

New Democrats join witch hunt of Ontario NDP legislator, Sarah Jama, who denounced oppression of Palestinians

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27 October 2023

Canada's trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party (NDP) has joined a vicious ruling-class witch hunt of Ontario NDP legislator Sarah Jama for her defence of the Palestinian people.

Ontario NDP leader Marit Stiles unilaterally booted Jama from the party's provincial parliamentary caucus last Monday. Federal NDP leader and onetime Ontario NDP deputy leader Jagmeet Singh has signalled his approval for Stiles' action by remaining silent on the entire affair—including a Progressive Conservative government-authored censure motion that strips Jama of the right to speak in Ontario's legislature.

Jama's "crime" from the standpoint of the Canadian political establishment was her issuing of an Oct. 10 statement on X (the former Twitter) comparing the oppression of the Palestinians with apartheid and demanding an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

As Israel's savage bombardment of Gaza got under way, Jama called "for an immediate ceasefire and de-escalation. We must look to the solution to this endless cycle of death and destruction: end all occupation of Palestinian land and end apartheid. Canada must hold true to its tradition of peacemaking, and refrain from military intervention. My heart genuinely goes out to all those impacted by this on-going violence."

In the past, Jama's statement would hardly have seemed exceptional. As numerous United Nations' resolutions have affirmed, Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands captured in the Six Day War of 1967—including its de facto imprisonment of 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza—is illegal. Israel's systematic and brutal regime of oppression against the Palestinians has been described as akin to apartheid by many Israeli legal scholars and by Amnesty International, hardly an organization renowned for its radicalism. But today, under conditions in which the imperialist powers have fallen over each other to demonstrate their full-throated support for the far-right Netanyahu government's genocide on Gaza, such statements are intolerable.

Jama's statement prompted a torrent of abuse and threats from all quarters. Right-wing forces raised the demand that she "go back to Somalia," her family's homeland. She has been universally denounced by the capitalist media, hard-right Ontario Premier Doug Ford, and Zionist organizations as an "anti-Semite" and a "defender of Hamas terrorists." Editors and columnists demanded that Jama remove her tweet, apologize and resign her seat.

After her office was inundated with death threats, Jama was forced to work from home. Premier Ford poured political fuel on this fire. He demanded Jama be ejected from the legislature, citing her "history of

antisemitism, which supports the rape and murder of Jewish people." Unbowed, Jama went on the offensive, and launched a libel suit against the Ontario Premier, a perfectly justified act of self-defense.

In response to the initial torrent of denunciations, Jama issued a short appendix to her initial tweet, stating, "I understand the pain that many Jewish and Israeli Canadians, including my own constituents, must be feeling. I apologize. To be clear, I unequivocally condemn terrorism by Hamas on thousands of Israeli civilians. I also believe that Israel's bombardment and siege on civilians in Gaza, as was also noted by the United Nations, is wrong. As a member of the Ontario NDP caucus, I stand by the position of our federal party, and believe that violence against civilians is never justified, and that there is no military solution to this conflict."

Her retreat only encouraged the hard-right agitators, who stepped up their calls for Jama to resign.

At every point, this right-wing political witch hunt has been facilitated by the NDP. Before this week's expulsion, Ontario party leader Stiles had insisted that Jama enter into an "agreement" with her, the purpose of which was to effectively muzzle Jama from expressing her views on the massacre in Gaza.

This treatment is typical for a party that has consistently barred pro-Palestinian candidates from contesting elections on an NDP ticket and suppressed discussion of pro-Palestinian motions and resolutions at its conventions. At the federal level, the NDP secures the parliamentary majority of the pro-war Trudeau government, which has been no less emphatic in its support for the Israeli regime than the Biden administration. The trade union bureaucracy, for which the NDP serves as a mouthpiece, has responded to the eruption of protests in support of the Palestinians by issuing a statement urging protesters to put their faith in the Trudeau government calling for a "ceasefire." This is the same government that has massively hiked Canada's military spending and positioned Ottawa as a key player in US imperialism's war on Russia and preparations for war with China.

It was the agreement Stiles prevailed on Jama to accept that subsequently became the pretext for throwing the disability rights activist out of the caucus. In a politically filthy statement justifying Jama's exclusion, the ONDP leader accused her of "unilateral actions which have undermined our collective work, and broken the trust of her colleagues." This was apparently a reference to her libel suit against Ford, an erstwhile Donald Trump enthusiast and notorious political thug.

Stiles went on to claim, "Some of Ms. Jama's actions have contributed to an unsafe work environment for staff," thereby blaming

the wheelchair-bound legislator for the fact that far-right forces, incited by the likes of Ford and the *Toronto Sun*, have threatened NDP officials. Needless to say, Stiles' statement had nothing to say about the “unsafe,” or more accurately deadly, conditions in Gaza produced by the imperialist-backed Israeli onslaught on the enclave, which her party is playing a key role in facilitating.

With Jama abandoned and ostracized by her own party, the Ford government felt emboldened in pushing its motion of censure against her through the provincial legislature. It bars Jama from speaking in the Ontario parliament until she deletes her Oct. 10 statement from her “X” account and formally “apologizes” to the legislature.

In addition to silencing Jama, the censure effectively disenfranchises the 100,000 residents of her working class Hamilton Centre riding. It constitutes a virtually unprecedented attack on the democratic rights of an elected legislator, with the Tory dominated Ontario parliament deploying censure powers not used for decades.

Jama’s censure and ousting from the Ontario NDP caucus is part of a broader witch hunt, which has seen the Ford government demand universities discipline students and student groups—including the elected leaders of the York Federation of Students—for issuing statements denouncing the Israeli dispossession and suppression of the Palestinians and upholding their right to resist. Last week Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities Jill Dunlop made a lengthy McCarthy-style statement from the floor of the Ontario legislature “naming and shaming” students and academics as “anti-Semites” and supporters of “terror.” Their public naming and vilification is a form of incitement, aimed at making them the object of official sanctions, if not physical attacks by the Ford government’s allies among far-right groups.

The true target of the calumny poured on Jama’s head is not Jama herself, but the growing movement of youth and workers which has spontaneously risen up against the genocide being carried out against the Palestinians. Protests have steadily grown during the nearly three weeks of US and Canadian imperialist-backed Israeli bombardment of Gaza, including mobilizations of more than 4,000 in Toronto and Montreal last weekend. The ruling elite is terrified the opposition to the onslaught against the Palestinians could trigger a broader upsurge of workers against war and austerity.

Canada is aggressively participating in the US/NATO war on Russia in Ukraine, pouring \$2.4 billion in weapons and \$9 billion in total aid to the far-right Kiev regime since Feb. 2022. This war is the opening battle of a global imperialist war to redivide the world, and it now threatens to spread throughout the Middle East as the US undertakes a massive military build-up. Under these conditions, the ruling elites in every major imperialist power cannot tolerate dissent and are abrogating democratic rights.

Jama’s expulsion has thrown the Ontario NDP into crisis. Certain sections of the party, supported by local union bureaucrats in Jama’s hometown of Hamilton, have sharply attacked Stiles’ blatant violation of democratic rights and support for Israeli genocide. These criticisms are bound up with the fear that the NDP is losing what little remains of its political credibility as a “left” and “oppositional” force. Under conditions of a growing political radicalization, some elements of the labour bureaucracy calculate Canada’s social democrats will better be able to perform their assigned task of diverting and derailing the development of genuine left-wing opposition to the ruling class, if they allow certain limited criticisms of the Israeli onslaught to be heard.

Typical of this type of criticism was that of Svend Robinson, a

former federal NDP MP and long-time leader of its anemic “left-wing.” He re-tweeted Stiles’ statement with a single word, “Shame.”

In response to Jama’s ouster from the NDP caucus, the Hamilton District Labour Council tweeted that she remained “their working class MPP” and that “The Hamilton and District Labour Council have been long-time members of the party, holding seats at the party’s Provincial Council and conventions. We will soon have the opportunity to decide on the future of our relationship with the party...We will work to ensure she is re-elected whether she stands under a party banner or not.”

By contrast, the thousands of commenters who flooded social media to denounce Stiles’ expulsion of Jama express justified anger and disgust at the despicable actions of Canada’s social democrats. Many resignations came from the party’s layer of young activists, who have maintained illusions, fostered by pseudo-left ideology and identity politics, that the NDP somehow represents a “progressive” political alternative, or even “socialism.”

Activist Selma Tobah declared, “If you cannot use your voice in positions of power to stand up for a people undergoing genocide, who have endured over 75 years of brutal occupation, then at what point does your conscience move? Please remove me from your email and phone lists. I won’t be volunteering for the NDP in the next federal or provincial election but will be actively reminding Londoners of your lack of Principles.”

The critical task facing young people and workers outraged by the NDP’s bitter hostility to the rights of the Palestinians and contempt for democratic rights is to draw a political balance sheet of—and break from—this right-wing party of austerity and war. Like social democratic parties around the world, the NDP long ago abandoned even the most tenuous association with a reformist program aimed at ameliorating capitalism’s worst excesses in favour of an open embrace of unrestrained corporate profiteering and imperialist war.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained in its recent statement “Union-NDP supported Trudeau government waging war on two fronts” published in July 2023, “If the Trudeau government is waging a war on two fronts, the union and NDP leaders are its ‘labour lieutenants.’ Their specific task is to contain, divert and derail mounting working class opposition...

“Workers must repudiate the Liberal-union-NDP alliance, which for decades has served as one of the key political mechanisms for suppressing the class struggle, as well as the Canadian and Quebec nationalist politics of the unions and pseudo-left which divide workers within Canada and from their class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and around the world.”



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