

The fight against British imperialism and world war must be based on the working class

Thomas Scripps
7 May 2023

This is the report delivered by Tom Scripps, the assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

Revolutionary greetings from the Socialist Equality Party and the IYSSE in the UK this May Day.

No country has more enthusiastically supported the US-led NATO war against Russia than Britain. The UK has sent billions of pounds of advanced weaponry to Ukraine, including Challenger tanks, and trained thousands of Ukrainian soldiers.

The recently leaked Pentagon documents show that the UK has by far the largest NATO contingent of special forces operating in Ukraine, which was never declared publicly by the government.

Britain's frenzied involvement in the war, its bloodlust, is driven by the deep political crisis confronting the world's oldest capitalist ruling class.

British imperialism, closely tied to American imperialism for decades, is trying to offset the decline in its global economic and political standing. This decline has been drastically accelerated since the 2016 Brexit vote to leave the European Union, and even further by the inflationary spiral stemming from the pandemic and the war.

The increasingly desperate economic situation in Britain is pushing the ruling class to ramp up its brutal exploitation of the working class through savage wage cuts and speed-ups, and to slash spending on all social services. Wealth taken from workers is being funnelled into corporate profits, dividends and executive salaries, as well as to fund increased military spending.

Politicians and the press have called for the "end of the post-World War II peace dividend," insisting that public services already devastated by austerity must be sacrificed on the altar of war.

Cuts and wage suppression are inevitably coupled with repressive legislation restricting the right to strike, protest and speak freely. The UK continues to play the role of world imperialism's jailer, imprisoning the anti-war journalist and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in its maximum-security Belmarsh prison, pending extradition to the United States.

The British ruling class is deepening its offensive against the working class because they are highly conscious that this social force can and increasingly must oppose their wars abroad.

The ruling class hoped that it could use the war against Russia as a means of suppressing class conflict, insisting on national unity against a common enemy. But despite an unending barrage of propaganda, faithfully conveyed by the media, this has failed. The NATO-Russia war has coincided with an upsurge of the class struggle unprecedented for decades in the UK.

Over a million workers have taken strike action since last summer in a wave of industrial disputes affecting the rail, delivery, telecommunications, local government, education, and healthcare sectors. Wildcat actions have been taken against corporate giant Amazon and at offshore oil rigs and refineries across the country.

The movement would be bigger still without the trade union leaders' active efforts to isolate and suppress every outbreak of the class struggle.

The Socialist Equality Party has intervened in the wave of workers' struggles across the UK to argue that opposition to the war on living standards is inextricably connected to the fight against imperialist war on Russia. Both require an international socialist perspective for a joint offensive of workers all over the world against the major corporations and governments.

We advance this perspective against those who claim

that opposition to war can be based on the labour and trade union bureaucracies and support for any capitalist government.

In the UK 20 years ago, the Stop the War Coalition led a millions-strong mass movement against the invasion of Iraq into the dead end of supporting the Labour and trade union “lefts.” At the same time, they advocated support for French and German imperialism as a supposedly more peaceful counterweight to Washington.

Today, France, Germany and all the European powers, despite their deep-running tensions with US imperialism, are all fully involved in the war with Russia.

The Labour Party “left” rump has universally abandoned anti-war posturing, abiding by Sir Keir Starmer’s insistence that Labour is now “the party of NATO.” Former shadow chancellor under Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, even leads a faction openly in support of war.

Corbyn, the former chair of the Stop the War Coalition, now barely speaks on war, even after his expulsion from the Parliamentary Labour Party. Barred from standing again as a Labour MP, his craven loyalty to the right-wing Labour Party is as strong as it was during his time as leader.

The trade union bureaucracy overwhelmingly supports the UK’s participation in the war in Ukraine. Last year, the Trades Union Congress passed a resolution demanding “immediate increases in defence spending.” It plays the vital role in managing the home front by suppressing the class struggle, doing everything in their power to prevent a general strike that would topple the crisis-ridden government.

The Socialist Equality Party counters the bureaucracy’s sabotage and betrayals of the class struggle by fighting to establish independent workers organisations to transfer power to the rank-and-file.

Our party has also challenged the opposition to NATO put forward by George Galloway and the NO2NATO campaign, which calls for an alliance with right-wing and far-right forces on the grounds of a supposedly common anti-war position, and orients to the “rising” capitalist powers, above all China, which it claims will clip US imperialism’s wings and inaugurate a peaceful “multi-polar world.”

Such a programme would mean disaster for the

working class. US plans for a war with China are already well-advanced, even as it fights Russia. The only answer the Russian and Chinese regimes have is a combination of nationalist militarism and political manoeuvring in a doomed attempt to reach an accommodation with the imperialist aggressors.

With our sister parties in the Fourth International, the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are holding public meetings on the war in Ukraine to establish the necessary socialist principles and historical understanding which must animate a genuine anti-war movement based on the international working class.

We are educating a new revolutionary cadre in the traditions of Trotskyism as the only foundation on which the international socialist movement can be rebuilt.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)