

Labour pledges loyalty to Zionism and Israel's Gaza genocide at Jewish Labour Movement conference

Thomas Scripps
19 January 2024

The Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) held its annual conference last Sunday, providing an occasion for Britain's Labour Party leadership to parade its total commitment to Zionism and the suppression of anti-Zionist, left-wing views.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer gave the keynote speech, using it to denounce mass protests against Israel's genocide in Gaza as antisemitic. He declared the party indebted and in service to the fanatically pro-Israel forces who spent years slandering left-wing members grouped around former leader Jeremy Corbyn as antisemites and seeking their expulsion.

Claiming that "after October 7" antisemitism was "taking a new shape", Starmer made clear "to the Jewish community who looks upon these events [anti-genocide protest marches] and can see hate marching side by side with calls for peace, people who hate Jews hiding behind people who support the just cause of a Palestinian state, we see what you see..."

"So let me assure you we will never let antisemitism sneak back into the Labour Party undercover. I see no greater cause in my leadership than this. This is my role."

Listening in the front row were Luciana Berger, Louise Ellman and Ruth Smeeth, leading figures in the "left antisemitism" witch-hunt of Labour members.

Berger left the Labour Party in 2019, claiming antisemitic abuse after local party members passed a vote of no confidence in her for her continuous undermining of Corbyn's leadership. She went on to join the Change UK party founded by former Labour and Tory MPs. When Change UK began to fall apart, Berger moved to the Liberal Democrats and campaigned for the party against Labour in the 2019 general election.

Starmer invited her back into Labour in 2023 and announced she will lead the party's mental health strategy

review at the JLM conference.

Louise Ellman, a former chair of the JLM, Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) and the All-Party Britain-Israel Parliamentary Group, resigned from the Labour Party in 2019 after motions of no confidence submitted by local members for her refusal to support the party leadership under Corbyn and her claim that his victory at an election would make Britain unsafe for Jews.

Ellman was invited back into the Labour Party in 2021, saying Starmer had "shown a willingness to confront both the anti-Jewish racists and the toxic culture which allowed antisemitism to flourish."

Ruth Smeeth is a former direction of public affairs and campaigns at the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM), a "strictly protect" US intelligence source and chair of LFI. Her false accusations of antisemitism saw longtime Labour activist Marc Wadsworth thrown out of the Labour Party.

Smeeth lost her seat in the 2019 general election but was nominated for a life peerage by Starmer in 2022. She sits in the House of Lords as Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent.

"Look round this room today," gushed Starmer, "The Jewish Labour Movement, Luciana, Louise and Ruth, all standing together again... I am proud of the steps we have taken so far, proud of the journey that JLM has led the party on.

"Whether you left or stayed, you were all fighting for our values and I will never be able to thank you enough.

"'Saving the party' is one of those phrases people in Labour often overuse. It gets thrown away, glibly. But, in all candour, we know that this is exactly what you did. Therefore any future success the party enjoys, this year or any year, any achievements, the Britain we will build, together with the British people, that is also down to you.

So, on behalf of the Labour Party, again, I say thank you.”

A large chunk of the Labour leadership participated in the conference to make clear that this is not just Starmer’s opinion, but the unchallengeable party line.

Four shadow cabinet members (Wes Streeting, Bridget Phillipson, Feryal Clark and Thangam Debbonaire), Party Chair Anneliese Dodds, three more MPs (Dame Margaret Hodge, Alex Davies-Jones and Stella Creasey), arch-Blairite Lord Peter Mandelson, General Secretary David Evans, two mayors (Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and South Yorkshire’s Oliver Coppard) and the party’s two most influential campaign managers, Pat McFadden and Morgan McSweeney, took part.

The list reads as a “Who’s who” of the Blairite campaign to oust Corbyn and his supporters.

Labour’s thuggish Shadow Health Secretary Streeting did not mince words, telling the conference Labour would “never allow this party to be surrendered to the forces of the popular hard left, with the bigotry that it brings and the wrongheadedness that it involves... whether it’s hard left or hard right, Corbyn or Farage, they’re two cheeks of the same backside... we’ve got to make sure that we never allow that kind of dangerous, hard-left politics back in our country again.”

Khan attended to justify why he was not shutting down the national demonstrations against Israel’s war held regularly in the capital.

“I know that not everyone agrees with every word I said about the conflict over the past few months. But I also know that our friendship will endure because we are united by far more.” He pleaded with his critics to understand that he “cannot ban certain marches because I do not agree with their views,” before reassuring them that the Metropolitan Police were “using the laws available to them to prosecute individuals at the rallies.”

More will be done, Starmer promised in his speech, acknowledging that “there are many members of this community who still need to see more from us, and the work goes on.”

This a reference to ongoing calls for a wider purge of Labour members and MPs, even including Starmer’s loyally right-wing deputy Angela Rayner, which would be part and parcel of a broader crackdown on opposition to Israel and its war among workers and young people.

The JLM conference was a Blairite victory lap celebrating the crushing success of the “left antisemitism” witch-hunt. This was facilitated by Corbyn’s refusal to mobilise any opposition whatsoever against this conspiracy of Zionists, Blairites, Tories, the media and

security services in Israel, London and Washington against hundreds of his own supporters.

The event provided a platform for Labour to state categorically that, as well as being “the party of NATO” it is also the “party of Israel” and its apartheid state and genocidal war—to which it will brook no opposition.

Nor will it allow the slightest opposition to capitalism. Besides Streeting’s anti-socialist rant, using Corbyn’s lukewarm reformism as an Aunt Sally, Starmer’s speech included the promise that Labour was changed “top to bottom... No longer a party of protest. No longer in thrall to gesture politics... Those days are done. They’re gone, they’re never coming back. We have changed irrevocably.”

No MP can seriously claim to oppose the genocide in Gaza or advocate even the mildest “left” politics while remaining a member of this party. In the general election this year, Labour MPs from the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) will be campaigning for a Starmer government which everyone knows will back Israel to the hilt, repress its opponents and enforce pro-war, pro-austerity politics.

That even those SCG MPs kicked out of the parliamentary party, Corbyn and Diane Abbott, refuse to directly challenge Labour, and that this faction held the leadership of the party for five years, proves that there is no position from which the Labour “left” will lead a political struggle against the right. Their refusal has nothing to do with circumstances and everything to do with their rotten politics of opposing any political movement of the working class and youth breaking free of the reactionary orbit of the Labour Party.

Corbyn’s surrender before the right and its “left antisemitism” witch-hunt shattered many illusions in the working class. The failure of the SCG to mount any effective opposition against Starmer’s support for the Gaza genocide will shatter more. The conclusion must be firmly drawn from these experiences of the need for a new socialist and revolutionary party of the working class, the Socialist Equality Party, with a unique record of struggle against both the Blairite witch-hunters and the Corbynite betrayers.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact