

Starmer sets out British Labour party's mission for government: authoritarianism, austerity and war

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A lone democracy protestor rushed the stage at Labour's annual conference this afternoon, pouring glitter over leader Sir Keir Starmer as he prepared to deliver his party's "vision" for government. As a phalanx of security guards surrounded the man—who shouted "democracy first"—dragging him from the stage, Starmer turned to the assembled delegates and the world's media, declaring, "Protest or power: that's why we changed our party".

His was a declaration of authoritarianism, referencing the party's mass frame-up and ruthless purge of left-wing members, a statement that would be welcomed by dictators everywhere. Yet it received rapturous applause and a standing ovation from the party faithful, the first of many such ovations during an hour-long diatribe that placed Labour to the right of the Tories.

Starmer opened with a paean to the Blair Labour government, hailing its "achievements" and invoking New Labour's 1997 campaign anthem, "Things can only get better", contrasting this to 13 years of Tory rule which had "broken" and "kicked the hope" out of Britain. Blair's spin doctor Peter Mandelson—who declared in 1998 that he was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich"—was on hand to cheer the new leader.

Starmer's opening remarks chimed with Labour's central message to conference: "rebuilding Britain" would require unparalleled national sacrifice. "I have to warn you: our way back from this will be hard", he intoned, issuing an ominous call for "a decade of national renewal" led by a party possessed of "the fire of change".

This was a conference dominated by the global eruption of imperialist war. For three days, Starmer and

his shadow cabinet had filled the airwaves with denunciations of the Palestinian uprising—depicted as the work of "terrorists"—joined by their declarations of support for Israeli war crimes. Labour has supported missile strikes and other forms of collective punishment by the Zionist state against Palestinian civilians in Gaza, the world's largest open-air prison.

On behalf of the Blairite wing of the party, Starmer claimed total victory against more than 250,000 Labour Party members who had elected Jeremy Corbyn leader in 2015. The victors' prize, he made clear, is a party committed to NATO, ending any association with the mass anti-war movement that challenged Britain's illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.

He called for "national renewal" against Tory chaos, declaring: "this new path can only be walked by a new party. A changed Labour Party. No longer in thrall to gesture politics. No longer a party of protest. A party of service." The words "nation", "service" and "respect" were used repeatedly—evoking the patriotic and volkish language of the far-right: "we serve working people as they drive our country forward."

Labour's purge of left-wing members has served a critical function for the ruling class under conditions of an historic cost-of-living crisis and war. Starmer spoke of an "age of insecurity" with "fault-lines that run right through the living standards of working people". He explained: "That's why we had to move so fast. Why we had to fight so hard to change this party. The bond of respect that comes from service is precious. National renewal depends on it. That's why we stood with NATO—an historic achievement of this party. Held out our hand to business. Ripped antisemitism out by the roots. Backed Ukraine. Country First, Party Second."

Starmer's call for "country over party" was an appeal to the most right-wing and even fascist forces. It incorporates the nationalist ideology of Blue Labour theorists such as Maurice Glasman promoted during Brexit. Starmer, a former barrister, was glaringly silent on the treatment of refugees—tacit backing for the Tories' systematic dismantling of the right to asylum. Priti Patel and Suella Braverman's fascistic "Rwanda Solution" occasioned no word of condemnation.

So right-wing is Labour's pitch that fascist Britain First leader Paul Golding yesterday praised the party's new membership cards that feature the slogan "Putting the country first", a Union Jack emblazoned on the reverse side. "Labour Party membership cards are looking very 'Britain First'" Golding tweeted, with a laughing emoji. Labour party members have expressed their utter dismay and anger, with one Twitter user commenting, "Wish this was satire, but it seems to be real. Yes, this is the new Labour membership card. COUNTRY FIRST. What hope have we got when the supposedly left wing option is aping fascism?"

Starmer and his backers are unrepentant. There is something pathological about Labour's love-embrace of the right. While attacking members of his own party who support Corbyn, declaring that protest will not be tolerated, Starmer used his keynote speech to invite Tories to join Labour: "If you feel our country needs a party that conserves. That fights for our union. Our environment. The rule of law. Family life. The careful bond between this generation and the next. Then let me tell you: Britain already has one. And you can join it. It's this Labour Party."

The plaudits from the British ruling class are running thick and fast. From the "liberal" broadsheets to right-wing tabloids. The shift to Labour in ruling circles is now a stampede. Former Bank of England Governor Mark Carney delivered a pre-recorded endorsement of Labour's Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves that was played at the conference yesterday: "It is beyond time we put her energy and ideas into action." Mandelson meanwhile spoke at a conference event on Monday night, telling business leaders that Labour is so pro-business that the City of London Corporation is "almost to the left" of it.

The Labour Party confronts the working class as an implacably hostile force. It has repudiated all vestigial connections to its reformist past, with Starmer telling

conference that the National Health Service should not be put on "a pedestal" and must face "reform" (i.e., privatisation). For millions of workers and young people, Labour's grotesque invocations to patriotism, austerity and war will serve only to confirm that the party is a political monstrosity. The working class has been disenfranchised, not only by the party's right-wing but above all by the prostration and capitulation of the Corbynite left. Corbyn and his backers systematically demobilised and suppressed mass working class opposition to the Blairites, insisting that Labour must remain a "broad church" uniting right and left wing. His defence of the Labour Party is the defence of capitalism, aimed above all at blocking a mass anti-war movement by the working class.

Class conscious workers and youth who want to fight imperialist war, the oppression of the Palestinians, social inequality and the rise of the far-right must join the Socialist Equality Party, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, and take up the fight for socialism.



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