

## SEP (UK) 2022 Congress Resolution

# Mobilise the working class against imperialist war!

14 November 2022

*This resolution was adopted at the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), held from October 22 to October 25, 2022. Read the full report on the Congress here.*

1. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) joins its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International in condemning the imperialist war in Ukraine instigated by the US and NATO. American imperialism and its British imperialist ally are not only risking but actively planning a nuclear war that could result in the extinction of human life on the planet. Their objective is the subjugation of Russia and control of its vast territory and resources—for plunder and as essential preparation for an onslaught against China.

2. Behind the backs of the working class, the NATO powers have instigated a conflict pushing towards direct military confrontation with Russia and China—a Third World War that threatens nuclear annihilation. The US and its allies have completely rejected any outcome of the war short of the achievement of Ukraine’s military objectives. Smelling blood in the water after Russia’s military debacle, they are increasingly unrestrained in their actions, providing material and technical support for an offensive on Russian-claimed territory. This can only be explained by the crisis and desperation confronting the ruling class. The US and the European governments are sitting on a social powder keg, ruling over working classes whose standards of living have been collapsing for decades and who are now mobilising in an international resurgence of the class struggle.

3. Though the war has been instigated by US imperialism, the SEP unequivocally opposes the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. While rejecting claims that Russia is “imperialist”, the SEP gives no support whatsoever to the “national defence” policies of the reactionary Russian ruling class that came to power through the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990-91 and the systematic plundering of its assets. As the war waged by the US and NATO is a continuation of imperialist expansion, the invasion of Ukraine is a continuation of the reactionary policies of the Russian oligarchy and its repudiation of the entire progressive heritage of the Russian Revolution and of the democratic principles embodied in the original founding of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922. The encirclement of Russia by imperialism is the disastrous outcome of the Stalinist regime’s final betrayal of the legacy of the October Revolution. Putin’s policy of Russian nationalism and chauvinism is incapable of opposing imperialism or appealing to the broad mass of workers in Russia, let alone in Ukraine, Europe and the United States.

4. The opposition of the SEP to the Russian invasion, however, is from the socialist left, not the imperialist right. All the reasons that have been given by the UK government and the Labour Party opposition to justify the war are lies. NATO is not fighting a war for “democracy”, or Ukraine for “national self-determination”. Rather, NATO is using the Ukrainian regime—brought to power in February 2014 by a US and Europe-backed

coup spearheaded by far-right and fascist forces—as its frontline force in the war on Russia. Neither Ukraine nor Britain and the other NATO powers show any concern for the democratic rights of their citizens. Kyiv treats its population as cannon fodder in the pursuit of the interests of the Ukrainian ruling class, in line with US and European imperialism. Liz Truss was made prime minister by the votes of just 80,000 Tory party members, and Rishi Sunak by the appointment of a few hundred Tory MPs. He leads a government eviscerating the right to strike and protest. British imperialism is jointly responsible with the US and other imperialist powers for the deaths of millions of innocent civilians, the largest refugee crisis since World War Two, and the bolstering of dictatorships around the world.

5. The war against Russia is the continuation and intensification of the drive for US global hegemony that was initiated with the first invasion of Iraq in 1990-91 and intensified following the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991. It is the outcome of a geopolitical strategy pursued by the United States and backed to the hilt by the UK for more than 30 years. Over those three decades, the US has led a series of wars aimed at using its unrivalled military power to offset its protracted economic decline: the Persian Gulf war of 1990-91; the war against Serbia in 1999; the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001; the second war against Iraq in 2003; the war against Libya in 2011; and the CIA-backed civil war in Syria. In 2016, the ICFI stated:

The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China. [Preface to *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990-2016*, David North, July 11, 2016]

6. British imperialism participated as a chief partner in every one of these bloodbaths. The UK has long acted as Washington’s foremost ally in Europe. But since Brexit this alliance has assumed an ever more essential imperative in British imperialism’s efforts to project its global interests. Opposed by Washington, Brexit lost the UK its place within the European Union as the foremost advocate of US interests in the continent, especially in opposing German and French efforts to build a European military capability independent of NATO. This has necessitated a redoubling of London’s efforts to prove its usefulness to the White House and the Pentagon. British imperialism, amid an unprecedented collapse in its world standing, is cleaving as close to the US as possible in the hope of

a share of the spoils. The UK has given the regime in Ukraine £2.3 billion in military aid including advanced weaponry and thousands of Ukrainian soldiers are being trained at British military bases. Before the war, the UK's Operation Orbital trained 22,000 Ukrainian troops. Britain's special forces are present on the ground in Ukraine.

7. The UK's war drive is rooted in its deep political, social and economic crisis, which has been enormously exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In just two-and-half years, more than 200,000 people have died from COVID in the UK, and hundreds of thousands debilitated, because of the deliberate decision by the ruling class to prioritize profits over lives. The catastrophic impact falls upon a society already torn by extreme levels of social inequality and widespread deprivation. Faced with a growing oppositional movement in the working class, the British ruling class is turning to war as a means of enforcing a false "national unity," with repeated calls for sacrifice from the government to justify massive hikes on the price of fuel, food and other essentials

8. Britain's generals have made clear the scale of the war planned by the ruling class. In his keynote address to the Royal United Services Institute's (RUSI) annual "Land Warfare Conference", head of the British Army General Sir Patrick Sanders demanded a strengthened armed forces capable of waging offensive wars, insisting, "The British Army must be prepared to engage in warfare at its most violent." In 2018, General Sir Nicholas Carter, the former Chief of the Defence Staff, proposed that the British Army needed "to project land capability over distances of up to some 2,000 km," comparing today's tasks to the Nazi war of annihilation waged against the Soviet Union.

9. Johnson's downfall as prime minister came in a palace coup by his own MPs because Britain's ruling elite had lost confidence in his ability to wage war on the working class at home and war against Russia. He was replaced by former foreign secretary Liz Truss as the most ferocious anti-Russian provocateur. During a hustings for the Conservative Party leadership, she said of authorising a nuclear strike and global annihilation, "I think it's an important duty of the prime minister and I'm ready to do that." Where Johnson promised to increase military spending to 2.5 percent of GDP by 2030, Truss pledged 3 percent and has not been contradicted since. She has further promised that UK military spending "will be determined based on the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine," and dismissed Putin's warning of a nuclear war as "bogus". Moscow has responded by identifying the UK as a primary target, with Russian General Andrey Gurulyov telling Russian state TV that a nuclear attack on Britain would mean "we forget about the British Isles."

10. War abroad means class war at home. The Royal United Services Institute has hailed "the end of the peace dividend" when spending on "the NHS and state pensions" could be paid for "through cuts in the GDP share spent on defence". An increase in GDP spending on defence to 3 percent by 2030 would mean an additional £157 billion over the next eight years. Striking rail workers have been repeatedly denounced by Tory MPs and the media as "Putin's friends", amid demands that industrial action be "brought to a halt" so that the UK can successfully wage war against Russia. Just as Margaret Thatcher's depiction of the miners as "the enemy within" heralded a massive state offensive against the miners, so too does the depiction of rail workers as stooges of Russia pave the way for the full mobilisation of the state—this time against the entire working class. The government has already pledged to mobilise agency workers as a scab labour force, to bring in minimum service provisions criminalising strikes in all essential services and preventing any strike from taking place until negotiations are exhausted, including balloting on all proposed deals.

11. Britain is standing squarely behind US imperialism's aggression against China, abandoning its previous attempts to cultivate trade and investment with Beijing that saw the UK become a founding member of Beijing's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, hoping to position itself

as a key player in China's access to European markets. The reversal was described by *The Atlantic* as "sweeping away decades of foreign-policy consensus in the most drastic such shift in the Western world," leaving British foreign policy in "almost a complete overlap with the US". The UK has undertaken extensive preparations for a conflict with China in key policy documents such as the Integrated Review of foreign and defence policy and "Defence in a Competitive Age". In September last year, the US, Britain and Australia announced the formation of the AUKUS anti-China military pact, focussed on the deployment of nuclear-powered submarines. Truss as foreign secretary called for "a global NATO" to ensure that "democracies like Taiwan are able to defend themselves."

12. The Labour Party marches in lockstep with the Tory government. Leader Sir Keir Starmer has reasserted Labour's position as "the party of NATO", proclaiming support for the military alliance "the root of the Labour Party, the centre of the Labour Party," threatening to expel any Labour MP who does not demonstrate "unshakeable support" for NATO. He has denounced anti-war protesters for "providing a smokescreen" so the Putin government "can go on beating up and jailing those brave individuals who dare to stand up to its despotism on the streets of Russia." Labour was key in enabling the Tories to replace Johnson with Truss and then Sunak amid an unprecedented government crisis, appealing to "decent, honourable" Tory MPs to "put their country first" and remove him themselves.

13. Britain's trade unions have lined up directly behind the NATO war drive. This year's Trades Union Congress (TUC) conference passed a resolution moved by the GMB demanding "immediate increases in defence spending" and calling for "defence contracts to be placed in the UK where possible and shipbuilding orders to be placed with UK yards." In March, the TUC cancelled its annual demonstration outside the Tory Party conference in favour of a "day of solidarity with Ukraine". The GMB, National Union of Mineworkers, ASLEF, TSSA, the University and College Union, Public and Commercial Services Union, Communication Workers Union and Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union joined a demonstration organised by the NATO stooge Paul Mason demanding the arming of Ukraine.

14. Mason is a telling example of the transition of a broad swathe of the pseudo-left milieu directly into the camp of imperialist reaction. Appointed as an advisor to Jeremy Corbyn's Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell in 2016, he then worked on Starmer's Labour leadership election campaign before becoming a consultant for Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey. Mason organised a delegation of trade union leaders and Labour MPs to meet with members of Territorial Defence Brigade in Kyiv, sporting the insignia of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists established by Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera. His call for a "popular front" is directed to the petty-bourgeois "left" and identity politics groups to recognise that their interests lie with the City of London and NATO, calling for the West to "isolate, paralyse and disintegrate Russia as a state while rearming itself for both conventional and nuclear deterrence."

15. Starmer's pro-NATO witch-hunt is a devastating indictment of Corbyn and Labour's "left" rump. Of all Corbyn's retreats from his stated principles, the most significant was his accommodation to imperialist militarism. On the war in Syria, NATO's military build-up against Russia and the renewal of Britain's nuclear weapons programme, Corbyn gave way to his right-wing critics. It is thanks to Corbyn that Starmer, Johnson, Truss and now Sunak have been able to go so far in their criminal mission. His refusal to fight the Blairites has left behind a party more openly right-wing than it was under Tony Blair, united with the Tories as a de facto single "party of war". McDonnell replied to Starmer's attacks on Corbyn for criticising NATO by tweeting, "A commitment to NATO has been Labour policy democratically determined by party conference and accepted by every Labour leader for inclusion in

every Labour manifesto, including by Jeremy Corbyn, since NATO's inception."

16. The abject capitulation of the Corbynite MPs has blown apart the claim made by the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) and Britain's pseudo-left groups that a "left" faction of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy will lead an anti-war campaign. On February 18, the STWC published a statement demanding that NATO "call a halt to its eastern expansion" and stop pouring "oil on the fire" in Ukraine. Only 11 Labour MPs, plus the suspended Corbyn, signed. When threatened with expulsion from the parliamentary party, all 11 capitulated within an hour. Corbyn's close ally Diane Abbott declared, "I am a loyal supporter of Keir Starmer", saying of her signing the STWC letter, "That was before Russia invaded Ukraine... Everybody in the Labour Party supports a defensive alliance."

17. The political perspective of the STWC is not anti-imperialist. It is based on an appeal for British imperialism to project a foreign policy that breaks free of Washington and aligns the UK within a European political and military block. In 2003, during the run-up to the Iraq war, it held up the French and German governments and the United Nations as an alternative to the alliance of Blair and George Bush Jr. Having come to the head of a mass anti-war movement, the STWC set it on course for collapse. On Ukraine, the STWC's January 21 statement argued, "We believe there needs to be a new all-inclusive security architecture in Europe, not under the hegemony of any one state. We demand that the British government and the Labour Party distance themselves from the policies and priorities of the USA and develop an independent foreign policy." Amid an unprecedented social polarisation, most of the upper middle-class layers that formerly provided the social base for the STWC have reconciled themselves to a social order that provides them with a comfortable lifestyle and recognised the merits of imperialist wars for regime change to preserve the world capitalist order in the name of defending "democracy" against "Russian imperialism."

18. Germany, France and all of Europe's imperialist powers are fully complicit in the US-led war drive. In its statement, "Oppose the US-NATO drive to war with Russia in Ukraine!" the International Committee of the Fourth International explained:

The European bourgeoisie, having barely survived the catastrophe of the two world wars, are inclined to greater caution. However, they go along with Washington's war drive, despite the fact that war over Ukraine could be catastrophic to their own interests, reliant as they are on Russia for natural gas and other resources. They face massive internal crises that propel them along the same disastrous path. Moreover, they know that a direct challenge to the American agenda would bring about devastating retribution... The European bourgeoisie also fear that resisting the United States will result in exclusion from the spoils to be secured in the potential reorganization of Russia. Duly disciplined, they join in the drive to war.

19. Britain's largest pseudo-left tendencies, the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party, provide no genuine opposition to the war drive of the British ruling class. The Socialist Party barely writes on the war and puts forward no opposition to it based on the working class. Its sole reference to workers is to urge those in Ukraine to take charge of waging war against Russia and for "socialists" to "aid" them in this effort. Above all the SP's role is to disarm the working class as to the dangers posed, with Tony Saunis of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), stating that "The depth of this crisis has led to a fear that 'World War Three' and a nuclear holocaust could be unleashed." He reassures that "it is not in the interests of western imperialism or Putin to allow this conflict

to develop into an all-out war between Nato forces and Russia and the threat of a nuclear exchange."The SWP formally opposes NATO expansion, but defines Russia as an imperialist aggressor state, with its ideological leader Alex Callinicos declaring that "the idea put around by some on the left that behind the Ukraine crisis lies a drive by American neoconservatives for war with Russia is the purest nonsense." The SWP's parent International Socialist Tendency issued a statement drawing an equals-sign between US and European imperialism and Russia and China, describing Russia as "a weaker but still vicious imperialist power," with Ukraine "merely a pawn" for "both sides."

20. In its 2016 statement, "Socialism and the Fight Against War", the ICFI designated Russia and China as capitalist states that must be overthrown by the working class but rejected their designation by the pseudo-left as 'imperialist'. Noting that "both states are the product of Stalinism's betrayal of the socialist revolutions of the 20th century and its ultimate restoration of capitalism," the statement explained that adding the word "imperialist" to descriptions of China and Russia "serves very definite functions. First, it relativizes, and therefore diminishes, the central and decisive global counterrevolutionary role of American, European and Japanese imperialism. This facilitates the pseudo-left's active collaboration with the United States in regime-change operations such as in Syria, where the Assad regime has been backed by Russia. Second, and even more significantly, the designation of China and Russia as imperialist—and thus, by implication, as colonial powers suppressing ethnic, national, linguistic and religious minorities—sanctions the pseudo-left's support for imperialist-backed 'national liberation' uprisings and 'colour revolutions' within the boundaries of the existing states." Today the characterization of Russia and China as "imperialist" serves one overarching purpose: To justify and legitimize a policy of "decolonizing" Russia and China, that is, breaking these countries up into a series of puppet regimes with their vast oil, gas and mineral resources controlled by the US and NATO imperialist powers.

21. The social basis for opposition to war is the international working class. In its initial statement opposing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, published on February 24, 2022, the International Committee of the Fourth International wrote:

The danger of a catastrophe can only be averted by the action of the working class, within the US and throughout the world, on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program.

A fundamental principle of this program is the rejection of the defense of the "national state", a historically obsolete political structure, the existence of which is in contradiction to the dominance of world economy and the global interdependence of the productive forces.

Trotsky added, "Not to bind itself to the national state in time of war, to follow not the war map but the map of the class struggle, is possible only for that party that has already declared irreconcilable war on the national state in time of peace." To follow "the map of the class struggle" means to root opposition to imperialism in the fight to unify the international working class in opposition to exploitation, inequality and the capitalist system.

22. At its most basic level, imperialist war arises out of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system—between a global economy and the division of the world into rival nation-states, in which private ownership of the means of production is rooted. These same contradictions, however, produce the objective basis for world socialist revolution. Already, the consequences of the war are enormously intensifying social conflicts around the world. The impact of soaring inflation is driving class struggle,

including the eruption of strikes and protests among autoworkers, airline workers, health care workers, educators, service workers and other sections of the working class.

23. The SEP demands an immediate end to the US-NATO war against Russia. This war is being waged as a conspiracy against the population of the UK and the entire world. It has been imposed without any discussion of its causes and consequences. All the resources used to finance the military machine will be paid for through brutal austerity and attacks on the working class. The SEP condemns the international propaganda campaign against Russian culture that is spearheaded by the petty bourgeois advocates of war, the government and the state. This important component of the drive to war has involved discriminatory measures taken against Russian musicians, film directors, athletes, other individuals, as well as against the Russian language, literature, music, film, and culture more broadly. Throughout the world, the campaign confuses and pollutes political consciousness, intimidates opposition to the war, and serves to counter the objectively driven striving of the working class for international unity.

24. An end to war is not possible except through the political mobilization of the working class in opposition to the entire ruling class and its two parties, Tory and Labour. The development of an anti-war movement in the UK must be connected to the fight to unite workers in every country, including in Russia and Ukraine, against war and imperialism. The SEP resolves to build a powerful anti-imperialist movement in the UK as part of an international movement of the working class against war. We will do so in intimate collaboration with our international co-thinkers, especially in mobilising the European working class against the resurgence of imperialist militarism led by the UK, Germany and France.

25. The SEP will work together with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality to build the anti-war movement among working class youth and students. The central question is the mobilization of the international working class, based on a socialist perspective. But this only highlights the need to build a mass, international and socialist movement of youth and students—encompassing the generation of workers who are being denied a future. The building of an anti-war movement among students is vital because the defence of imperialism and the justification of imperialist war finds its most developed and reactionary expression in the ideologies promoted in the universities, in the form of the many brands of pseudo-leftism. Our central aim will be to orient students to the struggle for socialism in the working class.

26. While there is enormous opposition to war among British workers, this opposition lacks a programme, perspective and leadership. The task of the Socialist Equality Party is to develop within the working class and its vanguard an understanding of the inextricable connection between war abroad and exploitation and repression at home, and in this process build a revolutionary leadership in the working class that has as its aim the conquering of state power and the socialist reorganization of economic life, as a component part of the world socialist revolution.



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