

Intense discussions at UK public meetings on “How can the genocide in Gaza be stopped?”

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (UK) held a series of public meetings this month on the subject: How can the genocide in Gaza be stopped? The meetings provoked intense discussions on Gaza and the broader question of building a socialist leadership in the working class.

London

Around 30 workers and students attended the meeting in London, where the report was delivered by Socialist Equality Party (UK) Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps.

A lively discussion followed, with continuous questions and contributions from the floor. Many expressed their thanks at hearing such frank political criticisms levelled against the perspective of the ceasefire marches and the Stop the War Coalition, which they had found increasingly frustrating.

Most asked what the alternative was and several questioned why more people were not prepared to take action. Scripps argued for the necessity of a campaign oriented to the working class and mobilising its immense social force against the genocide. For this, a new political leadership was required.

Jeremy Corbyn quickly became a focus, with most participants expressing sympathy for his political opinions but agreeing that he had not taken up a fight against the Labour right-wing as he should, particularly over the antisemitism witch-hunt that prepared the way for the slander and criminalisation of the Gaza protests.

Scripps explained that Corbyn’s political actions, and the false presentation of Corbyn by various pseudo-left tendencies as the embodiment of left-wing sentiment, were behind much of the sense of paralysis referred to in the meeting. What was touted to workers and young people as the way forward in a struggle for socialist politics proved to be a total capitulation to British capitalism and imperialism. The same was true of forces like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

The answer was to take up a fight for genuine socialism based on the Trotskyist principles derived from a century’s experience of struggle against Stalinism, bourgeois nationalism, social democracy and petty-bourgeois radicalism. Such a programme could win the support of the millions being radicalised by economic crisis, the return of fascism and the descent into new and bloodier wars.

With many calling for various forms of direct action to stop

Israel’s war, or the supply of British support to Israel, Scripps made clear that the SEP was in full solidarity with all those taking a stand against the genocide and facing state repression. But he stressed that, to be successful, all action had to be rooted in a common political perspective aimed at mobilising the international working class and advancing the solution of a free and equal Arab-Jewish Palestine as part of a United Socialist States of the Middle East.

Leading anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist Piers Corbyn, the brother of Jeremy Corbyn, was denied entry to the meeting because of his attacks against health workers and collaboration with far-right anti-vax and Holocaust deniers. One of his associates made threatening remarks to SEP stewards.

Riza commented after the meeting, “It was a very interesting, thought-provoking talk by Tom. I learned a lot; it made me think a lot. It is a large international struggle we are dealing with here, and Palestine is part of it. We need to understand that struggle and sustain it in a robust manner. That means we need theory and history.

“The international struggle and revolution being talked about encompasses not just the rights of Palestinians and the liberation of Palestinians, but the rights and liberation of workers, the oppressed, hungry people, the elderly, all over the world, including this country, including Jews in Palestine as well, their rights have to be upheld.

“The mainstream left around the world tend to be too complicit and silent and not strong enough in voicing their concerns, beliefs, and overcoming this propaganda, this slander about antisemitism and racism; they need to stand up stronger, given precedents like Trotsky in the past, to really push forward the socialist agenda and socialist struggle.

“The establishment have too much power. Their opponents need to be more revolutionary and speak out more. I’m disappointed with Corbyn and the likes of Corbyn in Greece, Spain, etc., for not being vocal enough, not strong enough, and being too much a part of the establishment.”

Pati said the meeting had been a “very nice introduction, but I also liked the fact that people were very involved in the discussion. I am very involved in the Gaza issue, so I wanted to know more about how you can organise.”

The report had been “very academically grounded and

addressed a lot of questions about political involvement and how you need to have a clear understanding of the way you're fighting injustice and oppression. One point that was very good was that solidarity goes beyond borders."

John said "A lot of interesting opinions were expressed. People got a lot of insight into what the root causes of the problems not just in Palestine but generally, globally are and how they're linked to socialism."

Sheffield

An extensive discussion took place around how the Socialist Equality Party conceives of the development of Marxist culture under conditions where the mass media has control of information and the narrative, and what had been achieved by the socialist movement since the emergence of Marxism in the 1840's.

Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Chris Marsden reviewed extensively the origins of the Trotskyist movement and the false attempt to equate socialism with Stalinism. He explained that the growth of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the former USSR rested in the isolation of the first workers' state and the failure of the revolution to extend to the more advanced capitalist countries.

The Russian Revolution would not have been possible outside of the "high level of culture brought into the working class by the Marxist movement". He explained how Stalinism through the Moscow trials attempted to exterminate that culture by murdering its representatives and that the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement is the sole representative of the perspective of socialist internationalism for which Trotsky fought.

"Our conception is not a gradual building up of an alternative socialist culture. The most important element of culture is intellectual culture. This is identified today based on a political opposition to capitalism, opposition to imperialism, exploitation and oppression. Millions of people are animated by very real concerns about what is happening in world.

"Protest is vital, but it has to have a perspective. People are looking for leadership and if you want to fight it must be on a socialist programme."

A question was also asked about George Galloway's candidacy in the upcoming Rochdale by-election and what we thought about his intervention. "Galloway may win it, as Labour have abandoned their own candidate, but nothing good will come of it. Galloway is not building a political party for the working class. His politics is nationalist and right-wing, as is his orientation. His past attraction to Stalinism was most rooted in the politics of the Popular Front and his support for left/right unite politics and he admires [Donald] Trump and [Nigel] Farage."

Manchester

An attendee at the Manchester meeting raised the importance of workers taking industrial action to stop weapons and other war materials reaching Israel. After Marsden raised that the

Trades Union Congress and its main affiliated unions had prevented such action in Britain, the questioner said she understood that what was required was workers getting together themselves independently of the union leaders and not waiting on the bureaucracy.

Audience member Chris said, "The meeting went beyond slogans and demands, and provided an analysis of the political character of those leading the most visible 'stop the war' protests, separating the genuine immediate necessities of stopping the genocide from the political dead ends that uncritically following these figures and organisations would bring for Palestinians and for the working class as a whole."

Inverness

Several people attended from the regular Highland Palestine demonstration outside Inverness Town House opposing the genocide in Gaza as well as IYSSE supporters in the area.

One attendee asked about the trade unions and whether they had offered any support. Speaker Steve James replied that some trade union leaders had made statements calling for a ceasefire, but these were not matched by the slightest effort to mobilise their members.

Their statements were a smokescreen, while the trade union apparatus continued to work with the warmongers.

One attendee suggested that "national culture" would somehow make it impossible for workers to unify against the Gaza genocide and the broader threat of war. SEP members pointed to the powerful objective trends undermining a nationalist outlook in every single country. They cited the globalisation of production and communication, the shared experiences of workers everywhere, workers' capacity to communicate globally and instantaneously, the huge expansion of the working class as making it potentially the most powerful social force on the planet.

But objective trends on their own were not enough. A conscious international perspective and leadership was necessary to bring workers together in the struggle to abolish capitalism and the nation state system and replace it with socialism.

After the meeting a former postal worker said he had been a Corbyn supporter but agreed with the analysis presented in the report of Corbyn's role. He was disgusted at the role played by the Communication Workers Union leadership in the recent national strike and agreed to further discussion with the SEP.



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