# Thatcherite warmonger Liz Truss becomes Britain’s prime minister

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**5 September 2022**

The elevation of Liz Truss to the position of prime minister heralds a decisive conflict between the Conservative government and the British working class.

Truss has been chosen by 80,000 well-heeled reactionaries among the Tory Party’s ageing 170,000 membership to occupy Britain’s highest office. She is the candidate considered most ruthless in implementing an agenda of war with Russia and China, and class war in the UK.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained following the forced resignation of Boris Johnson in July, “The political fear animating a leadership challenge that almost led to the meltdown of the government is that Johnson is such a divisive and discredited figure that he could not be entrusted with the next stage of the ruling class offensive against the working class or with prosecuting NATO’s war in Europe.

“The British bourgeoisie is in the throes of a political crisis rooted in a global capitalist breakdown, a still raging pandemic, a worldwide inflationary spiral, trade war, the eruption of war and, above all, the resurgence of the class struggle.”

Immediately before Truss’s election was announced, the *Daily Telegraph* declared that “for the first time since Margaret Thatcher, Britain is about to have a principled, classical liberal, pro-market, well-read, economically literate and policy-driven PM.”

She began building this position in the Tory party a decade ago when, as a newly elected MP, she co-authored *Britannia Unchained*, along with others in the party’s Thatcherite Free Enterprise Group. It decried the UK’s “bloated state, high taxes and excessive regulation,” described British workers as “among the worst idlers in the world,” hailed “economies like Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea” and urged the creation of multiple Free Trade Zones.

More recently, on the pandemic, she declared, “No lockdown would happen under my leadership,” and there would be “No mask mandates.”

Behind this monstrous personality, a government with no popular mandate to rule is seeking to impose a political agenda dictated by the financial oligarchy that threatens millions with destitution, dictatorial rule, the eruption of world war and nuclear destruction.

Truss takes office amid a devastating cost-of-living crisis, with rampant inflation and soaring fuel costs leading to a strike wave encompassing rail, post and telecom workers that threatens to explode into action involving millions more.

She is notorious for her warmongering against Russia. This reached a crescendo in August, when she was asked whether she would activate Britain’s Trident nuclear weapons, even though “it would mean global annihilation.” Truss replied without any emotion, “I’m ready to do that.”

Truss has also pledged to raise military spending to 3 percent of GDP by 2030, which would have vast implications. According to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) military think tank, this would mean a 30 percent troop increase and cost a staggering £157 billion.

Paying for this would mean income tax increases of 5 percent and unprecedented cuts in social spending. £157 billion is equivalent to the annual spending on the National Health Service (NHS) for the whole of the UK.

The ruling class knows that the escalation of war in Europe, military aggression against China and its drive to claw back from the working class the hundreds of billions handed out to big business during the pandemic, under conditions of a raging economic crisis, cannot be carried out by democratic means.

RUSI’s appraisal of Truss’s military spending pledge calls it “the end of the peace dividend.” It states, “Since the mid-1950s, the UK has been able to fund the growing share of its national income devoted to the NHS and state

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pensions through cuts in the GDP share spent on defence."

Ramping up defence spending "would be a radical shift in priorities," and "there has been little attempt to ready the British public for the sacrifices that will be needed."

Preparations are well advanced for the brutal repression of social opposition.

The day before Truss's victory, the *Sunday Times* reported a leaked strategy paper of Britain's police chiefs laying out contingency plans to deal with the cost-of-living crisis that anticipates a rise in crime and a breakdown in public order. The threat of mass civil unrest "as a response to prolonged and painful economic pressure" led one senior officer to warn of "a return to the febrile conditions that led to the London riots in 2011."

The central concern of the Tories, however, is not riots but collective working class resistance.

In response to the rail strikes, the government has already legislated for the use of agency workers as scabs. Truss will now implement "minimal service" legislation that effectively outlaws strikes in all essential industries and services, including education and the NHS.

The content of this legislation was laid out by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps in the *Daily Mail*, who boasted, "We WILL take on these Luddites ... just like Thatcher." It includes increasing the ballot threshold for strike action, doubling the notice period for strike action, enforcing a compulsory "cooling-off" period, demanding endless ballots by allowing only one strike action per mandate, further curtailing the right to picket and fining unions £1 million for breaking anti-strike laws.

The ability of the Tories to mount such an offensive is the political responsibility of the Labour Party and the trade unions.

The Tories first came to office in 2010, in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, due to the political alienation of millions of workers from Labour under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, above all over the 2003 Iraq War and then the 2008 bailout of the banks that inaugurated the "age of austerity."

Workers looking to fight back against the Tories and the Blairites voted in massive numbers in 2015 and again in 2016 for Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, only for him to capitulate in the face of both.

Today, Labour under Sir Keir Starmer functions in a de facto coalition with the Tories, supporting their war policy and joining in opposing strikes. Immediately following Truss's election, with even the Liberal Democrats calling for a general election, Starmer congratulated "our next Prime Minister Liz Truss as she prepares for office."

Outside Parliament, the trade union bureaucracy police and suppress the class struggle, limiting the summer strike wave and preventing a broader upsurge of industrial action. Strikes have been kept separate, with many sold out based on below-inflation pay awards, while a drawn-out process of balloting has prevented the largest battalions of workers in the NHS, local government and education from acting.

The authority of the trade unions and support for the Labour Party have been greatly eroded by their decades of betrayal. Class tensions are acute, as workers are told to work even harder for less pay and still find it impossible to make ends meet. But unleashing the social power of the working class depends on breaking free of the stranglehold of the trade unions and the Labour Party.

The Socialist Equality Party offers our support in establishing rank-and-file committees in every workplace to wage the class struggle independently of the trade union bureaucracy. These committees must fight for a united industrial offensive, a general strike, to bring down the government. Through the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), British workers must reach out to their class brothers and sisters in every country. Unified internationally, the working class becomes an unstoppable force.

We call on workers to take up the demand for an immediate general election to create the best conditions for developing political opposition to the shared agenda of the Tories and Labour, which is: 1) the relentless escalation of the war against Russia; 2) the refusal to stop the endless transmission of COVID-19, mass infection and death; and 3) the ruthless assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class.

The immense struggles ahead must be waged based on a socialist and internationalist programme, through the building of the revolutionary leadership of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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