

UK: Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer suffers large rebellion over Gaza ceasefire motion

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Opposition Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer has suffered a rebellion by 56 MPs, including eight shadow cabinet members voting for a parliamentary motion put by the Scottish National Party (SNP) for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Starmer has refused to call for a ceasefire since the moment that Israel starting bombing Gaza on October 8.

The SNP amendment to the Conservative government's legislative programme called for "an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people" and for "the Government to join with the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire."

The SNP has 43 MPs in the 650-seat chamber who were joined Tuesday evening by just over a quarter of Starmer's party and a few other MPs, with the ceasefire amendment securing 125 votes. It was voted down by Tory MPs in alliance with the rest of Labour's MPs, 292 votes for a majority of 168. Many Tory MPs didn't vote, knowing the amendment would be defeated.

In a bid to stop some potential rebel MPs from voting for a ceasefire, Starmer put forward a motion reiterating Labour's call for "longer pauses" in the bombing to allow humanitarian aid to enter and more civilians to leave the war zone. *Politico* reported that despite a bit more hand-wringing from Starmer in his own resolution, "Starmer's team stressed overnight that no hard policy has changed since his speech at Chatham House." In that speech on October 31, Starmer insisted there should no ceasefire by the Israel Defense Forces.

By Wednesday morning, reports were that 19 shadow cabinet members, including several parliamentary private secretaries (PPS), could still vote for the SNP's motion. Starmer spent the day issuing threats to his front bench to back his resolution, abstain on the SNP

resolution or face the sack. Speaking on the *Andrew Marr Show* ahead of the vote, Shadow Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said cynically of Starmer's threat, "It's not so much about people being sacked as such, but that they would lose their jobs."

Starmer was reportedly huddled in discussions all day with potential rebel front benchers and succeeding in reducing their number from 19 to 10, as eight frontbenchers and two PPS's voted for the ceasefire motion.

The rebellion was nevertheless a significant political blow to Starmer.

The bulk of the 56 rebels were 35 members of the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) of Labourites. Some 32 members of the SCG are Labour MPs, plus three former MPs who already had the Labour whip removed by Starmer—former party leader Jeremy Corbyn, and two of Corbyn's allies Diane Abbott and Claudia Webbe.

Knowing they were about to be sacked, three front benchers—Yasmin Qureshi, Afzal Khan and Paula Barker—resigned their positions before the vote took place. Following the vote, Rachel Hopkins, Sarah Owen, Naz Shah, and Andy Slaughter were sacked by Starmer. Two other Labour MPs, Mary Foy, the PPS of Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner, and Dan Carden, another PPS, resigned the front bench too. The most prominent rebel, Jess Phillips, Minister for Domestic Abuse, resigned immediately following the vote.

Phillips, a member of Labour Friends of Israel and a Starmer loyalist, represents the Yardley constituency in Birmingham, which has a Muslim population of over 20 percent.

Those who stood down joined Imran Hussain, a member of the SCG, who resigned from Labour's front bench last week and who represents a constituency,

Bradford East, also with a large Muslim population.

The debate on the amendments was only attended by a few dozen MPs. It saw the extraordinary scene of Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran, who is of Palestinian heritage, telling the chamber that earlier in the day she lost a family member in Gaza. She said, “They were seeking safety in a church in Gaza City, and they did not, I’m afraid, die of a bomb. Instead, they died, perhaps for lack of food, perhaps of dehydration. Their health deteriorated in the last and they couldn’t get to the hospital they needed.”

The deputy speaker offered his condolences but then told Moran to end her speech, not allowing her to finish, citing a technicality. Moran was followed by Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy, who also offered condolences to Moran before touting his leader’s motion, which could well lead to the deaths of more of Moran’s family members.

As well as the nominally “left” Labourites who were obliged to vote for a ceasefire, others voting for the SNP motion included MPs in inner-city areas for whom continuing to support Starmer’s position would be political suicide, given mass popular opposition to Israel’s war of annihilation.

Last Saturday’s national protest mobilised 800,000 people and nearly 80 percent of the population back a ceasefire in polls. Outside parliament as the vote was taken, around 15,000 people protested demanding that MPs back a ceasefire.

Defying all popular pressure, the overwhelming majority of parliamentarians affirmed their support for Israel’s war of annihilation against the Gazan population, with the 125 voting for a ceasefire making up less than 20 percent of all MPs. The pro-genocide alliance between the Sunak government and the Labour Party continues.

The millions who want to end the war and prevent thousands more deaths cannot do so through further appeals to a pro-war parliament, nor rely on those MPs who have voted for a ceasefire to wage any political struggle against Starmer, Sunak and their ilk.

The crisis in ruling circles is a pale reflection of the gulf that has opened up between the entire political elite and the mass of working people. It is deeper into the working class, the only social force that can end the bloodbath, that a movement animated by profound anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist sentiments must turn.

World Socialist Web Site urged the following Saturday’s national demonstration, the fight to save the Palestinians must be waged independently of and against all the parties of big business:

“The working class alone can defeat and halt this offensive by making it impossible to wage it. Working class action, including strikes and boycotts of arms companies, docks and airports, can stop the shipment of any items to Israel with a military use...

“This can become a focus for the explosive anger over the savage austerity faced by workers. This fight must be waged against the trade union bureaucracy, which has done nothing to mobilise in defence of the Palestinians and acts as a dead hand in preventing any action that threatens the interests of the ruling class.”



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