

UK students: Stop the war in Ukraine! Build a movement in the working class! Fight for socialism!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (UK)
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An abridged version of this statement is being distributed at campuses across the UK during the first weeks of the university term.

Hundreds of thousands of students are beginning term at UK universities in the last weeks of September, following a return to collapsing schools by millions of children. The future for young people is dominated by a series of crises, including: the escalation of the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, another surge of COVID-19 infections, the deadly consequences of climate change, and the rise of the far-right across Europe and attacks on democratic rights.

All are expressions of an underlying crisis of the capitalist system. Youth are confronted with the basic fact that, if they are to have a future, they must fight for it. This necessarily means a fight for socialism.

Stop the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine, now halfway through its second year, has already claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The Ukrainian “counteroffensive,” directed by the NATO powers, has turned into a bloodbath.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has opposed the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, but we have done so from the socialist left, not the imperialist right. The claims that this war was “unprovoked”, and that the Conservative government is sending billions of pounds worth of weapons to Ukraine to defend “democracy” and the Ukrainian people, are lies.

The historical origins of this fratricidal war lie in the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, which restored capitalism, gave rise to the oligarchic regimes in Ukraine and Russia, and opened up a 30-year period of unending wars led by US imperialism, with the full support of its British and European partners. Since 1991, NATO has aggressively expanded to Russia’s borders. In 2014, the US and European Union (EU) backed a far-right coup in Kiev that brought to power a pro-NATO government which spent the next seven years preparing for war against Russia.

The aim of the imperialist powers in this war is the carve-up of the entire region, whose vast resources they need to prepare for an even larger conflict with China. This is why generations of Ukrainians are being sent into the type of mass slaughter not seen in Europe since the end of World War II. From the standpoint of imperialism, their lives are disposable.

The war in Ukraine marks a new stage in the lurch by the imperialist powers towards a new world war and threatens a nuclear catastrophe.

The IYSSE opposes the reckless escalations and provocations of British

imperialism, as well as the reactionary nationalism and chauvinism of the oligarchic Putin regime. Along with our comrades in Europe, the US, Russia, Ukraine and throughout the world, we are fighting to end this war by building an anti-war movement of youth and workers, based on the unification of the working class in Russia, Ukraine and internationally.

- No to nationalism and militarism! For the unity of the Russian, Ukrainian and European working class!
- Young people must fight to stop the war in Ukraine!

War abroad means war at home

The war in Ukraine signifies a frontal assault on the social and cultural rights of the working class after three decades of relentless attacks on living standards.

Between the proclamation of the “war on terror” in 2001 and the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Britain spent over £800 billion on the military. Sunak has pledged an extra £5 billion over the next two years, taking the military budget to £51.7 billion for 2024-25. The opposition Labour Party, for its part, has repeatedly attacked the government for not spending *more* on the military.

This money is being plundered from the working class, intensifying the decades-long looting operation of the super-rich. Commentators are speaking of the end of the “peace dividend”, meaning health and education budgets are on the chopping block.

Education spending is already eight percent lower in real terms than in 2010, and teachers’ wages 17 percent lower. They routinely cover a lack of equipment and breakfast for hungry children from their own pockets. There are more than 2,300 unfilled teaching posts and 3,300 posts filled by supply teachers.

One third of universities had budget deficits even before the pandemic, and the Office for Students promised it “will not bail out providers in financial difficulty.” Academic workers have lost jobs and suffered real terms pay cuts, as whole departments and courses in the arts, humanities and social sciences were closed in a massive attack on education and culture.

Already suffering a cost-of-living crisis, with incomes and maintenance loans falling well behind inflation, students are being robbed blind through this year’s new loans system. A lower repayment threshold and extension of the period of repayments from 30 years to 40 means that lower-earning graduates will pay back much more over their lives, but under the new system the highest-earning graduates will pay even less than before.

Universities have played a central role in the propaganda offensive over the war in Ukraine. “Experts” from the University of Cambridge, University College London, Kings College London and other leading institutions have been deployed to promote the lie of a “free, democratic Ukraine” and the need for the British working class to “make everyday sacrifices” to achieve NATO’s war aims.

- No money for war! Instead, free access to high-quality education and culture for all!
- No to the militarisation of schools and universities!

For a global effort to end the pandemic

The UK and large parts of the world are now in the midst of a new surge in COVID-19 cases, refuting the lies by capitalist politicians and the media that the pandemic is over.

Worldwide, excess death estimates indicate that 26 million people have died from a disease whose spread could have been stopped in early 2020 had world governments launched a globally coordinated programme of elimination. Thousands continue to die each day, and hundreds of millions are suffering from Long Covid.

With all mitigation measures dropped, workers and youth are woefully unprepared for the spread of the virus, which continues to evolve into new and dangerous variants. The ONS Coronavirus Infection Survey was recklessly ended this year, making it hard to monitor the spread of COVID-19. However, official figures showed hundreds of deaths due to COVID-19 every week, making a total of 7,935 in the first half of 2023. The independent ZOE Health Study showed that infections doubled in the past month, and estimated that 1.15 million people are currently infected.

The fact that an entire generation of young people is being subjected to repeated mass infection with a virus that threatens their immediate and long-term health is a historic crime.

Similarly, no serious measures are undertaken to halt the catastrophic development of global warming. Wildfires and flooding have devastated large parts of Europe, as well as a deadly heatwave, but Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has defended granting 100 new licences for North Sea oil and gas. In all of its policies, the guiding principle of capitalism is: profits before lives.

What has been a public health disaster for the working class has been a financial bonanza for the rich. According to the 2023 Oxfam report, “Survival of the Richest,” since 2020, the richest 1 percent have captured almost two-thirds of all new wealth, nearly twice as much money as the bottom 99 percent of the world’s population. Billionaire fortunes are increasing by \$2.7 billion a day.

- Public health above private profits!
- For the mass allocation of resources to fund Covid-19 treatment and prevention globally!

The rise of the far-right and defence of democratic rights

Democratic rights are under attack across Europe and the United States, as far-right forces gain access to state power. In the UK, the strike wave of the past year has resulted in the government pushing through new laws imposing anti-democratic restrictions on the rights to strike and protest, and a fascist campaign against migrants.

On the continent, fascist parties like Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s Brothers of Italy have been systematically strengthened. In

Germany the far-right Alternative for Germany, despite hostility in the population, has been appointed to important parliamentary committees and state government positions. The conservative New Democracy party won a landslide victory in Greece in June’s election, and the far-right made gains. Far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen won 41.5 percent of the vote in the final round of the French presidential election.

In the US, two-and-a-half years after the fascist coup attempt on January 6, 2021, the Republican Party is being transformed into an openly fascist party. Donald Trump is using the election campaign to develop an extra-parliamentary fascist movement, but there is bipartisan support for arming the fascists of the Azov Battalion in Ukraine, where leading figures in the state are open admirers of Holocaust perpetrator Stepan Bandera.

Universities have been integrated into this shift to the right by the political establishment. In Germany, when the IYSSE exposed trivialisation of the Holocaust by right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski, who said “Hitler was not vicious,” the media and political establishment responded with a campaign against the IYSSE.

The growth of the far-right is not due to any mass support for fascist policies in the population, but is the result of support from within the state, and the betrayals of “left” capitalist parties. The policies of the far-right have been implemented by governments of the right and “left,” in the UK and EU, above all in the policy of “Fortress Europe” and brutal attacks on migrants.

Governing parties of the pseudo-left, like Spain’s Podemos and, in 2015-19, Greece’s Syriza, have participated fully in austerity budgets and violent, anti-democratic crackdowns on workers and migrants. These forces, based on a privileged layer of the upper-middle class, are less afraid of fascism than they are of an independent movement of the working class against capitalism.

- Fight against fascism!
- Defend democratic rights!

The class struggle, the trade union bureaucracy and the Labour Party

Capitalism threatens the future of mankind and the planet itself, but there is a way forward. The IYSSE is fighting for the future by turning to the leading and decisive revolutionary force in the world—the international working class.

While the ruling class is increasingly turning toward war, austerity, fascism and dictatorship, the international working class is on the move against it. Major struggles of the working class have emerged across every continent, and the UK has seen the largest strike wave since the 1980s, with more than four million working days lost to strikes last year.

After the class struggle was suppressed for decades, workers in practically every sector responded to the cost-of-living crisis by launching a wave of action to reverse the decline in their living standards, posing an objectively revolutionary challenge to the Tory government. But vast majority of these strikes were ended with below-inflation pay deals, and the destruction of working conditions, thanks to the role of the trade union bureaucracy.

The unions have presided over decades of stagnating and now falling wages and worsening conditions, securing privileged positions for their leading representatives. They serve as a corporatist police force, imposing the profit dictates of management and blocking the development of a unified counteroffensive by the working class.

The IYSSE, alongside the Socialist Equality Party, has fought to expose and overcome these betrayals through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees. Workers are drawing lessons from their experiences, expressed above all by the growth of the Postal Workers’ Rank-and-File

Committee which is fighting against the Communication Workers Union's betrayal of a year-long dispute and conspiracy with Royal Mail to enforce Amazon-style working conditions.

This is tied up with a political struggle against the Labour Party, a party just as right-wing, pro-business and pro-war as the Tories, but backed to the hilt by the trade unions. Labour's shadow cabinet have pledged attacks on the National Health Service, ruled out tax increases for the rich or improvements in social spending, and offered to "bring companies closer to decision-making processes."

Any major struggle by the working class will necessarily take the form of a rank-and-file rebellion against the union bureaucracy and be fiercely opposed by the Labour and Tory parties alike. Young people should join the IYSSE to fight for a new socialist leadership, the Socialist Equality Party.

- Turn to the working class! Break with the Labour Party!
- Fight for socialism!

Trotskyism, the Marxism of the 21st century

Campuses are full of groups like the Socialist Workers' Party, Socialist Party and International Marxist Tendency, which fraudulently present themselves as Marxist. They are wedded to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and seek to subordinate the working class to these organisations by claiming they can be pressured to act in workers' interests and promoting illusions in their "left" representatives like Mick Lynch and Jeremy Corbyn.

While formally opposing NATO in the war in Ukraine, they sow confusion by labelling Russia an imperialist power and seek to block the development of a movement against the main props of the Tory government's war policy: the Labour Party and the unions.

Various forms of anti-Marxism—such as postmodernism and the theories of the Frankfurt School, which reject the scientific study of history and society—are heavily promoted as "left" and even "Marxist" at the universities. At their core is the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class in capitalist society.

But objective reality is shattering these theories and illusions. The international class struggle is surging, and the fundamental questions of the 20th century—imperialist war, fascism and socialist revolution—are again on the agenda. They can only be understood and fought out based on an understanding of the history of the 20th century and, in particular, the history of the Trotskyist movement.

The ruling class celebrations of the final triumph of capitalism were always based on a colossal falsehood: the equation of Stalinism with socialism. In reality, Stalinism represented not socialism and Marxism, but the violent nationalist reaction against the 1917 October Revolution. The Trotskyist movement emerged a century ago in October 1923, when Leon Trotsky formed the Left Opposition in a struggle against Stalinism to defend the internationalist programme of the October Revolution.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) is the youth wing of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which was founded 70 years ago, in November 1953. For a protracted historical period, the International Committee defended the programme of world socialist revolution and the political independence of the working class against Pabloism and other revisionist tendencies that sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement and rejected and undermined the struggle for the socialist revolution by the working class. Today, it is the sole representative of Marxism and socialism.

To fight against capitalism and for socialism today means to fight for Trotskyism. We urge all youth at schools and colleges: Contact us today!

- Take up the study of Trotskyism, the Marxism of the 21st century!
- Build the IYSSE!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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