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زبانهای اروپایی

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11.03.2022

Johnson's plan for war with Russia means war on UK working class



Ukrainian President Zelenskyy addresses members of Parliament in the House of Commons Chamber via video link. (Credit: Parliament UK/Twitter)

On Sunday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson set out a “6-point plan” to “ensure Putin fails in his ambitions” in Ukraine. On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy directly addressed parliament, repeatedly invoking Britain’s war against Nazi Germany and recasting Winston Churchill’s famous “we will fight them on the beaches” as a promise to “fight in the forests, on the shores, in the streets”.

Johnson in turn promised to “press on with supplying our Ukrainian friends with the weapons they need to defend their homeland as they deserve, to press on with tightening

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the economic vice around Vladimir Putin”. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer declared that Zelensky “has shown his strength and we must show him, and the Ukrainian people, our commitment and support”.

The pat phrases of Johnson et al and the pocket Churchill impersonation by Zelensky are designed to blind the population to the devastating implications of a prolonged and escalating conflict with Russia.

Three of Johnson’s six points stand out: “Support Ukraine in its efforts to provide for its own self-defence”, “Maximise the economic pressure on Putin’s regime” and “Begin a rapid campaign to strengthen security and resilience across the Euro-Atlantic area”.

Put more directly, the UK, US and allied imperialist powers will fuel a prolonged proxy war in Ukraine and build up tremendous economic and military pressure against Russia, with the intention of destabilising the country and installing a puppet regime. Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary Dominic Raab let on the scale of the operation Sunday morning. “We’re talking about months if not years, and therefore we’ll have to show some strategic stamina because this is not going to be over in days.”

The longer the war goes on, moreover, the greater the danger of a military confrontation between the nuclear-armed NATO powers and Russia.

Former head of Joint Forces Command Sir Chris Deverell wrote on Tuesday, “The question is becoming: does NATO fight him [Putin] now or fight him later? He will likely respond with nuclear threats. But there is no fundamental reason why these are more useful to Putin than they are to NATO. Our logic has to be that his threats are meaningless. Whatever he can do to us, we can do to him.”

The *Times* published a column by leading correspondent Daniel Finkelstein yesterday, “We need to start talking about nuclear war.” He argues, “Millions of people might die in such an attack, but millions wouldn’t. What would they do? Where would they live? How would they eat? These are things we must plan for.”

What is not said by Johnson and Starmer is that the drive to war is already threatening the working class with economic and social catastrophe.

On Monday, former Tory MP and Foreign Office minister Sir Alan Duncan pulled back the curtain on the disaster being prepared. He told *Yahoo News* of the impact of sanctions on Russian oil and gas, “We, of course, want to disadvantage Russia as an essential tool of war. But we don’t want to disadvantage ourselves so that we fall into some kind of dystopian economic collapse. We are on the edge of that.”

Sanctions, corporate pull-outs and embargoes against Russia, combined with the disruption to supply chains caused by the conflict in Ukraine, are already driving up key commodity prices, especially oil, energy and food, supercharging inflation and further crippling household budgets.

Petrol and diesel prices, already at record highs, have increased nearly 10 percent just since the start of the year. Aggregate grocery prices rose at their fastest rate in eight years in February. This April, the UK’s energy price cap will be lifted to £1,971, a 54 percent increase; it is now expected to climb to £3,000 in October.

Nathan Piper, an oil and gas analyst at Investec, spelled out the implications to the BBC: “We are on the cusp of a prolonged period of high oil and gas prices, possibly lasting several years... You can’t just cut the second largest gas producer and third largest oil producer out of global supply and not expect it to have big impact on consumers.” There would be “extreme fuel poverty” for years to come.

The consequences for the working class will be devastating. According to the Resolution Foundation, CPI inflation could be pushed above 8 percent this spring, prompting a four percent fall in household income, or £1,000 a year.

The Centre for Economic and Business Research predicted even worse figures, with inflation reaching nearly 9 percent this spring. This would mean a 4.8 percent fall in personal incomes this year and another 1.4 percent in 2023, or more than £2,500 per person—the worst cut since records began in 1955.

These savage blows will fall on families already struggling to keep their heads above water after more than a decade of austerity, compounded by the pandemic. But the need to inflict yet more “pain” on the working class to sustain the anti-Russia war drive is asserted in column after column.

Jeremy Warner, assistant editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, worried at the end of last month if “Western electorates” were “even remotely prepared for the economic deprivations” resulting from “a war with Russia in all but name... Without wishing to trivialise today’s hardships, they are as nothing compared with what would come.”

An editorial last week in the *Financial Times* noted, “The west has shown unexpected resolve; it will need to show it can take economic pain as well.”

Rafael Behr appealed yesterday in the *Guardian* to the “willingness of citizens in free democracies to make sacrifices and withstand some economic pain to help their neighbours” in a “war of economic attrition”.

Collapsing incomes will be worsened by savage social spending cuts to pay for an orgy of imperialist militarism. Writing in the *Telegraph*, former Army officer Colonel Richard Kemp declared, “As in the 1930s, years of cutting military spending must be sharply overturned ... It is time to put our hands in our pockets to rapidly rebuild our forces back to the levels of the 1980s.”

Sunday Telegraph editor Allister Heath wrote, “Boris Johnson will need to bite the bullet: we must urgently increase [military] spending back to 3 percent of GDP, and conceivably to 3.5 percent”.

Explaining where the money will come from, Heath wrote, “Britain’s peace dividend has been spent more than once, primarily on pensions and the NHS... The post-Blairite era of social-democratic largesse must end: the state needs to refocus on its core function of defending lives, liberty and property. We require less redistribution, and enhanced resilience. This implies large spending cuts. The social care plan will need to be abandoned, the pensions triple-lock axed, the NHS reformed and numerous wasteful subsidies, pseudo-levelling-up policies and other programmes and handouts ended.”

This is the common agenda of the British ruling class. In his response to Johnson’s six-point plan, Starmer summarised Labour’s position as warmonger-in-chief in partnership with the Tories: “I don’t want to divide, other than to push the government further and faster on this.”

Johnson, Starmer, and the media hope to push this assault through with calls on the population to band together in a time of crisis. But “national unity” in war is as much of a myth as it is in a pandemic. What is being prepared is a social explosion. Warner himself draws a comparison between today and the period following the 1973 oil price shock: “Society seemed on the brink of collapse. Governments fell like ninepins before the inflationary tsunami.”

Such a dramatic escalation of working-class struggle will upend the war plans of the imperialist powers. A new anti-war movement must base itself on this process, guided by a socialist perspective not one of pacifist appeals, uniting workers around the world in defence of their lives and livelihoods against the ruling class plunderers and warmongers.

World Socialist 10.03.2022