Demands to escalate war against Russia as Tories back their own confidence motion

Chris Marsden
18 July 2022

It is on the issue of war that the candidates to replace Boris Johnson as prime minister will be judged by the ruling class.

This was made clear by Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun*, which editorialised July 17, "Whoever replaces Boris Johnson as Prime Minister must not falter from his course until Putin is vanquished".

The Sun boasted that a third of Russia's firepower has been "wiped out, thanks to Ukraine's valiant defenders", its "territorial gains have been humiliatingly meagre", "Sanctions are slowly but surely choking the lifeblood from Russia's pariah economy, and Putin's wider strategic aims have backfired, with Finland and Norway [sic] joining a beefed-up NATO."

It then insisted, "For all the criticisms of Boris Johnson, his robust support of Ukraine is undoubtedly paying dividends. Whoever replaces him as Prime Minister must not falter or deviate from the course he has set, until Putin is vanquished."

Its rose-tinted military analysis combined with a demand for more bloodshed was drawn from comments to the BBC by Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Antony David Radakin. The head of Britain's armed forces said he believed Russia has "already lost" the war in Ukraine, but was still a threat to "the world order" that must be eliminated as it "continues to be a nuclear power, it's got cyber capabilities, it's got space capabilities, and it's got particular programmes under water so it can threaten the underwater cables that allow the world's information to transit around the whole globe."

The Sun solicited an interview with the current favourite leadership challenger Rishi Sunak, which it ran under the headline, "Fighting talk". Sunak, it reported, "has vowed to do whatever it takes to help Ukraine's President Zelensky defeat Vladimir Putin's invasion," declaring in an open letter, "President Zelensky, brave citizens of Ukraine, be in no doubt the United Kingdom will remain your strongest ally."

He promised that "his first foreign trip would be to Kyiv to offer his full support to the war hero PM in person," while promising, "I will reinforce our policy of total support for Ukraine that Boris has so ably led. The Conservative Party will stand united together in our support for you."

Yet to the extent that war is discussed amid the crisis gripping the Tory government, it is on their terms and with the full agreement of the Labour Party.

Amid acute class tensions provoked by the government's murderous pandemic policies and the crushing rise in the cost-of-living, Labour cannot do anything that raises before workers the central unspoken issue that led to Johnson's fall as party leader: the conclusion within ruling circles that he was too discredited, too hated and too incompetent to lead the UK as it escalates the war against Russia and the war against the working class at home.

On Monday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson was able to move a motion of confidence in his own government because of Labour's refusal to move its own.

The debate that ensued reinforces the demand raised by the Socialist Equality Party for workers to fight for an immediate general election in order "to rouse opposition to the war policies of the government and to agitate for mass action by the working class to defeat the savage assault on living standards and democratic rights."

Even the manner of its calling confirmed that Labour is as anxious as the Tories that they remain in office to avoid any public discussion on policies hostile to the broad mass of the working class, but which both parties

© World Socialist Web Site

are committed to impose on behalf of big business.

Originally, Labour wanted a debate on a motion making a no confidence vote conditional on Johnson remaining prime minister until he is replaced on September 5. Its motion stated, “That this house has no confidence in Her Majesty’s government while the Rt Hon Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip [Boris Johnson] remains prime minister.”

This allowed the Tories to reject the motion, stating that Johnson had already resigned, and for Johnson himself to table a motion declaring, “That this house has confidence in Her Majesty’s government.”

Johnson used this to spend 30 minutes boasting of his “achievements”, including being the first government to reopen the economy during the pandemic, the first to arm Ukraine and the most bellicose against Russia. He warned that there are fears his political demise will mean the end of UK support for Ukraine’s war against Russia, saying, “The Champagnski corks will be popping in the Kremlin.”

He ended by referencing his photo-opportunity flight yesterday on an RAF Typhoon jet, saying he was at the helm for a “glorious period” but handed back the controls. That “is exactly what I will do with this great party of ours,” he boasted, after which the Tories will “coalesce in loyalty” around the new leader.

Left to the Labour Party, that is exactly what will happen.

Speaking in reply, Sir Keir Starmer focused almost exclusively on Johnson’s serial lying because he cannot identify a single major policy issue on which Labour disagrees with the government—above all on war in Ukraine.

Again and again, he tried to “embarrass” Tory MPs by citing their moves against Johnson and resignation statements. But even while stating that there were no disagreements on policy between Johnson and those now competing to replace him, he ended with a series of questions as to why the Conservatives are leaving Johnson “with his hands on the levers of power for eight weeks”.

Of the fact that Johnson’s replacement is supposed to have his hands on the levers of government until 2024, Starmer says nothing.

The Tories are so anxious to avoid public debate on their record in office and what they want to do next that two of the leading challengers, former Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, pulled out of a televised leadership debate on *Sky*, forcing its cancellation. They were responding to Tory despair at the acrimony of previous debates. But if the Tories fear the impact of “blue on blue” infighting and the clear hostility to all candidates expressed by studio audiences, this is dwarfed by their fear that the government’s crisis could trigger mass social opposition from below.

The same essential concern animates Labour, which shares the Tories’ agenda to the letter and wants nothing to cut across its implementation. Their aim throughout the deepening crisis of rule facing British imperialism has been to present Labour as a government in waiting should the Tory party be unable to carry on.

The SEP has raised the demand for a general election to create the conditions for workers to disrupt the conspiracy of the Tories and Labour. We explain that both parties are committed to: “1) the relentless escalation of war against Russia, even to the point of risking a nuclear war; 2) the criminal refusal to stop the endless transmission of the Sars-CoV-2 virus and to allow mass infection and death; and 3) the ruthless assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class.”

The SEP will utilise a general election to develop the industrial and political struggle of the working class. We will mobilise workers against the trade unions’ suppression of the growing strike movement and their role in preventing any political challenge to the Tory government and its de-facto Labour coalition partners. We will make the case for the organisation of a general strike to stop the war, force the adoption of a zero-COVID policy, and build support for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site