

Venezuela and Ukraine highlight the bankruptcy of Britain's official anti-war movement

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America's neo-colonialist intervention in Venezuela and the agreement signed by the UK and France preparing for the widespread deployment of NATO forces in Ukraine place the necessity of building an anti-war movement squarely before the British and international working class.

No way forward is provided by the Stop the War Coalition, the Corbynite Your Party or the Greens, whose response underscores the fact that only a socialist programme provides the basis for a fight against imperialism and the danger of world war.

As ever, Jeremy Corbyn has been made the figurehead of the "opposition" put forward by Stop the War; his article in *Tribune* magazine, "Starmer's Passivity on Venezuela is Cowardice" is republished on the STWC website. It argues in his usual handwringing fashion against "Britain's 'special relationship' of unthinking submission to the White House's interests."

Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer's actions in supporting Trump are "blind", "absolutely staggering" and "utterly pathetic", an "abomination" and a "humiliation", huffs Corbyn. His moral outrage covers for a bankrupt perspective of persuading British imperialism to adopt a new course by distancing itself from the United States: "a consistent, ethical foreign policy based on international law, sovereignty and peace".

This is a fantasy. Starmer is undoubtedly prostrating himself before Trump, who is using the military in a reckless pursuit of US imperialism's predatory interests. But *both* policies are rooted in a common underlying crisis of capitalism—including spiralling national debts and social tensions—and a common effort to resolve it at the expense of their rivals through military means.

That is why Starmer has also signed a statement with other European powers defending Greenland against the US President. British capitalism has its own imperialist interests. These rely heavily on the use of NATO, and US military force within NATO, to further the war against Russia in Ukraine—a crumbling joint effort of the alliance which Trump's ambitions against NATO-member Greenland/Denmark threaten to

completely collapse.

By referring to "another Labour Prime Minister... doing his best to cement the UK's status as a vassal of the United States," Corbyn is following the line laid down by Stop the War since its inception. As the WSWs wrote previously: "not an anti-imperialist strategy, but rather one levelled only against the United States and appealing directly to a section of the ruling class which felt Britain was paying too high a price for too little gain from US-led wars."

On this basis, Corbyn and Stop the War pre-emptively limit a movement against the aggression in Venezuela to impotent appeals to the government to change course. The STWC demands "that the British government immediately stops all involvement with the illegal, provocative and more and more extreme actions of President Trump, and publicly condemns Trump's gangsterism."

Corbyn's Your Party, now formally founded, has only been able to rouse itself as far as organising a petition, which reads: "We call on you, Prime Minister, to 1) unequivocally oppose and condemn Trump's armed assault, 2) ensure the UK votes to condemn it at the UN Security Council, and 3) demand the safe return of Venezuela's head of state." It has garnered fewer than 20,000 signatures; less than half the party's membership.

The experience of the 2003 Iraq War under Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair is invoked by Corbyn purely to this end of persuading Starmer to see the light.

"Ignoring the warnings of ordinary people who could see the catastrophe ahead," Corbyn writes, "and bypassing any approval from the United Nations, the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq resulted in the deaths of more than a million Iraqis, and set off a spiral of hatred, conflict and misery that is still spinning today... How many more of these catastrophic failures do we need before we learn the lesson?"

Blair's government could just as well "see the catastrophe ahead"; it chose to bring that suffering down on the people of the Middle East as a price worth paying for a place at the table of the imperialist redivision of its resources and for geopolitical influence. As Blair said in 2001, following the 9/11 attacks in the US, "The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in

flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us.”

The lesson learned by Blair and the British ruling class is that doing so has no consequences, with all moves to investigate and hold Blair’s government accountable quashed.

Corbyn directly aided this process during his time as Labour leader from 2015-20. His amnesty for the Blairites and maintenance of Labour’s commitment to NATO and nuclear weapons allowed the now proudly proclaimed “party of NATO” to be handed over to Starmer unscathed, ready to lead the most right-wing, militarist British government since the Second World War.

Stop the War, having championed Corbyn’s leadership—he had been chair of the STWC, dropping the position upon becoming Labour leader—continued to advocate an alternative course for British imperialism. Founder Lindsey German, a leader of the pseudo-left Counterfire, complained at its 20th anniversary event in 2021 of governments refusing “to entertain other [foreign policy] opinions—such as those put by anti-war campaigners 20 years ago”.

This line saw the anti-war movement of millions against the invasion of Iraq, to which Stop the War came to the head, whittled away to almost nothing.

When the horrors of the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians and outrage at British governments’ complicity once again moved millions to take to the streets, Stop the War and Corbyn spent two years refusing to educate these forces in the wider imperialist war drive reflected in Gaza. Not a word was said from the platform at over 30 national rallies in London about the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine.

Corbyn’s silence on this critical issue has continued this week, even as Britain signed an agreement which raised the prospect of thousands of British troops being deployed to Ukraine, and participated in a US Navy operation seizing a Russian-flagged oil tanker. Both raise the dire prospect of a shooting war between London and Moscow, both nuclear-armed powers.

British and European military figures are telling the media, like Richard Shirreff, former deputy supreme commander of NATO in Europe: “This [the deployment in Ukraine] can’t be a lightly armed ‘blue beret’-type peacekeeping force... enforcing peace means being prepared to overmatch the Russians, and that means also being prepared to fight them if necessary.” They are complaining of “no sign the government penny had dropped that they need to up defence spending sooner than thought”.

But Corbyn is as tame as he was when serving generals threatened to mutiny against his prime ministership, and soldiers used a picture of his face for target practice.

As with the Gaza genocide, Stop the War extends the freedom given to Corbyn to play the anti-war leader to the trade union bureaucracy, cheering general secretaries for issuing pro-forma statements which commit them to nothing.

This week it republished a belly-crawling editorial from the Stalinist *Morning Star* which describes Trades Union Council leader Paul Nowak’s call “on the UK government to condemn this blatant violation of international law” as “an excellent lead,” adding that other trade union leaderships have “issued similar powerful condemnations”.

The article even suggests a rebellion in Starmer’s viciously right-wing, pro-war Labour Party, writing that “very few Labour MPs could be found in the Commons on Monday night prepared to give Starmer and Cooper their unequivocal backing,” clearly “unpersuaded by the assertion that the government prioritises international law[!]”.

Nothing more is offered either by Your Party’s Zarah Sultana or Green Party leader Zack Polanski, who repeat Corbyn’s criticisms of Starmer as a “vassal of Washington” or of Trump as an “unreliable ally”—in Sultana’s case with a sprinkling of anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Workers and young people must grapple with the challenge in front of them: the construction of an anti-war movement on entirely new, the only possible, principles of socialist internationalism.

Trump’s invasion of Venezuela and murder of a US citizen in Minneapolis this week shows there is no wall between wars waged on the working class abroad and at home. Starmer’s backing for the Venezuela aggression, the genocide in Gaza and the war in Ukraine, combined with his starving of anti-genocide political prisoners, proves the same. As the military violence grows, so too will the attacks on workers and so too their resistance.

It is on this process that building an anti-war movement depends, linking the resistance to the class war of the government at home with resistance to its imperialist aggression abroad. But this will have to be done in constant opposition to the semi-pacifist political paralysis preached by Corbyn and company, and the insistence that action be subordinated to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

Through this fight, new forms of working-class struggle—rank-and-file workplace and neighbourhood committees with global links—will take root and take ownership of the fight against war and to defend and advance democratic rights and social conditions. A fight which can only be completed in the struggle for socialism.



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