporting of coronavirus infections, hospitalisations and deaths will be ended by Easter. Johnson's actions resemble those of a murderer who declares in advance that he will conceal all evidence of his impending crimes.

Inflation is set to rise to 7.25 percent by April, the highest rate since 1991. Rocketing prices are driven by the trillions of pounds, dollars and euros pumped into money markets by central banks over the past two years via pandemic bailout measures. Energy costs will rise by £693 per household and potentially another £500 in October. Food prices are also rising sharply while petrol is up nearly 27 percent. Mortgage rates are set to rise after an increase in interests rates to 0.5 percent this week, coming on top of rent hikes that have already produced a rise in homelessness.

Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey declared this week that workers must accept the restriction of their wages to combat inflationary pressures, "it is painful. But we need to see that." Wages have already fallen way below inflation, thanks to the trade unions' ruthless suppression of strikes. Bailey's statements make clear these efforts are not enough and are a declaration of class war against the working class.

This ruthless offensive by the financial oligarchy demands a deepening turn to police state methods of rule. A raft of anti-democratic legislation will soon come onto the statute books. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill empowers police to place the same restrictions on static "public assemblies" as they currently can on moving "public processions". The home secretary is empowered to decide what constitutes "serious disruption to the activities of an organisation which are carried on in the vicinity of a public procession" or "serious disruption to the life of the community" and restrict protests accordingly. The Nationality and Borders Bill criminalises asylum-seekers and migrants, overturning the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention. Its fascist "pushback" policy grants immunity to Border Force staff if migrants die in the English Channel in the process of its enforcement, making deliberate acts of murder official policy. Voting rights in the UK will be severely curtailed via an Electoral Integrity Bill making photo ID mandatory. The Judicial Review Bill limits legal scrutiny of government actions, with the Law Society describing its impact as "undermining the rule of law and restricting access to justice."

### **The Tory moves to replace Johnson: A palace coup**

What is unfolding in parliament over "partygate" is the modern-day equivalent of a palace coup—a change at the top to preserve the existing order. Left at this level, whether Johnson survives or not, the Tory government—as it did under David Cameron and Theresa May, each one more right-wing than the last—will continue as the most ruthless representative of the major corporations and the super-rich. The forces involved are epitomised by the prime minister's former chief adviser Dominic Cummings, who has engineered the leaks against Johnson. On January 31, asked by the *New York* magazine whether his actions against Johnson were "fair", Cummings replied, "The fact that someone wins an election doesn't mean that they should just stay there for years, right?" He has previously proposed having "a kind of dictator in charge" during the pandemic, with "as close to kingly authority" as possible, "pushing the barriers of legality."

Amid the crisis gripping the Conservative Party, the Tories are preparing to replace Johnson with someone considered better able to implement the further shift to the right demanded by the British ruling class. Leading contenders include multi-millionaire favourite Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss, known by Tory backbenchers as "the human hand-grenade".

### **Labour: Tory Party Mark II**

Behind Labour's blustering in Westminster, Sir Keir Starmer's party is acting as chief enabler for the Tories' rightward lurch. Starmer hopes to convince big business that Labour can be trusted to form a government. Hence his constant invocation of the "national interest" and his support for an orderly transfer of power within the Tory leadership if this is deemed necessary.

Starmer made this clear in his response to senior civil servant Sue Gray's heavily redacted report into "partygate". Appealing directly to Tory MPs, he insisted this week, "only they... can end this farce." He declared, "Margaret Thatcher once said, 'The first duty of Government is to uphold the law. If it tries to bob and weave and duck around that duty when its inconvenient, if government does that, then so will the governed'."

Preventing opposition from developing among "the governed" is the overriding political imperative of both parties. Throughout the pandemic, first under Corbyn and then under Starmer, Labour has operated in a de facto "government of national unity" with the Tories—supporting every major policy initiative, including the multi-billion bailout of pandemic profiteers, ending lockdowns and forcing children into unsafe schools, "No ifs, or buts".

Starmer's intervention confirms the character of the Labour Party. His decision to quote Thatcher's 1975 inaugural speech as Tory party leader speaks volumes. In it, she repeatedly railed against socialism and defined the anti-working-class agenda she would implement with such devastating effect after the 1979 election. Labour today is a Thatcherite party. This fact is recognised by the house organ of the Tory right, the *Telegraph*, which printed Starmer's speech in full, calling it "a defining moment at the dispatch box..." Even if the government's crisis forces a new leader to call an early general election and the Tories lose, Starmer would continue seamlessly with their policies. Workers must face up to the political reality that the Tory and Labour Parties represent a single entity—the party of herd-immunity, social reaction, militarism and war.

### **For class struggle and socialism**

The working class can no longer accept the definition of politics as choosing between rival pro-capitalist parties, with the Labour Party representing the "lesser evil". For five years, up until 2019, workers were told that Jeremy Corbyn's victory as Labour leader opened the possibility of its renewal as a party of social reform. Instead, after an endless series of political retreats and betrayals of his millions of supporters, Corbyn handed the party back unscathed to the Blairites, after allowing Johnson into Number 10.

Ending the Tory government demands the independent political mobilisation of the working class. That resistance has already begun. Last year saw a 42-day strike at British Gas, a sabotaged vote for national action at British Telecom, as well as dozens of strikes by transport workers, HGV drivers, warehouse workers, rail workers, teachers and health workers. This month alone has seen this emerging strike wave joined by hospital cleaners and security guards at London hospitals and the announcement of strikes on the London Underground.

Workers have confronted sabotage and betrayal by the trade unions. In the process the unions have been widely discredited. They are viewed

with disgust by the most advanced sections of militant workers. All over the world, strikes and protests are erupting against the renewed threat from COVID and the decades-long assault on wages and living standards, marking the beginning of an international counter-offensive by the working class. The prolonged suppression of the class struggle by the trade union bureaucracy, the Labour Party and the myriad pseudo-left groups that trail after them is coming to an end—not just in Britain, but all over the world.

The fight of the working class against the Johnson government will raise ever more urgently the necessity of a political mass movement, independent of and opposed to both the Tories and Labour, and against the capitalist system and its state.

An interconnected network of rank-and-file workplace and neighbourhood committees must be built to wrest control of the class struggle out of the hands of the pro-capitalist labour bureaucracy and take the fight to the ruling class. Politically it must be based on an anti-capitalist, internationalist, anti-imperialist and socialist perspective to mobilise the working class, especially its younger generations, to take state power and reorganise economic life to meet social need instead of private profit.

Above all, bringing the pandemic under control, defending workers' livelihoods and opposing militarism and war requires the unification of the working class in every country against the common enemy, unleashing the most powerful social force in the world in the struggle for socialism. There are no shortcuts. The working class is entering into decisive battles and requires a new leadership, the Socialist Equality Party. Those who understand the urgency of the present situation should contact the SEP today and make the decision to join.



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