

UK Labour Party spearheads anti-Russia warmongering

Thomas Scripps
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The Labour Party, in de facto alliance with the Conservative right-wing, is setting the pace for the UK's militarist aggression towards Russia.

It has positioned itself to the right of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government, insisting it take ever-more inflammatory measures.

The UK and its imperialist allies led by the US are using the Russian invasion of Ukraine to conduct a multi-pronged destabilisation campaign targeting the Putin regime. They are escalating the danger of a Third World War.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has emerged as the leading British advocate of this warmongering policy, joining forces with those on the Tory backbenches accusing Johnson of being too soft. On the main morning news show, he cheered the cross-party unity in place since the pandemic and which has reached the stage of total unanimity during a war crisis. "All political parties spoke with one voice in our support for Ukraine and our support for NATO," he gushed.

The Labour leader wants to go further faster against Russia than Johnson. He told *Good Morning Britain*, in terms of sanctions, "I support what the government put forward yesterday. I want them to go further than that."

By "going further," Starmer meant that sanctions "must not only isolate Russia but must be capable of crippling its ability to function." Not only the Russian but the British and international working class will be expected to pay the price for this policy. "Obviously," said Starmer, "there will be an impact, an economic cost here to the action that is being taken."

Refusing to endorse a policy of de-escalation he insisted, "The time for talks is over." Asked, "do you ever envisage an opportunity or situation whereby our military, the NATO military will actually go into Ukraine and help support their battle with the Russians?", the Labour leader gave the evasive reply that "the collective decision of

NATO is against that". But he insisted on the importance of "reinforcing our support for the surrounding countries and states".

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that day that the alliance has over 100 fighter jets, more than 120 ships and three carrier strike groups deployed in the region, as well as thousands of troops.

Labour's Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey spelled out Labour's demands in more detail with an op-ed piece in the government's house paper, the *Times*, "Why Labour supports action on the Ukraine crisis".

Asserting "Putin won't stop with Ukraine", Healey denounced "the actions of an imperialist and dictator" and claimed, "Britain has a long history of standing up to such tyrants."

Identifying "three fronts" on which Britain and its allies must fight Russia, he listed "First, further military help for Ukraine to defend itself" and "Second, the toughest set of economic sanctions," accusing the Johnson government of "dragging its feet".

Healey's third front was the "reinforcement and reassurance of Nato allies", by which he meant the rapid stepping up of military deployments and troop movements on Russia's border. Labour "strongly back deployment of further forces to frontline Nato members," he said, including "longer-term deployments", "more advanced technologies", "better spending to match threats and closer co-ordination with the EU, the Joint Expeditionary Force and democratic nations beyond the alliance."

Several hundred British soldiers from the 1st Royal Welsh regiment arrived in Estonia ahead of schedule yesterday, with tanks and other military equipment, doubling the UK's deployment in the country where it leads a NATO battlegroup. The Type 45 destroyer HMS Diamond set sail for the Eastern Mediterranean, after the deployment of additional fighter jets announced on Thursday.

Healey repeated his points in the House of Commons, praising the government’s “further package of military support to Ukraine” and telling Defence Minister James Heappey “he has Labour’s full support for this.” Healey went on to insist that the Ukrainians need more anti-tank missiles and asked if the Tory government “is willing to go that bit further.”

Heappey thanked him for “the way that he and his front bench Labour colleagues have engaged with government at this time of national emergency.” He commented later on the spirit of “bipartisan bonhomie” in the chamber.

Regarding anti-tank missiles, Heappey indicated NATO’s longer-term strategy of turning Ukraine into an Afghanistan-style quagmire for Russia, saying he was “very aware of their utility both in open battle during the initial phase of the conflict but also in the urban domain in any resistance or insurgency that might follow.” It would not surprise the Labour Party that weapons with such “dual utility... are high on our list of things that we are looking to supply.”

Outside parliament, Labour is proving its militarist credentials with a crackdown on the mildest expressions of dissent within its own ranks, putting into practice within the party the policy of criminalising anti-war protestors as “traitors” advocated by Conservative MP Tom Tugendhat for the whole country.

On Thursday, 11 Labour MPs in the rump Socialist Campaign Group who had signed a February 16 Stop the War Coalition statement were told to withdraw their support. The statement criticised the “relentless expansion of NATO”, while tamely suggesting, “Britain should be advancing serious diplomatic proposals to defuse the tension and seek a solution to the crisis rather than ratcheting it up.” Within an hour, all 11 had obeyed.

Momentum, the Corbynite campaign group, responded by dismissing the statement as “a week old” and stressing the signatories’ loyalty to the agenda of British imperialism. Its co-chairman Andrew Scattergood told the *Guardian*, “These MPs’ steadfast commitment to the Ukrainian people and against Russia’s invasion is beyond question. Indeed, many of them have led the criticism of Putin’s act of aggression today, forcefully and without reservation.”

Starmer pressed on yesterday, denying the party’s youth movement Young Labour access to its own social media channels, cutting funding to the organisation and cancelling its annual conference. Their crime was criticising the party’s “macho posturing & trying to ‘out do’ the Tories on hawkish foreign policy” and Starmer

himself for his attacks on the Stop the War Coalition. The last tweet posted on its account announces it has been “restricted until further notice” because “the account has recently become actively detrimental to the Party’s core objectives: to promote Labour candidates and policies, and to win elections.”

Leading Young Labour figures were summoned to a meeting with General Secretary David Evans, according to the *Daily Mirror*. They have put up as little resistance as the SCG, presenting the party’s attack as an unfortunate misunderstanding. Chair Jess Barnard tweeted that the group was “deeply disappointed... We have tried to work with the Party at every stage ... We hope to resolve this issue immediately and are seeking dialogue with the party.”

John McDonnell is one of the 11 Labour MPs to withdraw their signatures from the STWC open letter. Jeremy Corbyn’s right-hand man when he was Labour leader announced the same day that he would be speaking at a protest Saturday alongside Paul Mason.

An ex-radical, Mason’s lurch to the right has been perhaps the most extreme in modern British politics. He is an open advocate for war with Russia, waged by a “popular front” including the imperialist powers. He spent the past week in discussions with Ukraine’s fascist-infested volunteer militias, calling for the suppression of *Russia Today*, and attacking the Stop the War Coalition for pushing “Kremlin talking point[s]”.

Challenged by *Sky News* about Corbyn’s claimed opposition to NATO, Starmer said yesterday, “the Labour Party has never wavered in its support of NATO... the Labour Party policy never shifted under his leadership.”

He is right. Corbyn and company surrendered to the Blairite right-wing and demobilised the mass anti-war sentiment which put him in the leadership. In the face of the current crisis, they have speeded up their retreat.

A real anti-imperialist, anti-war movement must be built in opposition to these political scoundrels.



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