

Oppose sending British troops to Ukraine! Mobilise the working class against imperialist war!

Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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The admission by Defence Secretary Grant Shapps that Britain plans to deploy troops to Ukraine and confront Russian ships in the Black Sea confirms how close the world is to a direct war between nuclear powers. It must be answered by the development of a mass anti-war movement in the British and international working class.

Shapps' proposals threaten disaster. To openly place British military forces in Ukraine has only one possible aim: to provide a *casus belli* through the sacrifice of NATO military personnel.

The plans were revealed in an interview with the *Sunday Telegraph*, "Grant Shapps to send UK troops to Ukraine." This followed a visit to the Army's Salisbury Plain training ground Friday and a return trip to Ukraine one day earlier, involving discussions with President Volodymyr Zelensky and with General Sir Patrick Sanders, the UK's chief of the General Staff. Shapps said he was talking to military chiefs about increasing training and the production of military equipment by private companies in Ukraine itself:

"I think there's a point at which, I was talking today about eventually getting the training brought closer and actually into Ukraine as well... not just training, but also we're seeing BAE [the defence firm] for example move into manufacturing 'in country.'"

Political editor Edward Malnick added, "Mr. Shapps suggested that Britain was preparing to play a more active role helping the country to defend itself against attacks in the Black Sea, where Russia has been increasingly targeting cargo ships carrying grain."

A threat of all-out war with Russia

Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's former president, warned immediately that transferring British training courses to the territory of Ukraine would "turn your instructors into legal targets for our armed forces. Knowing full well that they will be mercilessly destroyed. And no longer as mercenaries, but precisely as British NATO specialists."

He noted comments by "the head of the German defence committee with an unpronounceable surname—Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann—who said yesterday that she believes that Ukraine has the right to use long-range missiles to attack targets on the territory of the Russian Federation... These idiots are actively pushing us towards a third world war."

The media was forced to acknowledge that Shapps was threatening to provoke war with Russia. The *Guardian* described the announcement as "highly escalatory... the Ministry of Defence has never acknowledged a permanent military presence in the country."

It noted that at the start of the war, "Tavoriv military base in western Ukraine, one of the main encampments used by British troops to train Ukrainian troops, was hit by a devastating missile strike that killed at least 61 people, including many international volunteers, only a few weeks after the invasion."

UK's role as provocateur in chief

Fear of provoking mass opposition to such a disastrous escalation of a war without any popular support led to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak denying *immediate* plans to deploy UK troops, telling the press that this was "something for the long term, not the here and now." Shapps also rowed back, claiming to *Conservative Home*, "The *Sunday Telegraph* erroneously wrote a headline which bore no connection to any of the transcript or anything that had been discussed."

The government is now relying on a servile media to bury Shapps' revelation of the UK's criminal plans: "they [*Telegraph*] fixed it immediately and no one else wrote it up," he told *Conservative Home*. But whatever denials are made, the defence secretary has confirmed that the UK, in intimate collaboration with the Biden administration, is preparing provocations that must lead to all-out war.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned on Monday, "This reality arises not just from the statements of Shapps or Sunak, but from the military logic of the situation. The US and NATO have staked their credibility on the outcome of the war in Ukraine... With Ukraine running out of human cannon fodder in the conflict with Russia, the only way to 'change the game' is for NATO forces, up to now providing the weapons, intelligence, logistics, and command structures for the Ukrainian army, to intervene directly in the conflict."

Britain's role throughout the Ukraine war has been that of provocateur-in-chief. Shapps boasted to the *Telegraph*, "Of every single partner in the world... We were helping first, we supplied kit first and encouraged others to do the same, we provide more training and intelligence."

In January 2023, the UK announced the provision of 14 Challenger II main battle tanks to Ukraine, breaking the logjam on other European countries delivering Leopard tanks and on the US sending Abrams. The UK was the first to provide Ukraine with long range Storm Shadow missiles capable of striking targets deep into Russian territory. As part of British-led Operation Interflex, more than 20,000 recruits from the armed forces of Ukraine have received training in the UK, including jet fighter pilots—preparing the way for the handing over of F-16s long demanded by Ukraine.

Threatening engagement with Russian vessels in the Black Sea also continues the UK's role as NATO's provocateur. In June 2021, days before NATO's Operation Sea Breeze naval and air exercise, British destroyer *HMS Defender* entered waters off Crimea claimed by Russia and was met with warning shots.

Preparing to fight a war with Russia is the declared policy of the UK. 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," directly comparing today's tasks to the Nazi war of annihilation waged against the Soviet Union.

In his keynote address to the Royal United Services Institute's (RUSI) annual "Land Warfare Conference" last summer, General Sir Patrick Sanders, named as having briefed Shapps, demanded a strengthened armed forces capable of waging offensive wars. Sanders insisted, "The British Army must be prepared to engage in warfare at its most violent."

The scale of the violence being considered is demonstrated most chillingly by September's revelation that the UK is on the verge of stationing US nuclear weapons on its soil at Royal Air Force Lakenheath for the first time in 15 years.

Trade unions and Labour Party cheerleaders for war

Pursuing and escalating the war against Russia depends above all on the services provided by the trade unions in suppressing the class struggle and the Labour Party in giving unswerving support to NATO aggression.

For the past three decades, a crisis-ridden British ruling class has seen support for US-led wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and now Ukraine as the primary political mechanism for projecting its global interests against its main European rivals, a policy reinforced by the disastrous impact of Brexit on Britain's world position. But the turn to war and the imposition of austerity, coming in the aftermath of the horrific impact of the COVID pandemic, have produced a cost-of-living crisis that has led to the explosive eruption of a strike wave that started last summer.

The Tories have responded by passing minimum service legislation, effectively banning strikes in essential services. But they have relied so far on the betrayals imposed by the trade union bureaucracy on rail, post, telecoms, education, local authority and health strikes involving millions of workers.

Amid a governmental crisis that saw the downfall of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the abortive premiership of Liz Truss and her forced replacement by Sunak, and with rail strikers denounced in the media as "Putin's stooges," the trade union bureaucracy protected British imperialism and its war drive from a threatened general strike.

In September, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) overwhelmingly backed the war in Ukraine, calling for "financial and practical aid from the UK." Last year's TUC Congress voted to "support affiliates' campaigns for immediate increases in defence spending in the UK," since "Congress ... recognises that defence manufacturing cuts have hindered the UK's ability to aid the Ukrainian people under brutal assault from Putin's regime."

The trade union leaders now insist that workers have no choice but to rely on the election of a Labour government next year. This is despite Sir Keir Starmer's declared hostility to strikes and his insistence that a Labour government will continue the austerity measures of the Tories and will do so more efficiently. They explicitly back Labour's full support for war in Ukraine by what Starmer boasts is "the party of NATO."

The elevation of Starmer and his cabal of right-wing warmongers to Labour's leadership is the political responsibility of Jeremy Corbyn. His refusal to mobilise the massive popular support he had among workers

and youth against imperialist militarism was the essential precondition for preparing a NATO war against Russia.

Within a week of Corbyn's election as Labour leader in September 2015, the *Sunday Times* published a statement by a "senior serving general" warning of "a mutiny" if he became prime minister, using "whatever means possible, fair or foul" against him. Corbyn's response was to roll over on every major issue, including war in Syria, NATO membership and the renewal of Britain's nuclear weapons programme.

Corbyn's replacement by Starmer in 2020 signalled the final collapse of the "Labour left" and any nominal anti-war tendency in its leadership. When Starmer last year threatened any MP backing the Stop the War Coalition or criticising NATO with disciplinary action, all 11 signatories to a statement criticising NATO and Russia and calling for a negotiated peace immediately withdrew their support. Most of what remains of the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) led by Corbyn's former shadow chancellor John McDonnell now openly backs the war.

For a mass, socialist anti-war movement!

The Socialist Equality Party demands an immediate end to the US-NATO war against Russia, waged as a conspiracy against the population of the UK and the entire world and imposed without any discussion of its causes and consequences.

Behind the backs of the working class, the NATO powers have instigated a conflict pushing towards direct military confrontation with Russia and China that threatens nuclear annihilation.

There is significant and growing opposition to war among British workers, especially the younger generation. But this opposition lacks a programme, perspective and leadership. A struggle must be taken up to mobilise the working class in a global anti-war movement against the NATO powers and the bankrupt nationalism of the Putin and Zelensky regimes that has brought the Russian and Ukrainian workers to the brink of disaster.

War abroad means class war at home. Shapps used his *Telegraph* interview to demand an increase on military spending to 3 percent of GDP. All the resources used to finance the military machine will be paid for through ever more brutal austerity and attacks on the working class and imposed by a turn towards dictatorial forms of rule. To oppose war therefore means to resolutely pursue the class struggle, animated by a socialist and anti-capitalist programme. As the Socialist Equality Party has explained:

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, healthcare workers, educators, service workers and other sections of the working class.

The SEP calls for the building of a new mass anti-war movement of the British, trans-European and international working class. An end to war is not possible except through the political mobilization of the working class

in opposition to the entire ruling class, its servants in the trade union bureaucracy and its two parties, Tory and Labour. It means building independent organs of class struggle, rank-and-file committees in every workplace.

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 and for socialism. It will be built in collaboration with our international co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



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