

Gaza demonstrations targeting Starmer and other MPs' offices prompt Labour call for police clampdown

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21 November 2023

The mass movement against the Israeli genocide in Gaza took an important step forward by targeting Sir Keir Starmer and other Labour MPs for supporting Israel's war crimes and ethnic cleansing.

With national demonstrations calling for a ceasefire now happening fortnightly, over 100 local events were held this weekend. The most politically significant were protests outside the constituency offices of Labour MPs who refused to back a call for a ceasefire in a parliamentary vote last Wednesday.

Hundreds marched through Camden, north London, to demonstrate outside Starmer's office, carrying placards reading "Starmer, blood on your hands", "Starmer: still supporting war crimes", "No justice, no peace", "You decided Palestinian lives are dispensable; you should be ashamed of yourself", "No integrity; you uphold crimes against humanity" and "If it smells like a Tory, acts like a Tory and lies like a Tory, it's probably a Tory".

They chanted, "Keir Starmer, you can't hide; you're supporting genocide."

Others protested in Tower Hamlets, Harrow, Islington and Lewisham, all in London, outside Rushanara Ali, Bob Blackman, Emily Thornberry and Vicky Foxcroft's offices; in Cardiff outside Jo Stevens' office; in Birmingham outside Steve McCabe's; and in Leicester outside Jonathon Ashworth's.

Labour responded by slandering and urging the repression of the protestors.

Starmer denounced the "terrible abuse" his MPs had been subjected to and claimed that he had been "asking myself over and over again, particularly at the moment, how do I protect them [his family] as we go into this?"

The insinuation that MPs, let alone their families,

have been physically threatened by the protestors is a lie; some red paint splattered against Stevens' office was the only action taken beyond marching, chanting and delivering speeches.

Frequent references to murdered MPs Jo Cox and David Amess were both slanderous and inflammatory. Labour MP Jo Cox was stabbed and shot by a fascist, Tommy Mair, in the run up to the 2016 Brexit referendum. Conservative MP Amess was killed in 2021 by Ali Harbi Ali, a Somali known to the police for his sympathy for ISIS. Peaceful protestors are in this way equated with the far-right and Islamist terrorists.

Starmer's right-hand woman, Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves, delivered the most extensive attack on democratic rights, telling *Sky News* on Sunday that "Some of the protests... have crossed the line from protest to intimidation." Giving Labour's extraordinary view of "democracy", she declared, "Anything that would attempt to intimidate an MP to vote in a certain way *or to put pressure on them* [emphasis added]—it is anti-democratic in my view."

She told the BBC the same thing, that the "huge pressure" MPs have been put under over the vote on Gaza has been "very concerning".

In 2003, facing a mass movement against another criminal war, on Iraq, former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair declared, "I do not seek unpopularity as a badge of honour. But sometimes it is the price of leadership." Reeves channelled the same authoritarian spirit this weekend: "In a democracy we elect our MPs and they make decisions. They represent their constituents but they also listen to all of the evidence."

She was supported by Blair's spin doctor Alastair

Campbell, a chief architect of Britain's involvement in the Iraq War, who condemned protestors' "intimidating behaviour" and the Green Party's "nastiness" for publicising the (publicly available) list of Labour MPs who did not vote for a ceasefire. The last generation of Labour Party war criminals defends the next.

Stripping back the hypocritical rubbish about the morals and procedures of representative democracy, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained of the former Labour prime minister's comment, "Blair's dictum—that the essence of leadership is a readiness to defy the popular will—was a distilled expression of the contempt felt by the global financial oligarchy and its hirelings for democratic norms. It was his recognition that it is not possible to secure a democratic mandate either for predatory wars abroad or economic and social policies at home aimed at enriching the elite at the expense of the vast majority."

This gulf between all the parties of big business and the vast majority of the working class has widened immeasurably, driven by growing hostility to the ruling class's pursuit of class war at home and imperialist war.

Labour now intends to mobilise the state to censor and suppress popular criticism of its MPs, lining up with the Tory government's dictatorial agenda. Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has "held discussions with police to ensure the safety of Labour MPs," according to the *Telegraph*, while Shadow Leader of the House of Commons Lucy Powell has called for social media companies to "do more to stop the whipping up of hate and misinformation."

The political challenge now being mounted against Labour must be thought through to the end. The party is repeatedly proving itself a defender of genocide and prepared to trample the democratic rights of its opponents among workers and young people. Where does this leave political leaders who continue to sit as its MPs and campaign for its election?

Not one of the 56 MPs who lent their votes to a doomed ceasefire motion attended, endorsed or took part in the protests this weekend. If asked why, and none of Britain's pseudo-left groups gravitating around the Stop the War Coalition would embarrass them by doing so, they would answer that to do so would mean being thrown out of the party. But why remain inside

an increasingly authoritarian party of genocide and war if not to fight the warmongers?

Starmer's predecessor Jeremy Corbyn, who will never stand as a Labour MP again, does not have even this excuse. Freed of any party discipline, he refuses to mobilise his supporters against Starmer and company. All that can be allowed are polite and pointless registrations of disagreement within the House of Commons.

Corbyn and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs serve to block, as they did even *in* power, any fight being taken up against the right-wing Labour Party. Yet these are the figures advanced by the Stop the War Coalition as leaders of the protest movement.

It was the subordination of the mass movement against the Iraq War to these forces which allowed the invasion and bloody occupation to go ahead 20 years ago at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. The same and worse cannot be allowed to happen again.

Defeating British imperialism's support for Israel's genocide in Gaza means toppling both the Tory government and its Labour partners in crime. A new political leadership must be built capable of leading a mass movement of the working class and young people, as part of an international and socialist struggle against war. That leadership is the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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