

Billions for education not war! Support the Socialist Equality Party (UK) campaign for a unified struggle against capitalism and war!

Statement of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee (UK)
27 June 2024

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Attend our London election rally on June 30.**

All the major UK political parties have launched their election manifestos for education. They prove that educators and the communities they serve must face the fact that the devastating impact of decades long cuts to budgets will continue whoever enters Downing Street after July 4.

Despite feigning concern over the crisis within the school system, Labour has refused to commit any significant new funding. With the Tories facing a wipe-out, party leader Sir Keir Starmer has repeatedly declared that “There is no magic money tree” and no “spending your way out of a crisis.”

Centred on the escalation of the war against Russia in Ukraine, funding for pressing social needs such as education, health, and financial security will be subordinated to the demands for increased military spending.

Starmer, having repeatedly declared his willingness to use nuclear weapons in the “face of rising global threats and growing Russian aggression”, has insisted, “The changed Labour Party that I lead knows that our national security always comes first.”

One of the first election policies to be announced by Sunak was the introduction of National Service for young people aged between 18-24. He targeted the 750,000 18 to 24-year-olds “currently out of work” and “disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system” to become cannon fodder in a new imperialist carve up of the world and its resources.

Labour did not oppose the scheme in principle, with shadow pensions secretary Liz Kendall complaining only of “an unfunded commitment, a headline-grabbing gimmick, it is not a proper plan to deliver it.” With Starmer proclaiming Labour as the “party of NATO”, it will introduce National Service/conscription whenever this is demanded by the ruling class.

Labour's pledge to recruit just 6,500 teachers, during the

biggest recruitment crisis in education on record, will barely make a dent. It will not provide additional central government funding for this, proposing instead to levy VAT business rates on private schools to raise £1.5 billion. Staunch opposition from the most privileged layers will mean Starmer could swiftly scrap or modify the headline grabbing policy.

Labour has also committed to provide £315 million for breakfast clubs to be met from closing some tax loopholes, but without a plan to recruit any staff. It has made clear it will not remove testing, abolish the widely despised Ofsted schools inspectorate, or fund crumbling buildings after the RAAC concrete crisis demonstrated that hundreds could collapse.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IfS) concluded that “Labour had no commitments on school funding”. Christine Farquharson, IfS associate director, said of Labour's manifesto, “We, and schools, are left with no sense of what might happen to budgets.”

The IfS said of Labour's pledge to recruit 6,500 new teachers that it would boost the teacher workforce by just 3 percent, as 13,000 fewer secondary teachers than were required were recruited last year.

A recent poll by Teacher Tapp found 44 percent of heads anticipate running a deficit budget next academic year. School leaders and teachers are acutely conscious that chronic underfunding of education will continue, yet the education unions are still promoting the false notion that a victory for Labour in the general election will “redress” the catastrophe unfolding in schools.

With dozens of local authorities facing bankruptcy, a collapse in teacher recruitment, an unprecedented level of teacher resignations, a crisis in SEND (special educational needs and disabilities), collapsing school buildings, and a witch hunt against teachers opposing the Gaza genocide, proposing a right-wing Labour government as a means of overcoming the crisis in education is to treat teachers with

contempt.

During last year's strike wave, Labour denounced strikers and attacked teachers for "harming" children's education and insisted they should be back in schools.

But the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) gushed over the prospect of a Starmer victory, hailing "a number of positive policy proposals". It advised, "Labour will need to commit to making teaching an attractive proposition for graduates once again. That will need to include competitive levels of pay and a manageable workload so that the necessary number of teachers can be both recruited and retained".

The real reason for education unions rallying for a Labour victory is to further integrate themselves into the structures of government. The NAHT stated, "There are a number of policy ideas that will require close work with the profession if they are to succeed."

Patrick Roache, general secretary of NASUWT (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers) opposed calls for strike action at their annual conference in April, saying it was necessary to go on the stump for Starmer. "Political campaigning to secure a government prepared to fix the damage inflicted on the education service over the last 14 years must now be the priority", as "teachers need change from a new government that is committed to delivering a new deal for teachers and education".

The National Education Union (NEU) overturned its strike mandate at its conference held in April, calling on teachers to wait for the STRB's (teachers' pay review body) recommendations due in July. This was aimed at dragging out the process until the general election—called on May 22—with the aim of intensifying their collaboration with Labour in government.

The NEU's own manifesto cites the disastrous state of education and includes a lengthy wish list, but the most it can bring itself to call for is an increase in school funding of slightly above one percent, to what it was under the last year of the last Labour government. "In 2010 the UK spent above five percent of GDP on education, which is the average for OECD countries. Today it has fallen to just 3.9 percent. We are calling for the next Government to invest £12.2bn next year to start reversing the impact of Government cuts."

Starmer's government will be much further to the right than that of the hated Tony Blair (1997-2007). Blair expanded the Thatcherite nostrums of "private enterprise", with his introduction of the privately run/publicly funded Academy system, and widespread use of the Tories' private finance initiative.

After six years in office Blair backed the illegal war in Iraq, but his key election slogan in 1997 was "education, education, education". Funding for education actually

increased between 1997 and 2007 for core "per pupil" funding by 48 percent in real terms; 35,000 new teachers were recruited, along with a substantial increase in support workers, such as teaching assistants—up by 172,000.

Such is the crisis of capitalism today that Starmer's policy is "war, war, war".

Many teachers lost their lives at the height of the pandemic, forced to work in unsafe schools, with children sent into classrooms that were death traps. As the Tories were gripped by crisis, burning through four prime ministers in as many years, Labour forged a de facto coalition to prop them up, first under the nominally left Jeremy Corbyn, and then Starmer.

Starmer was the most intransigent in demanding that schools stay open— "No ifs, no buts." This callous indifference to life during the Covid pandemic will extend to sending young people to fight against their class brothers and sisters for home and country!

Teachers must prepare to take on Labour as it prepares to take office. This requires a break from the trade union bureaucracy whose function, in order to secure their privileged existence, is to block the development of a struggle in defence of educators' independent interests.

The Socialist Equality Party is standing Tom Scripps against Starmer in the Holborn and St Pancras constituency and Darren Paxton in Inverness, Skye and West Ross-Shire "to break the conspiracy of silence maintained by the capitalist media, the major parties, the trade unions and what passes for the "left" over the acute dangers facing the working class. We intend to build a socialist alternative."

We call on teachers to build the Socialist Equality Party and fight for a genuinely anti-war movement which unifies the working class and youth internationally.

Build the Educator's Rank-and File Committee!

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