

Socialist Equality Party (UK) holds meetings on Israel's war on Gaza

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party (UK) completed a series of public meetings on the genocide in Gaza last week. Events were held in London, Bradford and Inverness.

Since Israel launched its genocidal assault, SEP members have intervened continuously in national and local protests, and at universities across the country, distributing thousands of statements from the *World Socialist Web Site* Editorial Board, interviewing and discuss with workers and students.

At the event in London, SEP Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps explained that the meeting had been called “to discuss what political fight is necessary to stop the slaughter.”

Referring to the bombing of Guernica, the massacre at Lidice and the suppression of the Warsaw and Warsaw Ghetto uprisings, he said, “We make no apology whatsoever for these comparisons. What we have in Israel is a fascistic regime waging a war of extermination.”

Introducing SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden, Scripps explained that he would address the question “What political strategy is required to stop this war... [and] to stop it metastasising into an even more destructive regional war with the even more direct involvement of the imperialist powers—and threatening a world war.”

“The Palestinians face a second Nakba,” Marsden said. “Netanyahu and his fascist allies have used the Al Aqsa flood as a casus belli, an excuse to enact a pre-planned campaign to ethnically cleanse Gaza, and permanently annexe it,” to be followed by the same moves in the West Bank and the ethnic cleansing of Israel’s Arab citizens.

Moreover, “As terrible as what is taking place in Gaza is, worse is to come. US interests in the war being waged goes far beyond the declared goal of suppressing Hamas.” The United States and its NATO allies have opened “a Middle Eastern front of the war with Russia and as a step towards implementing war plans against China—the US’s most important competitor.”

Marsden insisted that the scale of the present conflict and the ambitions of the US and other imperialist powers for a redivision of the world’s markets and strategic resources made clear that the genocide of the Palestinians cannot be prevented by protests calling for a ceasefire, no matter how large. He noted that more than 1.5 million people marched through London in 2003 against the planned war against Iraq being hatched by US President George W. Bush and Labour’s Tony Blair, “But the war went ahead, with Blair declaring it a point of principle for leaders to defy the popular will.”

Today, “Starmer and the Labour Party carries on the rotten tradition of Blair,” while “none of the few remaining ‘left’ Labour MP’s who have appeared on platforms calling for a ceasefire will even mention Starmer by name and will not call for a struggle against the naked warmongers in the ‘party of NATO’...”

“The posturing of the Labour “left” as an alternative to the Blairite right was tested to destruction when a mass movement of workers and young people catapulted Jeremy Corbyn into the leadership of the party.

“What was his record? Retreat and capitulation all along the line. He opposed demands to expel the Blairites, allowed them a free vote on bombing Syria, abandoned opposition to NATO and nuclear weapons, and allowed his own supporters to be witch-hunted out of the party based on bogus charges of ‘left anti-Semitism’. This laid the foundations for the present McCarthyite campaign against opponents of Israeli war crimes.”

Marsden urged the adoption of an alternative strategy, rooted in the working class and animated by an anti-capitalist and international socialist strategy.

“A mass movement of workers must be directed against all the capitalist governments and political parties of the ruling class,” he said. “The working class can defeat and halt this offensive by making it impossible to wage it... But this fight must be waged against the trade union bureaucracy, which has done nothing to mobilise in defence of the Palestinians.”

“The political crisis facing the working class in every country is one of perspective and leadership,” he continued. “All the old workers’ organisations that accepted capitalism and the nation state as the basis for securing the interest of the working class have not only failed. They have been transformed into a police force for the corporations and the state.”

Addressing a special appeal to Jewish workers in Israel to stand against nationalist and anti-Palestinian hysteria, “those who before October 7 understood very well that in Netanyahu, Smotrich and Ben Gvir, they faced a gang of fascist criminals”, Marsden said, “There can be no defence of the interests of Jewish workers without a political break with Zionism and all its representatives... only a unified multinational state, with equal rights for Arab and Jewish workers, offers a road forward.”

Marsden stressed that it is important to understand the cultivation of Zionism was “conceived of as a weapon against socialism, which offered the only genuine road towards the end of class, national and religious oppression for the world’s peoples.

“Many here will know that the founding of the State of Israel was proceeded by a limited terror campaign by the Irgun against British attempts to temporarily limit Jewish migration and to demand London withdraw troops and end Mandate rule of Palestine. But that does not change the fact that Britain, in a letter known as the Balfour Declaration on November 9, 1917 proposed to establish a homeland in Palestine for the Jews when the territory was still part of the Ottoman

Empire with which Britain was at war.

“The letter was sent by Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour to Lord Walter Rothschild and the Zionist Federation. This was just two days after the seizure of power in Russia by the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky.

“Winston Churchill, in a February 1920 article, ‘Zionism versus Bolshevism’, made clear that the cultivation of Zionism not only provided a bedrock of support for British imperialism in the Middle East, but was a weapon against Bolshevism, international communism, and the threat of social revolution.

“He described communism as a ‘worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality’, stating, ‘With the notable exception of Lenin, the majority of the leading figures are Jews. Moreover, the principal inspiration and driving power comes from the Jewish leaders.’

“Praising the ‘national Jews’ of Russia, the bankers and industrialists, and excoriating the ‘international Jews,’ he wrote, ‘The struggle which is now beginning between the Zionist and Bolshevik Jews is little less than a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people.’

“Churchill declared that a British-protected Zionist state in Palestine ‘would from every point of view be beneficial, and would be especially in harmony with the truest interests of the British Empire.’

“As for those already living there, in 1937, amid the Arab revolt against the British in Mandatory Palestine, Churchill stated:

‘I do not admit that the dog in the manger has the final right to the manger, though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit for instance that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to those people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race or at any rate a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place.’”

“It is time to turn Churchill’s fears of a socialist future into today’s reality,” Marsden said, “through a rebuilding of an international revolutionary movement of the working class.”

The audience in London, as in Bradford and Inverness, was diverse and primarily young. A teacher asked what could be done in the workplace to oppose the war given the refusal of the trade unions to back such action, opening a discussion on socialist organising among the rank-and-file.

After a contribution from a Palestinian woman, relaying her experiences of the historic plight of the Palestinian diaspora, Marsden explained that their fate, and those of all the oppressed people of the world, was bound up with the history of the socialist movement and its betrayals and persecution by social democracy and Stalinism. Ending the oppression of the Palestinians was bound up with the revival of this movement based on a resurgence of the class struggle and the mass radicalisation engendered by the war on Gaza.

This led into a final discussion, prompted by a young worker’s question on where his generation could look for political answers, on the history of the Trotskyist movement and its struggle to overcome the “crisis of revolutionary” leadership identified by Trotsky.

Marsden reiterated the growing threat of a world war and the fact that only a socialist revolution, the Russian Revolution of 1917, had been able to bring such a war to a halt before the victory of one side resulted in the total destruction of the other.

The meeting concluded with an appeal for those present to attend the Saturday November 18 lecture at Birkbeck University

in London to be delivered by David North. Marking the centenary of the Trotskyist movement and titled, “Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century,” this was an essential opportunity to clarify the complex historical issues of programme and leadership that had been discussed.

In discussions at Bradford and Inverness, audience members made the points that “We can’t appeal to” parliamentarians since “there is no party that represents the people; the Labour Party does not represent the working class”, and that, “Going on the marches, boycotting, writing to people, writing to MPs. That’s not got us anywhere.”

Robert Stevens, the UK Editor of the WSWs, told an audience in Bradford that what is required is “the building of a mass movement based on a socialist perspective.” There had to be “working class solidarity internationally in support of the Palestinians.” The “perspective of the Stop the War Coalition is bankrupt, to try and get Labour leader Keir Starmer on our side. That’s not going to happen.”

A wide-ranging discussion at the Inverness meeting included questions on whether the European Union was a counterweight to imperialist violence, and on Scottish nationalism.

Steve James, a regular writer for the WSWs, answered that the European powers were united in their support for Israel’s genocide, quoting Trotsky’s 1928 description of “the modern bourgeois governments of Europe” as “murderers chained to a single cart.”

Chair of the meeting Darren explained that events in Gaza were a decisive proof of the reactionary character of all national solutions to the problems of modern society. Humanity’s future depends on the unification of the world working class on an internationalist, socialist programme to overthrow capitalist nationalism and imperialism.

To continue and deepen this discussion, we make a final appeal to all UK readers in London and those who can travel there Saturday to attend “The centenary of Trotskyism: Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century” and to book their tickets now.



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