

UK Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer visits Kiev to pledge loyalty to NATO's war

Thomas Scripps
17 February 2023

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer visited Kiev Thursday to reaffirm the party's "unwavering support" for NATO's war in Ukraine.

Speaking to journalists before meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Starmer said, "Should there be an election next year and a change of government, the position on Ukraine will remain the same..."

"Throughout the conflict, the Labour Party has stood united with the government in the United Kingdom to show our support for Ukraine."

After meeting with Zelensky he reiterated, "I was able to tell him that should there be a change of government when we have a general election here, the support for Ukraine will remain the same."

Starmer continued, "I stressed that the Labour Party supports and would maintain the defence, training, and technological support the current UK government is providing."

"I've said throughout this conflict there will be no difference between the political parties on this, so we will continue to work with the government to see what further support we can provide."

Starmer declared his full support for NATO's primary war aim—using the Ukrainian working class as cannon fodder to force the collapse of the Russian state and removing an obstacle to the imperialist domination of Eurasia. With standard rank hypocrisy, he argued, "There has to be justice in the Hague and there has to be proper reparation in the rebuilding of Ukraine."

Starmer is violently opposed to the same demand being made of former Labour leader Tony Blair for the sociocidal war of aggression against Iraq.

He immediately made good on his promises by travelling on to this year's Munich Security Conference to meet with the imperialist architects of

the NATO war effort.

The Labour leader's trip follows previous visits to the Polish border and Estonia, which he used to stress as early as possible in the war that the party would be in lockstep with the Conservative government and other NATO powers throughout.

During his trip to Estonia, two weeks after the conflict began, Starmer visited the Tapa military base hosting British troops under NATO command. Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey tweeted ahead of time, "The Labour leader and I fly out tonight to Tallinn to reassure Estonia of the united UK determination to defend their security and to thank our British forces deployed there".

Speaking to the soldiers against a backdrop of tanks draped in union flags, Starmer declared, "There is no time for party politics."

Labour and the Tories' de facto government of wartime unity has also seen them form a united front against the working class, whose wages and social conditions must be looted to pay for the war drive.

Starmer has refused to back any section of workers' pay demands and ordered his shadow cabinet not to attend picket lines. He has denounced "magic money tree" economics. And he has participated in the slandering of anti-war protestors as Putin's stooges, adding to the McCarthyite atmosphere in which the Tories are pushing through extraordinary repressive laws.

His statements in Kiev confirm that there will be no change on either the war or the home front if current polls putting Labour 20 percent ahead hold up and place them in power.

Writing in *Foreign Policy* magazine Friday, to coincide with Starmer's Munich Security Conference appearance, Healey and Shadow Foreign Secretary

David Lammy promised that “A Labour-Led Britain Will Stand With the EU and NATO to Defend Ukraine,” and spelled out what this means for the working class.

They say, “The UK will be facing an aggressive and threatening Russia for the foreseeable future, as Ukraine has since 2014. This long struggle ahead is why Labour will put the defense of Europe first—and our highest priority will be security in Europe, the North Atlantic, and the Arctic...

“The next Labour government will ensure Britain is NATO’s leading European nation. We would apply a ‘NATO test’ to major defense projects within our first 100 days to ensure we are on track to fulfill our obligations to the alliance in full and review any capability gaps. There will also be no change under Labour in U.K. leadership within the Joint Expeditionary Force.”

These pledges are made amid demands in the Tory Party for an increase in the military budget of £8-11 billion in the next two years, and for a total of £158 billion in extra funds by 2030 to raise spending on the armed forces to 3 percent of GDP a year. They are a promise that all other government spending—in the context of crippling funding crises in health, education and every other public service—and workers’ wages will be sacrificed on the altar of war with Russia.

Starmer’s visit to Kiev comes at a time when this shared Tory-Labour agenda is being challenged by a determined movement of the working class—part of a continent-wide struggle—to defend its living standards and essential social services. Massive new mandates have been delivered by health, transport and education workers for renewed strike action, likely to centre on the government’s March 15 budget day—one week after the publication of its Integrated Review of military policy.

The Labour leader has made his pilgrimage to Kiev and Munich to make clear to the ruling class that his party will do whatever is necessary to crush this movement. The day before, he barred former leader Jeremy Corbyn from ever standing again as a Labour MP—provoking not a whisper of opposition from the party’s moribund “left”, including Corbyn himself.

Starmer’s actions expose attempts by the trade union bureaucracy to encourage support for Labour as an alternative to the Tories. Rail, Maritime and Transport

(RMT) union leader Mick Lynch, widely viewed as the head of the UK’s strike wave, has said he wants Starmer to be prime minister and that workers’ must “push him and persuade him” to stand with them. This was after the *Telegraph* attacked his own members as Russian President Vladimir Putin’s “useful idiots” for striking during the war, using terms earlier employed by Starmer.

The truth, as all the union leaders know, is that a Labour government would carry out the same attacks on the working class as the Tories. Their hope is that this would be done in alliance with the union bureaucracy—in a corporatist setup with big business and government—rather than by unilateral government decree as with the Tories.

Workers cannot afford to wait and see this proven in practice. The war in Ukraine is escalating rapidly towards a Third World War, at the same time as the international working class is being plunged into deep social crisis.

In a joint statement, the European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International wrote of the growing strike wave, “Working people, who create the wealth of today’s globally integrated mass society, have the right to decide how this wealth will be used, and must smash the diktat of the financial aristocracy over the economy so as to meet essential social needs and halt the ever-expanding war.”

The statement continued, “The enormous political tasks facing the movement of the working class place on the order of the day building of the ICFI as its international political leadership.”

Starmer’s alliance with the Tories on the most fundamental political question of the war confirms this analysis. To end war and austerity, a working-class party must be built in total opposition to Labour and its defenders—the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact