

UK Labour Party crisis intensifies over Starmer's support for Israeli war crimes

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The crisis rocking the opposition Labour Party following its leader Sir Keir Starmer's statement backing Israel's "right" to carry out war crimes—including switching off water and electricity supplies to Gaza—escalated this week.

Speaking on October 11 to LBC radio's Nick Ferrari, Starmer said, "Israel does have that right, must have that right, to defend herself, and Hamas bears responsibility." Ferrari asked, "A siege is appropriate? Cutting off power, cutting off water, Sir Keir?", to which the Labour leader responded, "I think Israel does have that right..."

Forced onto the defensive by the mass opposition in Britain to the war, Starmer's belated efforts to stem the crisis have only backfired.

Amid widespread dissent in Labour's ranks, centred mainly on its Muslim representatives at local council level, Starmer engaged in damage limitation, which only confirmed that the resignations of 23 mainly Muslim party councillors was a pale reflection of popular hostility.

Starmer's efforts consisted of making a trip to a mosque in Wales last Sunday—the South Wales Islamic Centre—and holding a meeting with the party's Muslim MPs on Wednesday, alongside deputy leader Angela Rayner.

Both backfired spectacularly. Starmer's tweet report of the visit to the mosque was denounced by its leaders, who said his version of events "gravely misrepresented" the meeting.

Starmer said he had "made clear [to the mosque leaders] it is not and has never been my view that Israel had the right to cut off water, food, fuel or medicines. International law must be followed."

This was rebuffed by a statement from the centre which said, "Members of the community directly challenged Keir on his statements made on the Israeli government's right to cut food, electricity and water to Gaza, warranting war crimes, as well as his failure to call for an immediate

ceasefire." They added, "We affirm, unequivocally, the need for a free Palestine. We implore all those with political authority to uphold international law, and the end to the occupation of Palestine."

Speaking to *Politico* about the incident, one Labour MP said Starmer had used the mosque as a "f*cking prop and a backdrop."

Starmer was at this point repeating the line handed down from Washington that a "humanitarian pause" to Israel's bombardment could be allowed to let a few trucks of minimal aid in, but no ceasefire—as the death toll in Gaza at that point neared 7,000, including over 2,000 children.

The crisis escalated Wednesday, with Starmer seeking to avoid more damage by refusing to address Gaza in any of the six questions he is allowed of Rishi Sunak at Prime Minister's Questions. This was to no avail as one his frontbenchers Yasmin Qureshi stood up to read an email from a constituent with family in Gaza reading, "My heart can't handle this anymore. We are being massacred, relentlessly bombed. Homes destroyed. No water, no food, no electricity." Qureshi asked Sunak, and by implication Starmer, "How many more innocent Palestinians must die before the prime minister calls for a humanitarian ceasefire?"

By this point, on top of the 23 councillors who had resigned, 250 Muslim councillors, and dozens of Labour MPs had demanded Starmer back an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The Labour Muslim Councillor Network organised the letter signed by the 250 which read, "As Labour councillors elected to serve our constituents, the message we have been hearing repeatedly over the past 2 weeks is simple, people just want an end to the bloodshed and the loss of innocent life. Therefore, as Labour Party councillors, as members, and as members of the Muslim community we urge the Labour Party to urgently adopt a position of calling for an immediate ceasefire."

On Thursday, the *Guardian* reported that quarter of the party's 199 MPs had either signed an Early Day Motion (EDM) in Parliament calling for a "cessation of hostilities" or had publicly called for a ceasefire. That day, Imran Hussain, a shadow levelling up minister, became the first Labour frontbencher to sign the motion.

According to *The Times*, up to four Labour MPs were considering resigning from Labour's front bench—including Sarah Owen, the shadow minister for faith, and Rachel Hopkins, shadow Cabinet Office minister.

The *LabourList* website reported it had spoken to a "a Leicester councillor" who said he had "never seen the bottom fall out of the Labour vote so fast" among "predominantly very loyal" Muslim voters. He said the anger was "worse" than over Iraq.

The Blair Labour government took Britain into an illegal war against Iraq in 2003 based on lies that Saddam Hussin's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction which threatened the UK. Blair never recovered and is so widely despised since being forced to step down as prime minister in 2007 that he ranks alongside Margaret Thatcher as a hate figure in the working class.

Also Thursday, the *Open Democracy* organisation reported on a survey by Research group Muslim Census which launched October 17 and has received more than 30,000 responses. "The survey, shared across social media, asked respondents who they voted for in 2019 and who they would vote for if there were an election tomorrow. Some 71 percent of people said they voted for Labour three years ago—but just 4.9 percent said they would do so now."

An October 19 YouGov poll showed that more than three-quarters of Britons said they would back an immediate ceasefire.

This revolt does not imply any principled politics on the part of those longtime Labour representatives opposing Starmer. What has caused them to consider *any* opposition to Starmer, of the mildest kind, is the revolt from below revealed in the many thousands of e-mails and messages Labour councillors and MPs are receiving denouncing its backing for Israel's war of extermination on Gaza.

Politico reported Friday that "One Labour MP in London" said "they have had 3,000 emails and letters. Even a colleague in a less diverse constituency has had 150." It added, "One Starmer-friendly frontbencher" said Muslim MPs "are being called traitors," adding, "I think MPs will be going back to protests outside their

constituency offices, demands to make statements."

These events express a far wider opposition to Labour, now seen as a single parliamentary party of war alongside the Sunak government. That the most consequential crisis Starmer has faced in his three years as leader prompts none of the Labour "left" to make a stand and resign is in line with their long record of propping up the party against the working class. After more than two week since Israel started bombing Gaza, all the Corbynites have done is draft a toothless parliamentary motion which, as with the vast majority of Early Day Motions, will never be debated let alone voted on.

At successive rallies in London against Israel's onslaught on Gaza, attended by hundreds of thousands, neither Jeremy Corbyn (speaking twice) or his former shadow chancellor John McDonald (speaking once last week) have even dared to mention Starmer by name—instead referring to "political leaders" who support war crimes! Corbyn was booted out of the parliamentary party almost three years ago and is not even subject to the party whip.

With Parliament prorogued on Friday for the autumn recess until November 7, all McDonnell was prepared to do after Wednesday's PMQs was to urge a recall if Israel begins a ground invasion of Gaza.

The crisis shows the devastating consequences of Corbyn's refusal to make a stand against the filthy "left anti-Semitism" campaign concocted by the Blairites—in league with the Tories, Zionists, Washington and the UK intelligence agencies—that ended with Corbyn's anti-democratic ouster as party leader. Had he have fought against this campaign from the off, instead of capitulating at every grotesque turn, this would have dealt a powerful blow to the machinations of British imperialism as the junior partner of the US.

The mass opposition to Israel's war crimes is a devastating indictment not just of Corbyn, but the entire milieu of political opportunist and cowards who still routinely hail him as "the best prime minister we never had".



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