

# UK government enlists schools in NATO war drive against Russia

Tom Pearce, Margot Miller

16 March 2022

Boris Johnson's UK government is acting as the attack dog for US/NATO war plans against Russia. It is intensifying anti-Russian propaganda, whipping up nationalism and stepping up censorship. Schools and schoolchildren are not exempt from this assault.

On March 3, a chain of 1,800 school students from All Saints Roman Catholic school formed around York Minster cathedral in York linked by a ribbon in Ukraine's national colours yellow and blue.

Pictures of children holding yellow and blue placards proclaiming, "Stand with Ukraine", "Support Ukraine", "Save Ukraine—Stop the War", "Innocent People are Dead," are shown throughout the media.

Other schools have told pupils to come into school in yellow and blue in order to "support Ukraine."

Children and their families who want to provide aid for refugees and call for peace are being roped into the government's war propaganda. They are being used to glorify an oligarchic Ukrainian state, established in a 2014 US/German-backed coup, defended by fascist militias, and was used as a stalking horse to lure the Putin regime into a conflict which could spiral into a world war.

The government is actively encouraging discussion in schools about the war in Ukraine, but only if it toes the official line. The government's "The Education Hub" website features a section: "Help for teachers and families to talk to pupils about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and how to avoid misinformation." It offers advice on "How to spot mis-and disinformation and how to help pupils do the same."

The only acceptable information source is a totally compliant corporate media. The BBC's *Newsround*, a current affairs programme established in 1972 that targets children aged 6-12 years old, is no exception.

*Newsround*'s website states, "Many people in the Ukraine want the country to join NATO to avoid being dominated by Russia." There is no mention of the

eastward expansion of NATO since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, or of the long-term geopolitical strategy of the US to take on both Russia and China, or that the costs of this insane enterprise will be diverted from the education, health and welfare budgets.

Professed concern by the government and its allies for the effect that daily scenes of carnage and destruction are having on children's mental well-being is sickening in its hypocrisy. Thanks to government pandemic policy, backed by the Labour opposition and education unions, children and their families have been subjected to devastating waves of infection, illness and death.

In the UK, 155 children have lost their lives to COVID-19 and at least 10,000 suffered the trauma and heartbreak of losing a parent or grandparent to the disease. Out of 119,000 children suffering Long COVID symptoms on March 3, 21,000 had suffered symptoms for a year or more.

The government is equally unconcerned about the refugees fleeing from the Ukraine conflict, making it very difficult for them to enter the UK.

When children protest the illegal occupation of Palestine by Israel and the imperialist wars in the Middle East that have killed millions, they are referred to the government's counter-terrorism Prevent programme. Anti-imperialist agitation is dubbed "extremism and radicalism" while pro-NATO protests are in defence of "democracy."

After demonstrations in 2021 against the 11-day military assault on Gaza by Israeli forces, the *Middle East Eye* reported that school students in Birmingham, Manchester, Rochdale, Leeds and London were disciplined and referred to Prevent for such misdemeanours as wearing "Free Palestine" badges and keffiyeh scarves, or putting up posters.

Some students said they faced detention, expulsion and being barred from exams if they protested for Palestinian

rights on school property.

At the time, a person from Leeds tweeted, “The headteacher of Allerton Grange High school publicly calling the Palestinian flag a call to arms and a symbol of anti- Semitism. What does this tell any Palestinian child or child from a country fighting oppression!!”

Students involved in school strikes against climate change have also been threatened with Prevent.

The hypocrisy knows no bounds. Recently, a group of year six (11 years old) pupils at Welbeck primary school in Nottingham wrote a letter to their local Labour MP Lilian Greenwood regarding the “partygate” scandal. The children appeared on Twitter holding their letters, which called on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to resign. The Conservative party accused teachers of “brainwashing” children.

On February 9, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi responded, “No school should be encouraging young people to pin their colours to a political mast.”

Two weeks later, the government hastily issued new, non-statutory guidance on political impartiality in schools. The guidance states, “When teaching about an ongoing humanitarian crisis and whether the UK should intervene militarily, teachers may just outline broad arguments in favour and against this option.” Also, “...many topics relating to empire and imperialism, on which there are differing partisan political views... should be taught in a balanced manner.”

Oppositional or socialist ideas that challenge the establishment’s narrative are barred: “Schools are responsible for ensuring that speakers, tools, and resources do not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty ...” So-called British “values” were introduced into the school curriculum in 2014 as part of the Prevent strategy.

Presumably, many political and historical works available in UK libraries are now forbidden as source material. Any “differing partisan political views”—such as the Marxist concept that democracy under capitalism is only democracy for the ruling oligarchy, that the rule of law defends the profit system, that individual liberty is the liberty to expropriate the wealth of society by exploiting the working class—are off limits.

The guidance spreads the net of censorship as far as possible, continuing, “Schools should not under any circumstances work with, or use materials produced by, external agencies that take extreme political positions on these matters. This is the case even if the material itself is not extreme, as the use of it could imply endorsement or

support of the organisation.”

As examples of extreme political positions, the guidance includes “promoting the adoption of non-democratic political systems rather than those based on democracy, for any purpose; a publicly stated desire to abolish democracy, to end free and fair elections, or violently overthrow capitalism.”

The real concerns of the government are growing social tensions and the escalating class struggle, which threatens to derail the government and opposition parties’ warmongering. “Political impartiality” advice for schools is in fact a tool for imposing the ideology of the ruling class on children and families.

The education unions do nothing to oppose this reactionary agenda. Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union (NEU), responded to the new guidance by saying simply, “very good guidance already exists.” The NEU supports the 1996 the Education Act which states the promotion of “partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school” is forbidden (Section 406). It also requires that when political issues are discussed, pupils are offered a supposedly “balanced presentation of opposing views” (Section 407).

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) has joined other unions in supporting sanctions against Russia, which will devastate the living standards of ordinary Russians who are not responsible for the Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine. The ASCL, and councils like Labour-controlled Manchester and Salford, are urging the government to remove Russian energy supplier Gazprom from the Crown Commercial Service’s School Switch Scheme, designed to help schools find the cheapest energy supplier.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**