

NEU**LEFT**

Conference Bulletin

Bournemouth 2022

Stop the War in Ukraine Why we say no NATO expansion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war that has followed, present a dangerous moment in world history – one that will have repercussions for decades to come.

The starting point for the NEU Left is straightforward:

- We are unequivocally opposed to the invasion
- We support calls for an immediate ceasefire and the removal of Russian troops
- We express full solidarity with Ukrainian people and anti-war protestors in Russia
- We are in favour of peace and a negotiated settlement
- We support calls for all refugees from war to be allowed to enter the UK

None of that is controversial and solidly reflects mainstream opinion in this country.

However, if we limit ourselves to this response, we are adapting to the narrative of the Tory government, Parliament and the official media discourse.

Doing this strips recent events of history, context or comparison and risks subscribing to the “madman theory of history”.

If we are serious about peace we must look at the context of a war that has the potential to widen and escalate, drawing other countries into widespread conflict. That means examining the role of NATO and scrutinising the actions of our government.

Concerns from various quarters about NATO expansion are well-documented.

The BBC’s Jeremy Bowen recently quoted a senior US cold war strategist describing NATO expansion since 1990 as, “the most fateful error of US policy in the entire post-cold war era”.

And when you hear that Henry Kissinger, of all people, counselled against NATO expanding eastwards, you have to wonder why the warnings were not heeded.

So, we must be prepared look at cause and effect – we do it all the time as educators.

When we teach Year 9 about the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany our starting point is the Treaty of Versailles and we look at the sweep of history from there – a common exam question is: “To what extent did the Treaty of Versailles create the conditions in Germany that allowed Hitler and the Nazis to gain power?”

This approach is not apologism - it is looking at how history happens and we should be prepared to do the same on this question.

And we should not wait to do it, because doing it now may help change the course of events.

There is an attempt to control the official discourse and quieten down any talk of NATO or how we got here – there always is in times such as this.

Attacks on the anti-war left have now reached the stage where there is talk of Stop the War Coalition being a proscribed organisation in the Labour Party and we should oppose these attacks.

We should also be concerned about the rapid growth in military spending that is going on in response to the war in Ukraine.

Our union has a proud record on international questions, both in terms of solidarity but also in adopting an anti-imperialist position on key questions, and the war on Ukraine should be no exception to that.



Stop the War fringe meeting

Monday 11th April - 5:45pm. Tregonwell Hall, Bournemouth Conference Centre

SUPPORT THE EMERGENCY MOTION ON UKRAINE

We must organise to strike on pay

NEU Conference will debate motions and amendments on pay. It is vital they are passed and that we commit our union to a fight on pay.

A basic function of any trade union is to defend its members' pay and conditions. We have already seen teachers' pay eroded by an average 17 percent in real terms over the last decade as a result of pay freezes and below inflation awards.

The government's latest proposal for a two year deal to the School Teachers' Review Board will slash pay for most teachers even more.

Once you factor in inflation we face an enormous cut in our real terms pay. Many teachers face another 10 percent cut in living standards.

Support staff will suffer even more than teachers, with their already low pay set to fall even further behind rising prices.

There is only one way we will stop this assault. To strike and strike hard. Nothing else will work.

It won't be easy to win a national ballot and beat the anti-union thresholds. But we must try.

At conference we should vote to organise an indicative ballot. That needs to be followed by then throwing everything into organising at national, regional, district and school level to deliver the votes needed.

And that needs to then flow into a full strike ballot and taking action we need to defend our living standards.

The money is there- with record profits for oil companies and bankers while ordinary people see living standards slashed.

If we fight and win it can give confidence to others to do the same- a rising tide of struggle which lifts all workers is the real levelling up agenda we need.



London pay protest last month - we need more like this

Action to hit back at P&O pirates

The callous sacking of 800 workers by P&O Ferries last month is a warning to the entire trade union movement. The P&O mass sackings shows how far the bosses are prepared to go to protect their profits.

While the Tories feigned horror at the actions of P&O bosses, in reality they blocked legislation last year that could have made fire and rehire more difficult, if not illegal. Also, we now know that the Tories were aware of P&O bosses' plans months in advance.

This is a government which has promoted casualisation and attacks on workers' conditions at every opportunity and whose anti-union laws have made it increasingly difficult for workers to fight back.

We need to demand an end to fire and rehire altogether and for nationalisation of industries like P&O Ferries.

Some union and Labour leaders have gone down the dangerous route of saying P&O was 'betraying British workers' and replacing them with 'foreign workers'. We must not give an inch to the racist idea that migrant workers are to blame for poverty conditions.

The people to blame for the P&O jobs massacre are the super-rich bosses, not the exploited workers from India who are paid a mere £1.81 an hour. We need a united struggle for decent pay and conditions for all workers and against racism.

Struggle, not legal manoeuvres or public relations campaigns, is the key to stopping the bosses' attacks. There could and should have been calls by the unions for workers to block roads, occupy ports and stop ships sailing.

Solidarity strikes should be put back at the heart of our movement- whatever the Tory laws say. Bosses like P&O ignore the law and we should not be bound by Tory laws when we need to defend ourselves against them.

That means the old spirit of solidarity, of an injury to one is an injury to all and of standing united in hard hitting action to win.



Child Q, racism and education

Educators, like most people were shocked by the Child Q Safeguarding Review and its exposure of the racist and misogynistic behaviour by the police.

Child Q was treated in a humiliating way which showed no respect for her as a human being and was subject to unproven and racist assumptions that adultified her and linked her with criminality.

In addition, it details clear breaches of basic safeguarding guidelines. We have been repeatedly told that the presence of the police in our schools is there to protect students and the community. Everything we have learned about this case proves the opposite.

In addition, the report clearly pointed to the disproportionate use of stop and search on young black people. Many of us will be calling for an end to the police presence in schools.

At the very least we need to be advising our members on how to limit and control any visits by the police, and to give them confidence to stand up to unacceptable practice and to question police involvement.

If a school is concerned about any student, surely they need to support that student and work with them and their families?

Indeed, we need to challenge the culture in which the police presence in our schools has been normalised. We have to question why it was felt appropriate to call the police in, and to allow a student to undergo a traumatising and humiliating experience and not to contact home.



Protests in Hackney over child Q and police racism

It goes with an approach to education that has focused on disciplining students through regimes that enforce 'zero-tolerance' behaviour and punish students who refuse to conform – an ap-proach found especially but not only in academies.

And it goes with the obsession with league tables and conformity that has seen black, Gypsy Roma Traveller students, SEND students and Disabled students often pushed out of schools through exclusion and off-rolling, which can leave some isolated and at risk of being pulled into criminality and exploitation.

We need to say enough is enough. This must not happen again and as educators we need to work with parents, students and others to fight for a better, inclusive education system.

Let's use our power to fight cost of living crisis

Just when we thought that the cost of living crisis couldn't get any worse, Rishi Sunak (the richest man in parliament) defied us by unveiling his Spring statement.

Prices continue to soar as workers see real terms pay cuts. Prioritising profits for fat cats at the expense of ordinary people will do nothing to tackle the hardship experienced by so many.

Rises in fuel bills, food prices, rent and National Insurance hikes will hit hard, and we now need to say that enough is enough. Workers are not to blame for inflation and we need to stand together and resist the demand for us to pay for it.

When the governor of the Bank of England, who earns more than £500,000 per year, shamelessly suggested that workers should not ask for much-needed pay rises, we know that the system is rigged, as bankers rush to celebrate their huge bonuses!

The appetite for change is there, so now is the time to organise and channel our anger.

We can't rely on the political leaders in this country, and as trade unionists we must seize the opportunity to make those changes ourselves.

Workers have the power and now is the time to use it.

Schools' White Paper - out of touch with real issues

The release of the government's White Paper on education, just confirms how out of touch they are with the reality of education in the UK.

Sadly it's not surprising that the White Paper falls far short in terms of any promising changes to education policy and is another case of the Tories failing to listen to educators.

The paper is mostly made up of soundbites which make good headlines but what it lacks are any substantial changes which will have a long-term positive impact on students.

In fact, many of the suggestions are things that schools and colleges already do- such as the pointless gimmick of saying schools should meet minimum hours which almost all already do!

The government failed to deliver the £15 billion its own Cover recovery Tsar thought was needed to help schools and students recover from the pandemic- and as a result he resigned in protest.

The White Paper fails again to deliver anything to help that recovery or address any the urgent needs in schools.

Instead Boris Johnson comes up with the novel idea that schools should identify students who are not making progress and communicate with parents about it. What the hell do they think every teacher and every school has been doing for decades!?

Behind the vacuum at the heart of the white paper through there is the plan for the government to continue to push its academisation agenda- despite not a shred of evidence that academies improve outcomes for students.

We will, working with local communities and parents have to mobilise to stop schools being forced to become academies and continue to insist that the principle of local democratic accountability should be at the heart of school governance.

What the Government should be doing is listening to educators and finding innovative solutions to the challenges that schools and colleges are facing right now.

instead they continue to focus on their narrow agenda of statutory testing, accountability driven by Ofsted and a one size fits all approach to learning which is outdated and damaging to children.

War on Disabled People continues

If you have not read 'The War on Disabled People' by Ellen Clifford- you should.

It analyses how the Tories have attacked Disabled People repeatedly since 2010, to make them pay for the financial crisis. This attack was so determined that in 2016, a UN report found the UK government responsible for 'a grave and systematic violation of Disabled Peoples rights' which resulted in 'a human ca-tastrophe'.

The attacks were borne out of political opposition and a dedication to capitalist ideals. All this was playing out in the fifth richest country in the world, where disability often remains invisible as a political issue.

The book focusses on the dreadful effect of continuous welfare reform and catalogues how ser-vices were downsized, and support was cut. Around this time Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) especially Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) came to be at the fore front of the anti-austerity movement.

During the current pandemic it was reported that more than 60% of the deaths involved disa-bled people, now we find ourselves in a situation where the government has removed all miti-gations that would offer some protection to those at greater risk of Covid.

Earlier this year the government published its National Disability Strategy. They failed to consult with any DPOs at all, whilst only speaking to charities.

Disabled activists took the government to court about this issue and won their case. Recently the Equality and Human Rights Commission scrapped their Disability Advisory Committee with no explanation given.

We are all worried about the cost-of-living crisis that will affect food, petrol, and energy prices.

Be aware this crisis will affect disabled people disproportionately, as many work part time and tend to use larger amounts of energy than average to keep warm and charge mobility aids etc

It's time to turn the tide in this war on Disabled People.

LGBT+ equality matters

LGBT+ equality in many schools and colleges is restricted to an assembly or a few PHSE lessons during LGBT+ history month every February, whilst in some places even these tokenistic gestures don't happen and there is nothing remotely LGBT+ inclusive on the curriculum at all.

However, it doesn't have to be like this. Equality and diversity is celebrated throughout the year and across the curriculum in lots of schools and colleges. It is in these workplaces that LGBT+ educators and students can feel safer and more relaxed.

Creating a diverse and inclusive curriculum and ethos in a school or college is not difficult.

One of the key points is to have a majority of staff involved, not just those who identify as LGBT+.

Including LGBT+ people (famous or not) within lessons can have a huge impact on young people (whether they are LGBT+ or not). Reading stories that include LGBT+ characters shouldn't be seen as something ground-breaking.

Prejudice and bigotry often originate from ignorance or fear, which is why inclusive education is so important in combatting the widespread homophobic/transphobic/biphobic bullying and harassment experienced by many students on a daily basis in schools and colleges.

Despite the huge amounts of good practice that exist in our schools and colleges, there are still some outdated, prejudiced and bigoted views held by some involved in education.

The recent situation in London, where the Archdiocese of Southwark cancelled a visit to a Catholic school by a gay author, shows what a long way we still have to travel to gain true inclusive education for all.

However, the outrage this incident caused amongst staff, parents, governors and the local community illustrates that the views held by the Archdiocese are a minority.

Equality and liberation can only be won through collective action and solidarity; we all need to fight for a curriculum that is LGBT+ inclusive.



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