

No to Labour's war for the rich! Young people need jobs and a future

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (UK)
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The Starmer Labour government is using unemployment and cuts to welfare to drive young people into the armed forces as cannon fodder.

The Times newspaper's Political Editor Steven Swinford told its readers "Labour is urging young unemployed people on benefits to join the armed forces for 'good jobs paying good wages' amid a military recruitment crisis."

He cited Chancellor Rachel Reeves speaking to ITV: "In the changed world we face today, there are opportunities for good jobs in our armed forces... And of course, as this government increases the amount of money spent on defence, it's going to be more good jobs paying decent wages in that sector."

Liz Kendall, Labour's work and pensions secretary, told Parliament of the plan to encourage unemployed people to join the armed forces, "Before I was appointed to this position, as a constituency MP in opposition I discussed with my local jobcentre and the armed forces recruitment team precisely these issues... I will certainly have more conversations with colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to make sure we put this plan into action."

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) denounces these bloodthirsty schemes.

Labour weaponises poverty

Talk of "opportunities" to join the military is rubbish. Young people will be practically forced to enlist. Labour has slashed welfare payments by billions of pounds, plunging an additional 400,000 people into poverty overnight, with more cuts to come. It has targeted young people, entirely excluding under-22s from incapacity benefit.

The ruling class has always relied on social hardship to fuel military recruitment. A 2019 report from the Child Rights International Network found that, between 2013-18 in England, army recruitment of 16-17 year olds was "57

percent higher in the poorest fifth of constituencies than the richest fifth." Roughly 40 percent surveyed in 1998-2000 said they were joining as a last resort.

The poorer their background, the more likely recruits are to serve in the frontline infantry where casualties are highest.

Army recruitment drives specifically target the most deprived sections of the working class. A brief for the 2017 recruitment campaign identified the target audience as young people in families with an average income of £10,000 a year. Cities with high unemployment, often with a history of brutal deindustrialisation, are a priority.

Labour has nearly doubled the money to be spent on army recruitment campaigns this year to £17.2 million. It is spending £1.3 billion on a new Armed Forces Recruitment Service, run by private sector conglomerate Serco, set to launch in 2027.

The government's militarist agenda is inseparable from its attacks on social spending, freeing up resources for the armed forces. On the same day Reeves announced sweeping welfare cuts, she made another £2.2 billion available for the military—part of plans to lift defence spending to 2.7 percent of GDP by 2027, and far more beyond.

Using an increased defence budget to recruit the young people thrown into crisis by the loss of welfare support completes the circle. How long before refusing a job in the military becomes a basis for withdrawing unemployment payments?

Solving the cannon fodder problem

The Labour government is leading British imperialism into a new struggle for the redivision of the world and its sources of profit. Starmer is spearheading efforts to form a "coalition of the willing" against Russia involving NATO "boots on the ground, and planes in the air" in Ukraine, where hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians and Russians have

already lost their lives in three years of grinding conflict.

Throughout these years, British military chiefs have been speaking about the need prepare the army “to engage in warfare at its most violent.” Last week’s *Times* article reported, “British defence chiefs are considering bolstering reserve forces to prepare the military for a ‘bigger, longer war’. They want to increase the army’s resilience so it can ‘generate mass quickly and sustain it’, a senior government source said.”

But they have had huge problems signing up the necessary recruits. Recruitment targets have been missed every year since 2010. In the year to June 2024, more than 15,000 full-time personnel quit the armed forces, while just over 11,000 signed up.

Anti-war sentiment and opposition to British imperialism is rising among young people. A YouGov-Public First survey released in February, commissioned by the *Times*, found that only 11 percent said they would go to war for their country and 41 percent said there were no circumstances in which they would take up arms for the UK. Less than half described themselves as proud to be British.

The ruling class must therefore resort to coercion. Last year’s general election was used as an opportunity to flag proposals for conscription. The Tories pledged a mandatory national service policy for 18-year-olds. These plans ran into obstacles, including concern among senior military figures about whether they had the structures to cope. Labour’s policy is to get the ball rolling with a forced influx of working-class youth.

Fight for the future, not British capitalism!

Capitalism is showing its true, bloodstained face. Young people around the world are watching their future go up in the flames of war, economic and climate crisis. Their communities are gutted and the work on offer is poorly paid, dead-end and soul-destroying.

Labour hopes to use this misery to fuel its plans for an explosion of British militarism, in competition with all the other imperialist powers. As the Socialist Equality Party (UK) wrote in a recent statement:

Donald Trump’s presidency marks a watershed in world politics. His efforts to overturn the constitution and establish a dictatorship in the world’s leading imperialist country have upended all the old relations between the imperialist powers established following

the Second World War...

Europe’s governments have responded to this “America First” economic and military policy with an eruption of militarism and nationalism. The naked assertion of colonial domination by Trump—from Gaza to Yemen and Ukraine—is pushing all imperialist leaders to prepare their own campaign of military and neo-colonial aggression...

Starmer’s government will be aided in these efforts by the trade union bureaucracy. Unite and the GMB are fully signed up to the government’s plans for increased spending on the military, and hostile to protests against British imperialism. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union, put forward as a left-wing union, has quietly settled disputes among its members in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The National Education Union and University and College Union are silent on recruitment efforts among school pupils, college and university students.

Resisting Labour’s combined war and austerity drive and fighting for our future means building a new, socialist anti-war movement, based on new organisations of the working class: rank-and-file committees of class struggle independent of the rotten trade union apparatus. Marxism, the politics which put an end to the First World War through the Russian Revolution of 1917 and German Revolution of 1918-1919, must be taken up again by workers and young people.

This is the tradition represented by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality. Write in with your thoughts about Labour’s plans. Get in touch about joining the IYSSE today.



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