

Labour Party's sordid manoeuvre against Gaza ceasefire motion plunges UK parliament into chaos

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Last night's debate in parliament prompted by a Scottish National Party (SNP) motion calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza was plunged into chaos after Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle agreed to a spoiler amendment from Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party to debate alongside the Conservative government's own counter motion.

This prompted a walkout by the whole of the SNP, joined by many on the government benches. Commons leader and Tory MP Penny Mordaunt announced the government had abandoned its involvement in the Opposition Day debate, denouncing Hoyle for having "hijacked" proceedings.

Hoyle's decision followed a personal intervention by Starmer. According to the *Guardian*, Starmer visited Hoyle in his office behind the House of Commons chamber. "Those briefed on the meeting said the Labour leader warned Hoyle that Labour MPs' security was at risk. Many had been deluged by criticisms, threats and abuse since abstaining on a similar SNP motion in November. With hundreds of protesters congregating outside parliament, they worried worse might be to come. After a tense meeting, and with Labour MPs desperately stalling inside the chamber, Hoyle eventually agreed."

Starmer was faced with a possible rebellion by 100 of his MPs, including two frontbenchers, who had stated they would vote for the SNP resolution if Starmer did not shift his position on a ceasefire.

Hoyle, who had absented himself from the first part of the debate run by his deputy, was forced to return and deliver a grovelling apology after a rare vote was called on whether the Commons should sit in private for the first time since 2001, which did not pass. He

faced demands for his resignation, accused of having colluded with Labour.

Tory MP William Wragg then tabled a parliamentary motion expressing no confidence in Hoyle which, by Wednesday evening, had been signed by 33 MPs, mostly from the SNP. This has now risen to 60.

With no government or SNP participation, Labour's amended resolution formally supporting an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" but negated by pro-Israeli caveats was passed without a formal vote. It is non-binding, and the government will not accept it.

SNP Westminster leader Stephen Flynn said in reply to an apology by Hoyle that it was "a disgrace that Sir Keir Starmer and the Speaker colluded to block Parliament voting on the SNP motion".

Starmer, a barrister and former Director of Public Prosecutions, was prepared to risk compromising the supposed "impartiality" of the Speaker to avert a major crisis of his leadership and of the entire Labour Party. After months of boasting of having crushed the "left", transforming Labour to prepare for government, he was forced to fend off the impact of mass hostility and opposition over his party's naked support for Israel's genocide.

On November 15 last year, the SNP had put an amendment to the King's Speech calling for a ceasefire, prompting Starmer to whip his MPs to abstain. Close to three quarters (142) did so, with just 56 voting for a ceasefire and eight members of Labour's frontbench resigning.

After months of slaughter, and with a ground assault on Rafah announced by Israel for March 10, Starmer feared that much bigger divisions in his party would trigger a crisis for the entire ruling class. This Tuesday,

accompanied by the shedding of crocodile tears by Starmer and other Zionist apologists such as Wes Streeting, Labour announced its “shift”, calling for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire” to allow aid into Gaza, rather than its previous “humanitarian pause”, and appealing for Israel to not proceed with its planned ground invasion of Rafah.

However, this was made conditional on Hamas agreeing to return the hostages it took on October 7 and lay down its weapons, i.e., surrender and await imprisonment and death, because “Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continues with violence”.

Aside from its use of the word “ceasefire”, Labour’s “new” position remains in line with the US, giving Israel veto power over any ceasefire. Labour’s motion was reportedly discussed with Starmer during his attendance at the Munich Security Conference. That conference saw the Biden administration formulate its own spoiler resolution supporting a “temporary ceasefire in Gaza as soon as practicable”, to justify blocking an Algerian call for a ceasefire at the UN Security Council Monday, on which the UK abstained.

It was the readiness of reportedly “dozens” of Labour Party “rebels” to accept this transparent fraud and for the rest to do the same when offered the chance by Hoyle, that allowed Starmer to claim victory.

This met no real opposition from the Labour “left”. Jeremy Corbyn issued his usual moral bromides, while refusing again to mention Starmer by name, describing only “an appalling day for British Parliament”. His former shadow chancellor John McDonnell boasted on X/Twitter that he had “used a point of order to record that I would’ve voted for both SNP motion & Labour amendment as they both contain call for immediate ceasefire.”

Hoyle’s intervention also meant that parliament did not have to formally back a Tory motion that could have been written by Benjamin Netanyahu. This called for “negotiations to agree an immediate humanitarian pause” while again explicitly supporting “Israel’s right to self-defence,” condemning “the slaughter, abuse and gender-based violence” of October 7 and stating that support for “moves towards a permanent sustainable ceasefire” depend on both the release of all hostages and the removal of Hamas from power with “the formation of a new Palestinian government.”

There were reports of Tory MPs not supporting the government, and even that its motion might have fallen. Now the government can focus on demands that Hoyle resigns—for breach of a convention that was only established in 1979 and in furtherance of supporting continued genocide in Gaza.

The main lesson to be drawn from the grotesque display of cynicism in parliament yesterday is that it offers no basis through which to oppose the genocide.

The SNP complains of being treated with contempt, but this contempt is directed at the millions of workers and youth who have demanded a ceasefire, the tens of thousands of Palestinians already murdered and the hundreds of thousands facing a death sentence in Rafah.

Outside parliament, thousands were gathered in a protest called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Stop the War Coalition. Both organisations have sought to corral mass protests behind the Labour Party, with claims it can be convinced to back a ceasefire. The sordid manoeuvres in parliament yesterday demonstrate the opposite.

The Tory government, the Labour Party, its backers in the trade union bureaucracy and all the institutions of the capitalist state are determined to back Israel as part of a broader effort to redivide the world and its resources through waging war against Russia in Ukraine, against Iran in the Middle East and preparing to take on China.

This is not the time for any further appeals to parliament, but for the systematic mobilisation of the working class against all the parties of the ruling class and its repressive state apparatus as part of a worldwide socialist movement against genocide and war.



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