

UK Conservative government lurches to far-right on agenda of war and austerity

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The annual conference of the Conservative Party, held in Manchester this week, marked a sharp shift to the right. Contributions from the leading figures in Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's cabinet centred on British imperialism's preparations for war against Russia and China and escalating attacks on the working class to be imposed through brutal attacks on democratic rights.

The Tories' main pitch is that they are better able to fight these battles on behalf of the financial oligarchy than Sir Keir Starmer's rightward careening Labour Party.

Defence Secretary Grant Shapps set the tone in a speech hailing the British government's criminal and escalatory role in Ukraine. This included N-LAW anti-tank missiles “wisely sent in advance”. Just “as N-LAWs struck fear into the hearts of invading Russian tank crews at the beginning, so our long-range cruise missiles do the same for Russian commanders today.” He boasted that Britain will have trained 50,000 Ukrainian recruits by the end of this year in a programme began in the aftermath of the 2014 fascist-led coup in Kiev that ousted Russian supporting president Viktor Yanukovich.

Shapps pointed to British military spending exceeding £50 billion for the first time in history, with the intention of exceeding 2.5 percent of GDP and as soon as possible to 3 percent. As well as a new class of Dreadnought submarines to carry the British nuclear arsenal under construction, Shapps announced £4 billion contracts towards developing “the most powerful attack submarine ever operated by the Royal Navy.” Part of the militarist AUKUS pact with Australia and the US, the submarines will be directed against “emerging navies anywhere in the world,” i.e., China.

The defense secretary announced the deployment of

RAF Typhoon aircraft to “NATO ally” Poland for use specifically against Russia and 400 troops to bolster the NATO operation in Kosovo.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly listed UK achievements post-Brexit including the anti-China AUKUS war agenda; the anti-China security, technological and critical materials Hiroshima Accord concluded with Japan; and the Atlantic Declaration with the US agreeing co-operation over critical minerals and nuclear material aimed at securing British supply chains.

Cleverly hailed Sunak as “the first world leader to supply Ukraine with NATO tanks. The first leader to train fast jet fighter pilots. The first leader to supply long range missiles to support those fighting on the frontlines.”

Suella Braverman, the Tory's sociopathic home secretary returned to the theme of her fascist speech made at the Atlantic Enterprise Institute in Washington last week and the necessity for a war against “unprecedented mass migration”. “The wind of change that carried my own parents across the globe in the 20th century was a mere gust compared to the hurricane that is coming,” she intoned. The “future could bring millions more migrants to these shores... unless the government they elect next year acts decisively to stop that happening.”

Braverman predictably made no mention of war, global social crisis and environmental collapse rooted in the capitalist mode of production forcing millions to leave their ruined homelands. She outlined the vicious and punitive actions already taken by the government, promising more brutal measures. Braverman complained “we struggle to remove foreign criminals. The problem was a “dense net of international rules that were designed for another era” in other words the

human rights legislation, including the universal right to asylum enacted by the United Nations after World War Two.

As striking doctors protested outside the conference, Braverman set out her intention to further clamp down on strikes and protests, attack homeless people and further strengthen the police. This was just days after she declared—following the announcement of the trial of a police officer for the murder of a young man, Chris Kaba, that we “depend on our brave firearms officers to protect us from the most dangerous and violent in society”, advocating a license to kill.

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt set out a direct assault on the working class. He signaled his intention to fund future tax reductions with measures, including productivity hikes, targeting public sector workers such as teachers, doctors and nurses. 66,000 additional civil servants taken on during the pandemic are to be removed in a recruitment freeze to save £1 billion to give to the rich.

Hunt set out a vicious agenda targeting the most impoverished and oppressed workers. There were 100,000 people leaving the labour market every year “for a life on benefits”, he declared. Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) minister “Mel Stride gets this 100 percent which is why he’s replacing the [already harsh] Work Capability Assessment.” Hunt promised to examine the sanctions regime under which benefit claimants are deprived of a portion of their weekly pittance for petty breaches of DWP rules.

Sunak's keynote speech was given bloodthirsty warm-ups by Leader of the House of Commons Penny Mordaunt and Veterans Minister, Johnny Mercer. Mordaunt, a former naval reserve officer and defence minister hailed the 1982 Falklands War, Winston Churchill and incited the audience to “Stand up and Fight” no less than 19 times. Mercer, a former captain in the British Army's Special Forces in Afghanistan, thanked Sunak for the Northern Ireland Legacy Act which ended the “hounding of these special people who stood against terror and violence in Northern Ireland on our behalf was appalling and a stain on our Nation.” The act put an end to numerous legal investigations into crimes carried out by British forces in during the decades long “dirty war” in Northern Ireland.

Sunak was then introduced in a saccharine and tone-deaf touch by his billionaire spouse, Akshata Murthy. He hailed the armed forces and intelligence services,

AUKUS, NATO and the UK's leading role in the war against Russia. “I say this to our allies, if we give President Zelensky the tools, the Ukrainians will finish the job.”

Days after the Canadian parliament applauded Ukrainian Waffen SS member, Yaroslav Hunka, Sunak solidarised himself with Hunka by repeating the fascist slogan, “Slava Ukraini!”

In a move columnist Allister Heath of the *Telegraph* approved as a landmark for the onset of “Austerity Mark II”, Sunak announced the cancellation of the HS2 high speed train project to the north of Birmingham in favour of a number of smaller infrastructure projects.

Response in ruling circles to the conference was mixed. The *Financial Times* commented, “After 13 years in power, the Conservatives seem desperate to find ways of clinging on for another five-year term. The new, radically pragmatic Sunak has yet to make a convincing case for what they would do with it.”

The Labour supporting *Guardian* commented, “many Tories were obsessed not with losing power but rather with the ferocious fight for the leadership that they think will follow an inevitable defeat.”

Such is the lurch to the right in the ruling party that Liz Truss, who was deposed as prime minister by Sunak for putting forward unfunded tax cuts, was feted at the conference with her newly established Growth Group embraced by 60 of the party's MPs.

Another political figure once derided in Tory central office who now bestrode the conference was Nigel Farage, the Donald Trump-supporting Brexiteer. Farage leads the Reform UK movement, the successor to his Brexit Party, which performs the role of helping push the Tories ever further to the right. Sunak refused to rule out Farage joining the Tories at a future date and standing as an MP, 30 years after he left the party. Asked by BBC's *Newsnight* if he would rejoin the party, Farage said, “Let's see what happens. They are going to lose the next election. There will then be the most enormous battle for ideas. If it became a real Conservative Party I might think about it”.



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