

Norwegian election campaign overshadowed by military build-up for war with Russia

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Voters go to the polls in Norway Monday to elect a new parliament under conditions in which the entire political establishment agrees on investing massive sums to wage war against Russia, and turning the country into a massive military staging ground.

Whether current Labour Party Prime minister Jonas Gahr Støre or Conservative leader Erna Solberg emerges as the next head of government following the election, nothing fundamental in the ruling class' policies of war and offloading the costs onto workers will change.

The Labour Party government announced last Sunday the purchase of five frigates from Britain at an estimated cost of 125 billion kroner (€10.7 billion), the largest single military purchase in the country's history. The new fleet is intended to serve as a key part of NATO's war mobilisation in the high north, where Norway shares a short land border and a long maritime border stretching into the Arctic Ocean with Russia.

A joint US-Norwegian flotilla entered the Barents Sea for military exercises last week, marking only the third time that NATO ships have operated there since the early 1990s. Surveillance aircraft were also scrambled from Norway and the UK to track three Russian nuclear-powered submarines reportedly operating off the northern Norwegian coast and portrayed as a potential threat to the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, as it operated in the North Sea.

Støre's government presented a new Arctic strategy, "Norway in the north," on 26 August. The document described Norway as facing the most serious security challenge since World War II, called for a "restrictive attitude" to Chinese activity in the Arctic, and stated, "Norway shall be a leader in the alliance on knowledge about Russian and Chinese activity in our immediate areas and will contribute actively to NATO processes with our expertise."

Labour has held power for the past four years, during which it has overseen a massive increase in military spending and unrestrained support for the far-right regime in

Kiev following the imperialist-provoked Russian invasion.

Labour ruled in a coalition with the rural-based Centre Party (SP) until February this year, when the SP withdrew amid growing popular anger over rocketing energy prices. The price increases were chiefly driven by the European imperialist powers' decision to cut Russian gas supplies as they escalated the war, which led to a significant increase in Norwegian energy exports throughout Europe.

As part of the European imperialists' drive to secure "energy independence," Norway's energy grid has been systematically integrated into Europe-wide networks over recent years. Historically a country that has produced significantly more energy than it requires, resulting in comparatively low prices, Norway was therefore faced with sharp price spikes.

The election will be decided depending on whether the parties of the left or right, also known as the "red" and "blue" blocks, win a majority. The red block is led by Labour, and includes the Socialist Left, whose origins lie in a fusion between a split-off from Labour in the early 1960s and a breakaway group from the Stalinist Communist Party of Norway in 1975, and the Red Party, which emerged out of the Maoist Workers' Communist Party during the 2000s.

The "blue block" is led by the Conservatives, although the far-right Progress Party has contended for the position of the largest party in the block.

The militarisation of the country is endorsed by every party in parliament, from the far-right Progress Party to the supposedly "left-wing" Socialist Left and Red Party. Last year, all parties in parliament united to agree on a massive expansion of financial resources to the Norwegian armed forces through 2036 that will see the military budget double. In March, all parties agreed to boost funding to arm Ukraine during 2025 by 50 billion kroner (about €4 billion). The Nansen Support Programme, established by the government in early 2023 with the unanimous approval of parliament, will therefore provide a total of 205 billion kroner (€17.5 billion) for the Ukrainian army by 2030.

That such substantial resources for a country with little

more than 5 million residents will come at the expense of spending on public services and other social programmes was underscored by finance minister and former NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg, who boasted in March that Norway's oil fund allowed Oslo to help fuel the ongoing slaughter in Ukraine.

"The funding will be used in its entirety in connection with international initiatives and procurements from the Ukrainian defence industry," asserted Stoltenberg. "The additional allocation is in line with the fiscal rule on the use of petroleum revenues."

Norway's oil fund, the largest sovereign wealth fund in the world, is worth some €1.7 trillion—four times Norway's GDP—and owns approximately 1.5 percent of all global stocks. Presented as a mechanism for the revenues generated by the country's large oil deposits to serve future generations, the fund has become a means to restrain public spending and allow the Norwegian bourgeoisie to play an outsized role relative to the country's small size on the world stage.

The "fiscal rule" referred to by Stoltenberg allows the government to spend no more than 3 percent of the fund's worth in any given year. Therefore, when Stoltenberg boasts that the funding of weapons of war for the imperialists' proxy forces in Ukraine is being carried out "in line with the fiscal rule on the use of petroleum revenues," what he is really saying is that the Labour government is cutting resources to social programmes to wage war.

While none of the parties in parliament has objected to the use of oil fund money to fuel the US-NATO war on Russia and the opening of a new "northern front" across the Nordic region, opposition parties have tried to score political points against the government by criticising the fund's investments in Israeli companies. Criticism came from the Conservatives, Socialist Left, and Red Party during August after Stoltenberg refused to answer questions addressed to him by a parliamentary control committee about the fund's investments in Israeli companies. The Red Party calls the extermination of the Palestinians in Gaza a genocide and supports a boycott of trade with Israel.

The Norwegian government was one of the first in Europe to formally recognise a Palestinian state. The oil fund has withdrawn its investments from 23 of the 61 Israeli companies in which it held stocks since June. In mid-August, Stoltenberg announced the exclusion of six firms linked to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and onslaught on Gaza, but once again ruled out divesting from all Israeli companies. Three days after Russia's US-provoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the government ordered the oil fund to divest from all Russian holdings.

The deployment of vast resources to fund militarism and war is accelerating a long-term trend of growing social inequality driven by reduced public spending and privatisation. Several studies have pointed to the growing gap between rich and poor. Public broadcaster NRK published research in early August revealing that in 96 of the 156 counties examined, social inequality grew between 2015 and 2023. Using the example of Tonsberg, a town with one of the sharpest divisions between rich and poor, the report noted that while approximately three out of four voters went to the polls at the last election in the wealthiest areas, areas where poverty was high saw barely half of the electorate vote.

The Socialist Left and Red Party have sought to capitalise on opposition to growing inequality with promises of higher taxes for the rich, better healthcare coverage, improved job security, and increased welfare benefits. But both parties serve in parliament to secure a majority for a potential Labour-led government—a party that has traditionally dominated Norwegian politics for decades and has presided over public spending cuts, anti-immigrant agitation and Norway's emergence as a frontline state in the war on Russia over the past quarter century. Between 2005 and 2013, the Socialist Left joined Stoltenberg's Labour Party government.

Moreover, both parties' solid support for the imperialist war on Russia in Ukraine underscore where their true allegiances lie. The Socialist Left reversed its longstanding call for Norway to withdraw from NATO in 2023 in response to the US-provoked Russian invasion of Ukraine.

While the Red Party still calls formally for Norway to leave the alliance, it backed the military spending plan to bring Norway's military budget up to 2 percent of GDP—directing 600 billion kroner away from public spending and towards weapons of war over the next 11 years—and supports a defence alliance with neighbouring Nordic countries, all of whom are NATO members.



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