

How can the genocide in Gaza be stopped? The fight for an independent anti-war movement in the working class

Chris Marsden
25 February 2024

This report was delivered by Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Chris Marsden at a public meeting in Sheffield on February 21, 2024. The meeting was the last in a series with others held in London, Manchester and Inverness.

What is now taking place in Gaza is a crime of unimaginable brutality. Millions have mobilised day after day, week on week since October 7 to stop it.

Yet today the news is filled with reports of the desperate plight of more than a million Palestinians trapped in Rafah, subjected daily to bombardments and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) attacks, starving to death even as the World Food Program suspends all aid convoys due to a “breakdown in civil order”—by which is meant desperate people trying to access food from the just 15 missions allowed in by Israel out of a planned 77.

Now Israel has set a date for a full-scale ground invasion, the most provocative possible, the beginning of Ramadan on March 10.

Yet with working people around the world fearing a crime beside which even Israel’s previous vile crimes will pale, and amid warnings that the entire Middle East will erupt, all opponents of genocide are offered as a counterforce are variously formulated resolutions in the United Nations Security Council, and here in parliament tonight urging Israel to call a ceasefire.

Some of these calls are for an “immediate ceasefire”, like Algeria’s which yesterday was blocked again by the US and abstained on again by the UK—for the third time!

The Biden administration has even felt obliged to formulate its own face-saving alternative which is not yet scheduled to be voted on. It calls for a “temporary ceasefire” and only “as soon as practicable,” married to a polite appeal for Israel not to proceed with the planned offensive against Rafah by the IDF, a military force funded and armed by Washington!

In parliament now, as we are meeting, a second Scottish National Party motion for an immediate ceasefire, and a threatened second rebellion by Labour MPs backing it, has prompted Keir Starmer and his fellow war criminals to propose an alternative. Labour says an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire” to allow aid into Gaza should happen, but conditional on Hamas agreeing to lay down its weapons, i.e., surrender and await imprisonment and death, and return the hostages it took on October 7 because “Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continues with violence”.

The truth is that Labour’s position is in line with the US position in providing Israel with both an excuse and a veto on a ceasefire.

The Tories have responded with their own amendment that could have been drafted by Netanyahu, calling for “negotiations to agree an immediate humanitarian pause” that explicitly “supports Israel’s right to self-defence” and “condemns the slaughter, abuse and gender-based

violence” of October 7. Support for “moves towards a permanent sustainable ceasefire” are predicated on the release of all hostages and the removal of Hamas from power with “the formation of a new Palestinian government.”

Under parliamentary procedure, the Tories as the government should have spiked Labour’s amendment. But the Speaker has ruled that both the SNP’s motion and Labour’s amendment can be voted on in a clear effort to block a clear call for an immediate ceasefire and save Starmer from a rebellion.

[These remarks were made as events unfolded and before parliament was plunged into chaos over the Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle’s manoeuvre hatched in consultation with Starmer ended in chaos, which is detailed here.]

The essential fact is that no matter which way the voting goes tonight, Israel will proceed with its planned mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing campaign.

What does this all mean for opponents of the genocide of the Palestinians?

There has been nothing comparable to the global eruption of outrage and opposition against Israel’s genocidal assault since 2003’s global opposition to the planned US led-invasion and the lockstep support of Tony Blair’s Labour government that manufactured many of the lies on which it was based.

The Iraq invasion began on March 19 and Baghdad fell 22 days later, on April 9, with Bush grotesquely declaring an end to major combat operations on May Day. The US inspired bloodletting, of course continued. But the failure of mass protests to stop a war that the US based on a strategy it described as “shock and awe”, or what Nazi Germany called Blitzkrieg, led to the collapse of the mass anti-war movement that was offered no perspective to go forward.

Many of the same essential problems face defenders of the Palestinians today. There has been no collapse of the protests against Gaza, and there won’t be. But it is still urgent that a policy is adopted and the type of mass movement needed to stop the genocide is built.

This means seriously addressing the political problems of the protests so far, above all the political perspective and leading bodies organising these protests.

That is not something people initially concern themselves with. Thousands of Palestinians were being murdered and Gaza reduced to rubble. And long established, high profile bodies were in a position to call for demonstrations to which masses of people responded.

The programme of the Stop the War Coalition

But whereas those who took to the streets were animated by deeply felt outrage, the responsibility of a self-professed leadership, especially one called the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), was to advance a programme on which this declared aim is to be realised.

No such perspective has ever been advanced, either by Stop the War, its allies such as the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, or their various international counterparts.

That is what will be discussed tonight to explain the key issue raised by the title of our meeting, “How can the genocide in Gaza be stopped?”

The central demand of the protest marches here in the UK and elsewhere has been the call for a ceasefire. This demand is directed towards Rishi Sunak’s Conservative government, and no one believes it would adopt such a policy without being forced to do so.

Stop the War said this would be accomplished through sheer force of numbers and by politically centring efforts on persuading the Labour Party and the trade unions to in turn persuade the UK government to join a worldwide alliance of like-minded governments supporting a negotiated end to the conflict. The aim then would be to isolate Washington and convince the Biden administration it was making what Stop the War described as a “strategic blunder” threatening its own interests in its unswerving support for Israel.

This is my best attempt to summarise the political stupidities offered as the means of ending the war in Gaza.

Most people would see the leader of the Stop the War as former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, and he is both its figurehead and the living embodiment of everything that is wrong with it. But the key political leaders of the movement are various representatives of the pseudo-left group Counterfire, a right-wing split from the Socialist Workers Party, and Andrew Murray, a public schoolboy and Stalin admirer of the Communist Party of Britain, who also functioned as an adviser to Corbyn when he was still leader of the Labour Party.

This is how Stop the War’s convenor Lindsey German of Counterfire argued for its line at the very beginning, on October 16. She admitted:

“The mass movement in solidarity with the Palestinians has never been more broad-based, but never has it been so abandoned by political figures, especially left Labour MPs...”

The main task of the anti-Gaza demonstrations, she insisted, was to inject steel into the spines of these creatures, because their capitulation to Starmer “makes it harder for the young students to demonstrate, harder for those who want their voice to be heard...” With then Home Secretary Suella Braverman wanting to criminalise the Gaza demonstrations, German added, “It is much harder to face down these threats... without those in elected positions speaking out.”

German then made an appeal to their self-interest, arguing, “This absence of Labour MPs is probably also counterproductive electorally, as it’s hard to see why those being politicised over the Palestine question should look to Labour, given its approach to the question being indistinguishable from a right-wing Tory government.”

On October 23, German also admitted that on the demonstrations, “The trade union bloc was quite small” and “none from the big general unions” were taking part. “This reluctance is no doubt in part due to closeness to the Labour leadership and the coming election, but also in part a continuation of retreats on foreign policy that we have seen at recent TUC [Trades Union Congress] congresses.”

German argued that bodies on the streets and mass pressure would eventually force Labour, the trade unions and all those in power to change course, writing on October 30 that “Labour MPs are now worried that the Muslim votes that Labour took for granted will no longer go to them but to other parties or to abstention... The demonstrations have prompted even a few Labour MPs to speak at demos and the movement has got increased support for ceasefire from politicians.”

German titled her piece, “The growing mass opposition to Israel is

crucial in forcing change.” Change for her means changing the minds of a few capitalist politicians.

This was what Stop the War offered up to the 800,000 who marched in London on November 11, demanding a ceasefire in the biggest protest in the UK since the 2003 march against the Iraq War—to people who hated the warmonger Starmer and “party of NATO” and Zionism.

On November 15, Stop the War’s perspective was finally put to the test when the first UK vote was held on Israel’s genocidal assault on the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) ceasefire amendment to the King’s Speech.

Starmer did not budge an inch, whipping his MPs to oppose and the motion met with a resounding No. Close to three quarters (142) of Labour MPs followed Starmer’s order to abstain and only 56 voted for a ceasefire. In the vote’s aftermath, eight members of Labour’s frontbench resigned. As we noted, “More revolting still was the refusal of a single nominally ‘left’ MP to break from the party, after weeks of near blanket refusal to even criticise Starmer by name for his criminal collusion with genocide.”

This includes Corbyn, who with just one single exception I have found, has never mentioned Starmer by name and has not specifically criticised the line of the Labour Party during the past months. He instead conducts himself as some form of pacifist missionary, persuading Sunak and Starmer, and through them Biden and Netanyahu to beat their swords onto ploughshares.

In *Jacobin* on November 9 this centred on his call for “an immediate ceasefire, followed by an urgent investigation by the International Criminal Court”, a body that neither Israel nor the US recognise. Corbyn even suggested that “The UK government has the authority and responsibility to call for this investigation”.

His public comment on the parliamentary vote was made in a November 21 article for *Jacobin*, where he declared, “History will judge those who had the opportunity to stop this massacre but chose to cheer on war instead.” Until “history” gets it act together, however, nothing can be expected from Corbyn. He concluded, “there has to be a plan, that “begins with an immediate cease-fire to stop the further loss of life. And it ends with freedom and dignity for all Palestinians and Israelis, living in joy, friendship, and peace.”

Amen.

On December 2, Stop the War met to discuss the supposedly tremendous success of their campaign. There Murray responded to growing dissatisfaction with what he summarised as “marches from A to B” that don’t achieve anything, insisting they had in fact secured “the biggest rebellion against the Starmer leadership”, proving “we are on the right route.”

The task was to continue putting pressure on the Labour Party by threatening to refuse to vote for its MPs at the next general election!

Murray was arguing in opposition to what he had identified as the possibility of opposition to imperialist war becoming the focus of a revolutionary movement of the working class. In a November 17 *Morning Star* article, he insisted “Never Underestimate People Power.” He wrote:

“Let’s bring Lenin in here. In his celebrated Left-Wing Communism he devoted a passage to anticipating what might precipitate a revolutionary situation in Britain, the mightiest capitalist state in the world as of 1920. This is what he [Lenin as quoted by Murray] wrote: ‘It is possible that the breach will be forced, the ice broken, by a parliamentary crisis, or by a crisis arising from colonial and imperialist contradictions, which are hopelessly entangled and are becoming increasingly painful and acute.’”

From this Murray concluded, “Any sort of plausible alternative able to capture the boiling disgust with the government-opposition synchronised support for slaughter would make an instant impact.”

Stop the War boost Corbyn and reject break with the Labour bureaucracy

This is the reason for his call for a protest vote, and endless fawning on Corbyn and company, as an alternative to building an actual revolutionary opposition to Labour.

Corbyn, when he spoke, maintained silence on Starmer's Labour Party. After boasting of the 125 MPs who voted for a ceasefire, he simply noted that "Large numbers of others didn't."

When asked whether such politicians will ever be forced to listen, Corbyn replied, "Yes they'll be forced to listen because had we called that vote a week earlier we wouldn't have got the 125 that we did, voting for a permanent ceasefire. We'd have got much less."

Attention then moved to boosting the United Nations and its institutions and the calls by some member states for a ceasefire—in the Security Council, then the General Assembly. All that has ever resulted from this to this day was the November 24 "operational pause" in Gaza to facilitate a prisoner exchange, accurately described by the WSWS as providing time for Israel "to reload its weapons for the next stage in its ethnic cleansing of the enclave."

We explained, "In the mouths of everyone from President Macron in France to the despotic rulers of various Arab regimes, calls for a ceasefire are a transparent cover for their active collusion with Israel in its efforts to ethnically cleanse Gaza, to be followed by the West Bank and Israel itself."

The next institution advanced as the saviour of the Palestinians was the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague, with the case taken out by South Africa accusing Israel of genocide that had its provisional hearing on January 11 and 12. There was a devastating indictment presented against Israel which was followed by millions. Corbyn sat in the courtroom.

On January 13, Corbyn wrote in *Jacobin* of how "the hearing will go down in history as a momentous display of international solidarity from a people who know what it's like to endure—and dismantle—apartheid... "South Africa is determined not only to be on the right side of history, but to change the course of it..."

Everyone was told to wait eagerly for the provisional ruling of the ICJ on South Africa's request for "provisional measures" to safeguard the Palestinians, including a demand for a ceasefire. When this came on January 26, the ICJ found that some of the acts committed by Israel in Gaza "appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the [genocide] Convention." But whereas it called for Israel to take measures to protect civilians from harm, it only called for a report to be issued in a month's time on whether it had done so. There was no call for a ceasefire.

Israel proceeded with its murderous rampage, with its fascist security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir writing on X: "Hague-schmague." This stand was supported, naturally and predictably, by Washington and London, leaving Lindsey German to offer the hope that "complicity with Israel" will "will cause huge problems for western imperialism over the longer term."

Stop the War and related tendencies never pose the need for workers to break free of the Labour Party and the trade union apparatus on which it depends. Holding up "Corbynism" as an anti-war tendency plays the essential role of maintaining the prospect of forcing Labour to make a U turn on Gaza.

This is Corbyn's role—the receptacle of lost hopes and the prophet of compromise and avoidance of conflict. He is the last line of defence of the bureaucracy and a key figure in protecting British imperialism from facing a challenge from below that would break out of the stranglehold of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

Corbyn's defenders have taken to calling him the best prime minister we never had. Excuse me, but he was the most ineffective Labour leader that we did have.

He was popularly elected Labour leader in 2015 mainly because of his anti-war and anti-imperialist record, especially regarding the 2003 Iraq War and his defence of the Palestinians. But with millions of workers backing him and hundreds of thousands joining the party to defeat a right-wing plan to depose him in 2016, he instead presided over an extended rout, ending with his replacement in 2020 by Starmer.

And of all the issues of principle on which he bowed to the right, most grotesque was when, after quitting as chair of the STWC on becoming Labour leader, he abandoned his opposition to NATO and the nuclear deterrent, committed to NATO military spending targets and gave a free vote to Labour MPs on military action against Syria.

As we have also stressed, the witch-hunt of anti-Zionist protesters opposing the Gaza genocide as antisemites was prefigured by the vile campaign against Corbyn and his supporters in the Labour Party. But it was Corbyn who facilitated this witch-hunt by refusing to oppose it and even presiding over the expulsion of some of his closest allies.

To sum up, Corbyn, who embodies the political failure of the Labour "left" and of national reformism, is still held up as a leader so that Stop the War and others can claim that a viable left reformist and pacifist alternative can still emerge from within the Labour Party under the impact of "People Power." This, they insist is "what workers want" or is the most they will accept.

Counterfire, the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, and the rest are not seeking some tactical means of propagandising for "genuine socialism" by reaching out to those who have illusions in Corbyn. They act as opponents of socialism. Boosting Corbyn is a mechanism for opposing the growth of revolutionary politics in the working class.

Pro-capitalist and anti-revolutionary "foreign policy" of the pseudo-left

Lindsey German gave a revealing February 2 interview to the *New Left Review* on what she sees as emerging from the global opposition to the genocide in Gaza. And it is not a break with Labour and a turn to socialism.

She is asked whether the mass protests could "open up the space for an electoral challenge to Starmer's Labour?" She replies that there will be protest campaigns, but "It still looks like Labour will win a clear majority."

"One of the big problems," she argues "is that the major trade unions remain tied to Labour." And "despite the strike wave that's taken place over the last two years, the unions haven't made significant gains in terms of their membership or influence. They are still relatively weak formations. So they'll be keen to strike deals with Starmer once he gets into power, and reluctant to support autonomous political initiatives."

This is a lie. The trade unions have not made advances "despite the strike wave," but because they betrayed it. Nevertheless, she concludes this means that "the larger unions will do everything they can to try to preserve a Labour government, even if its policies—on everything from austerity to the Middle East—are merely an echo of the Tories."

Not once does German suggest that workers either can or must oppose this bureaucracy and break from it. She does not want a movement to emerge that threatens Counterfire's opportunist relations with the Labour left and the trade union bureaucracy and the comfortable lifestyle that comes with it. The message is, "Complain and protest all you want, but only to pressure the bureaucracy into hopefully reining in British and US imperialism."

These are the social and political considerations dictating what can be described as the foreign policy of the pseudo-left, which is both capitalist to its core and based on an explicit repudiation of the possibility of its revolutionary overthrow. What Stop the War want is for British

imperialism to take its distance from US imperialism and therefore be less militaristic and less nationalist. Its perspective for realising this goal is to urge alliances with supposedly similarly less militaristic global powers, above all with China and the “Global South”.

It was Counterfire’s John Rees who on February 6, described the war on Gaza as “A strategic blunder to hasten US decline”. He writes that Israel’s “deploying a state-of-the-art military against a largely unarmed, at best poorly armed, population” means that “military defeat in any conventional sense was never a likely outcome for Israel.”

However, he offers as a consolation, “Military defeat and political victory define many liberation struggles.” As proof he cites the fact that “The Vietnamese lost three million souls compared to 55,000 US casualties before the war ended.”

Today, with “Israel and the US haemorrhaging global support,” which he says is “a fact crystallised by the now ongoing International Court of Justice (ICJ) investigation of Israel on charges of genocide”, then “the Palestinians may finally be on the verge of justice.”

The isolation of the US and its ally Britain is “part of a trend in which power has been ebbing from the US... Its military is the best-equipped in the world. Its force projection capacities are unmatched. But its military superiority is no longer accompanied, as it was for most of the 20th century, by overwhelming economic predominance. Its economy may still be the largest but it faces a sustained challenge from China and is set to fall behind its rival by the mid-21st century. Economies in Asia, notably India, and Latin America are now independent centres of capital accumulation not so directly dependent on links with the US...

“Meanwhile, the real challenger to US global power, China, is now growing faster militarily than it is economically.”

There you have it. Millions may die for years to come at the hands of the “best equipped military in the world”, but sometime by the mid-21st century, 25 years or so from now, China and other “now independent centres of capital accumulation” will supplant the US as global hegemon. In the meantime, protests must be mounted to give the US pause for thought and oppose what Stop the War describes on its X/Twitter account as “Britain’s addiction to foreign wars”, to secure “a foreign policy based on peace” that will hopefully prevent the world from being blown to bits.

As we explained, “The main problem with all such scenarios is that they assume the US will respond to such a challenge to its global hegemony by rolling over and accepting its natural demotion. Reality proves the opposite... the US response to an economic challenge from China that it cannot overcome by economic means alone drives its turn to a military solution.

“The Biden administration’s plan is for the genocide in Gaza to be followed by military action against Iran and its allies, in what Israel’s defence minister Yoav Gallant has described as a ‘multi-front war’ across ‘seven theatres: Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria [the West Bank], Iraq, Yemen and Iran’. The US is behind this drive, which it calculates will consolidate its grip over the oil-rich Middle East and strengthen its hand in an ongoing conflict with both China and Russia.”

For a revolutionary socialist anti-war movement

Everything Stop the War does serves to politically disarm the working class to the political realities they face. These are:

1. The US and Britain have seized on Israel’s assault on Gaza to put into effect longstanding military objectives targeting Syria, Lebanon and most of all Iran, aimed at total imperialist domination over the resources of the Middle East. They have taken the first steps in launching such a campaign with the bombing of Yemen, Iraq and Syria, while Israel targets

Hezbollah in Lebanon, as they continue to assemble a massive naval and military presence in the Mediterranean.

2. The war on Gaza is one theatre of an expanding global conflict, with NATO waging a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, while the AUKUS military alliance is spearheading a military build-up against China. That is Washington’s real response to the threatened loss of its global domination.

3. There is no basis for opposing the genocide in Gaza outside of a political struggle against the governments and nominal opposition parties such as Labour backing Israel, and the trade union bureaucracies that have done nothing to defend the Palestinians. Neither the Tory government nor Labour will change course over issues impacting on the fundamental interests of British imperialism.

4. Waging this struggle demands the systematic exposure of the role of the “left” Labour MPs and trade union windbags. Because it is they who prevent the formation of a genuine anti-war movement through their suppression of every struggle by workers against the ruling class, as they did throughout last year’s strike wave and will attempt to do so going forward.

In our polemic against Corbyn and Stop the War, we cited Trotsky, writing in 1927, on “The Struggle for Peace and the Anglo-Russian Committee” where he painted a devastating picture of the service provided by the official “left” for British imperialism.

I will cite it again here:

The “left” criticizes the government within such limits as do not interfere with its role as exploiter and robber. The “left” gives expression to the dissatisfaction of the masses within these limits, so as to restrain them from revolutionary action.

In case the dissatisfaction of the masses breaks through to the outside, the “left” seeks to dominate the movement in order to strangle it. Were the “left” not to criticize, not to expose, not to attack the bourgeoisie, it would be unable to serve it “in its own way”.

If it is admitted that the “left” is a ballast, then it is admitted that it is the useful, appropriate, necessary, succouring ballast without which the ship of British imperialism would long ago have gone down.

[Trotsky’s Writings on Britain: Volume 2, p. 210, New Park Publications 1974]

How do we go forward? By basing ourselves on political realities, rather than illusions and lies.

Ending mass murder and ethnic cleansing in Gaza and opposing the expanding war waged by the NATO imperialist powers and their proxies in the Middle East and Ukraine, ultimately targeting China, demand the development of a global movement of the working class against the capitalist class and its repressive state apparatus.

Delay only strengthens the enemy, as the state is fine-tuned to repress political and social opposition while the economy is put on a war footing through the destruction of wages, ramped up exploitation and the decimation of essential services.

None of this is easy, but we do not live in a time of easy solutions.

Once the millions who have taken part week after week in mass protests in defence of the Palestinians turn consciously and systematically to the factories and workplaces impacted by all these attacks, then a powerful force can be brought onto the arena of struggle with the power to defeat imperialism once and for all.

The fight must be for working class action, including strikes and boycotts of arms companies, docks and airports, and to prevent the

shipment of any items to Israel with a military use. The demand must be raised for a political general strike, linking the struggle against war to the defeat of the savage austerity imposed by governments internationally to pay for it, and against the destruction of basic democratic rights by a ruling class determined to crush all opposition to its crimes.

This is not a national struggle. The working class is an international class, with shared interest in facing a common imperialist enemy. It is its international character that makes the working class the revolutionary class capable of overthrowing capitalism and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states that is the root cause of war, and establishing socialism on a world scale.

The development of a mass socialist anti-war movement on these foundations requires new organisations, a new perspective and the building of a political leadership, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution and its British section, the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact