

UK: Queen's Speech lays out brutal class war agenda and evisceration of democratic rights

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10 May 2022

Today's Queen's Speech, in which the government's legislative agenda for the upcoming session of Parliament is outlined, took place amid a heightened political crisis for the ruling class. The Conservative government's programme was a further lurch to the right, with an evisceration of democratic rights at its centre.

With Buckingham Palace citing the queen's "episodic mobility problems", the 96-year-old monarch was unable to attend the State Opening of Parliament to read the speech. The queen has only twice missed the ritualistic constitutional ceremony in her 70 years on the throne, both due to pregnancies, and the last time in 1963.

Instead, the deeply unpopular Prince Charles, himself 73 and next in line to the throne, gave the speech with the queen's Imperial State Crown on a table next to him. The Palace ensured that Charles's eldest son, Prince William, attended his first State Opening sitting alongside him.

With both heirs to the throne present, the state was on full alert. Sky News anchor Adam Boulton noted, "The security around Westminster is the greatest I have seen in four decades," adding that "they've [police and security] sealed off all the way around the [Buckingham] Palace, as well as the Mall, and St James Park, as well as here at Westminster."

The event took place amid NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, in which Britain is buried up to the hilt, and as a massive political crisis affecting the major political parties rages at home.

Last week's elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly saw the nationalist Sinn Féin win the most seats, intensifying the crisis of British imperialism both in its oldest colony and regarding its relations with the European Union and the US. The pro-British Unionist parties are demanding the scrapping of the Northern Ireland Protocol governing post-Brexit EU trade and there is little possibility of the power-sharing executive resuming. But given the threat of a constitutional

unravelling and a possible trade war that would alienate Washington as well as Berlin and Paris, the Queen's Speech could only refer in general to taking "all steps necessary" to protect Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market.

Since November, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's leadership has been threatened by the Partygate scandal, after it was revealed he and other leading government officials broke COVID public health measures in place during 2020/21. But Johnson may now not be the first leader forced to stand down. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has been dragged into the crisis in the "Beergate" scandal, with Durham police launching an investigation into whether he also breached rules during a political campaign event in the north east of England. Just 24 hours prior to Parliament opening, Starmer announced that if he is fined he will resign along with his deputy, Angela Rayner—following his repeated calls demanding Johnson's resignation.

The government's response was to throw "red meat" to satisfy the Tory Party's right-wing constituency and the capitalist class demanding an escalation in the offensive against the working class.

Despite Johnson's "levelling up" mantra, there was not a single concession to workers being hammered by more than a decade of grinding austerity. In what was presented as the first "post-COVID" Queen's Speech by a government that has overseen almost 200,000 deaths, what was tabled was a deepening of the onslaught to be imposed by repressive measures.

The speech contained 38 bills to be legislated, including a Public Order Bill, which, building on the newly passed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, effectively ends the right to protest. All protests "interfering with key national infrastructure" such as airports, railways and newspaper printing presses, will be outlawed, with prison sentences of up to 12 months. Any person blocking the

construction of major transport projects such as the HS2 high-speed train network faces six months in prison.

“Locking on”, where environment protesters glue themselves to roads and structures, will incur a maximum penalty of six months’ imprisonment and an unlimited fine. People deemed to have come equipped to lock on will also be hit with a fine.

Justice Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab has authored a grotesquely named Bill of Rights to “restore the balance of power between the legislature and the courts”, which will repeal the Human Rights Act introduced in 1998 by the Blair Labour government. The government cynically announced Raab’s Bill would curb “the incremental expansion of a rights culture without proper democratic oversight”.

Law Society president Stephanie Boyce warned, “If the new Bill of Rights becomes law, it would make it harder for all of us to protect or enforce our rights. The proposed changes make the state less accountable. This undermines a crucial element of the rule of law, preventing people from challenging illegitimate uses of power.”

Whatever remains of any European Union-based legislation that hinders the untrammelled operations of big business is to be shredded under a Brexit Freedoms Bill. The *Independent* noted, “The legislation will also remove the principle of supremacy of EU law, which still applies to 2,376 acts of parliament passed before Brexit.” The Bill allows the amendment or repeal of many laws by using “secondary legislation”, to be enacted by ministers without full parliamentary scrutiny.

Among other incoming legislation is a media bill facilitating the privatisation of Channel 4 Television, a precursor to the eventual privatising of the main state broadcaster the BBC, a long-time aim of the Conservatives.

A measure aimed at bolstering the Israeli apartheid state will prevent public bodies from boycotting certain countries, i.e., Israel.

Further laws to be enacted include a national security bill, which will tighten the official secrets law and require lobbyists and PRs to register any work carried out for foreign states.

The Great British Railways Act will see the state offering the private sector train-operating companies guaranteed returns. It lays the basis for intensifying attacks on railworkers’ conditions. Another law will require all vessels operating at UK ports, specifically ferry companies, to pay employees the minimum wage, in effect laying the basis for a permanently low paid

workforce.

The Queen’s Speech is a declaration of war against the working class by a ruling elite that is shovelling unlimited financial resources into a proxy war against Russia, threatening a nuclear conflict. This is to be paid for by workers through an assault on their jobs, pay, terms and conditions and access to the basics of life including health care, education and housing.

In response, Starmer cynically called for the government to address the raging cost of living crisis as inflation races towards 10 percent. Johnson said only that he would address this “in the days to come”. This will consist of a few sops doing nothing to address the social distress impacting millions of people who can no longer afford to live. It may include making a grant of the £200 energy bills loan being made available to households from October. To put this into perspective, a household using a typical amount of gas and electricity will by then be paying up to £2,600 annually.

Millions already cannot even afford to eat properly. Research published this week by the Food Foundation reveals that almost 5 percent of households, or 2.4 million adults, had not eaten for a whole day during the last month. More than one in 10 households (6.8 million adults) had eaten smaller meals than usual or skipped meals because they could not afford or access food. Some 2.6 million children live in households that do not have access to a healthy and affordable diet, which puts them at high risk of diet-related diseases.

In this situation, that a sated ruling elite with no significant social base to govern can offer nothing except militarism, war and repression points to a society headed for a social explosion.



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