

Multiple campaigns plan to stand against UK Labour Party candidates

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Several campaign groups have been set up ahead of the general election due later this year, and independent candidacies declared, with the intention of running against the Labour Party. All focus on opposition to Labour's support for Israel's mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians in Gaza. Most cite the broader rightward lurch of the party under Sir Keir Starmer.

Among the groups are "We Deserve Better", led by *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones; "No Ceasefire No Vote", centred on the Stop the War Coalition; "The Muslim Vote", backed by various Muslim civil society organisations; and "Collective", launched by former South African member of parliament for the African National Congress Andrew Feinstein.

George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain and the Socialist Party's Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will also be standing slates of candidates and have discussed coordinating their campaigns.

The formation of anti-Labour slates is an acknowledgement of the hostility among workers and young people to the party, above all for its collusion with genocide but also for its total alignment with Tory economic and social policy and naked hostility to striking workers and democratic rights.

Latest reports are that another 23,000 members have quit, following the hundreds of thousands before them, primarily in response to Gaza. And millions have concluded that despite massive hostility to the Conservative government and the likelihood of a Labour landslide, installing Starmer in Number 10 will only put new faces behind the wheel of the juggernaut of austerity and war.

There is a growing sentiment in favour of a genuine left-wing alternative. But the aim of the various electoral fronts and initiatives is to limit workers to one of two dead end alternatives: pressuring the Labour Party to the left, above all to back a ceasefire in Gaza, or at some point forming a new "left" party modelled on Labour and hopefully led by its former leader Jeremy Corbyn.

What is specifically opposed is the urgent and necessary political break by the working class from Labourism and the adoption of a new revolutionary internationalist programme of struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

A measure of the crisis facing Labour is the founding of "We Deserve Better" by Jones, who published a self-aggrandising "farewell" to the party in the *Guardian* this month, having for decades been known for his unswerving loyalty to the Labour Party apparatus. He is notorious for posing as a supporter of Corbyn while acting as an echo chamber for the bogus antisemitism campaign against his supporters—appearing on platforms of the Jewish Labour Movement which acted throughout as a front for the witch-hunt animated by the

Blairites, Tories and Israeli and US governments.

In November 2020, on *BBC Politics Live*, for example, he decried Corbyn and those around him for their "lack of emotional intelligence" and insisted that Labour must unite to implement the finding of the Equality and Human Rights Commission report into alleged antisemitism in the party:

"All the way through this there's been this problem of a lack of emotional intelligence," he intoned. "If it ends up that the people on the Left become the guys getting defensive over antisemitism on TV, there's no future for the Left in this country."

In the same spirit, he wrote a column for the *Guardian* in 2020 titled "Starmer can succeed, and he deserves our support," arguing, "anyone with progressive sympathies should swing fully behind him."

Appealing twice for "critical friendship" towards the Labour leader, Jones argued for Corbyn's supporters not to "embrace a scorched earth policy" and "actively destabilise" Starmer's leadership, as the Blairites had done to Corbyn, because "It would achieve nothing except to prolong the Tory nightmare and alienate the wider membership... dissent should be in the context of willing the triumph of a radical Labour government."

In February 2023, writing on the expulsion of Corbyn from the Parliamentary Labour Party, Jones acknowledged Starmer's intention of the "eradication of the left from the Labour Party," but was still content to issue Cassandra-like warnings that "the most interesting ideas are bubbling away on the left: banishing them from Labour's future is an act of self-harm."

Today, Jones's website argues, "The Tories are toast. Let's send Labour a message." Further down, "If we don't act, we're showing Labour they can ignore us and continue to lurch further to the right without any accountability."

In practice, this means backing a collection of "Green and left-wing independent candidates", with Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer and activist Leanne Mohamad cited as examples, "as well as socialist Labour MPs." In other words: a limited electoral front promoting the fiction of pressuring a viciously right-wing, pro-war, pro-business Labour Party into changing its policies.

None of this prevents the Socialist Workers Party from giving Jones's project its stamp of approval: "Jones shows which way the wind is blowing among substantial sections of Labour activists. Let's hope he encourages many more people to leave Labour and start debating a socialist alternative."

All such projects, even one fronted by Jones, must be seen as "new possibilities to grasp. Some of that will be reflected in elections, and electoral campaigns can be a focus for people's anger."

The SWP are even more enthusiastic about "No Ceasefire No

Vote,” which writes similarly of creating “mass pressure for every candidate to call for a ceasefire and an end to the occupation... Labour must have no place to hide over its complicity in genocide. Every candidate must be asked, repeatedly and assertively, where they stand—and pressed to stand for what is right. We stand ready to support parliamentary candidates who call for a ceasefire, and challenge those who refuse.”

If Labour did belatedly back a ceasefire call, this would change nothing. It already made a feint of doing so in February to give some of its MPs an excuse not to support a stronger ceasefire call by the Scottish National Party. Even “Genocide Joe” Biden is making a pretence of opposing the Netanyahu government’s plans for a ground invasion of Rafah that will leave tens of thousands dead in its wake. All such conversions to the merits of a ceasefire are an attempt by Israel’s partners in crime to conceal their own guilt.

The Socialist Party is also an advocate of “We Deserve Better”, “No Ceasefire No Vote” and other independent campaigns, which it is seeking to bring under its Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) umbrella. Again, its actual perspective is for a ginger group on a Starmer-led Labour government. Calling for a “list of workers’ candidates”, the SP writes that “a number could be elected as a left-wing bloc under a Starmer government, acting as a lightning rod for workers’ discontent that will inevitably develop.”

The working class’s need for a “mass party of our own” is indefinitely deferred. The proposed “bloc of MPs in the next parliament,” it is argued, “could help lay the basis for the development of a mass workers party.”

Two organisations have already put themselves forward to fulfil this role: George Galloway’s Workers Party and Feinstein’s Collective. The Workers Party’s particular nationalist populist politics will be addressed in detail in a future article.

Collective was announced at the “No Ceasefire No Vote” conference on March 2. The personnel involved make clear the politics. Among the leading figures, besides Feinstein, are Pamela Fitzpatrick, a co-director of Corbyn’s Peace and Justice Project, former Labour MP Claudia Webbe, Stop the War Convenor Lindsey German, former Corbyn advisor Andrew Murray, former leader of the Respect Party and now Labour Party member Salma Yaqoob, and former Labour member and now Independent Mayor of North Tyne Jamie Driscoll.

Among the organisations “in solidarity” are Transform Politics and the For the Many Network. Transform is the new incarnation of Left Unity—the moribund campaign set up with film director Ken Loach, now approaching his ninetieth birthday, as its figurehead—which championed a return to “the spirit” of the 1945 Labour government. For the Many seeks “to reunite the Left around the socialist principles that informed the 2016-2019 Labour Party manifesto.”

Collective, in sum, is a collection of all the flotsam and jetsam of the Corbyn project, cast adrift after the abject failure of its stated goal of pushing the Labour Party to the “left”.

It has been born of a reluctant acknowledgement that the pipe dream of transforming the Labour Party into a vehicle for socialism is rejected by millions of workers and young people. To them is now offered another political dead-end: to build a new movement based on a manifesto drawn up by Corbyn’s advisers with the intention of appeasing his Blairite critics—one that accepted membership of NATO, its military spending targets and nuclear weapons, lightly peppered with social reforms so meagre they would have once been scoffed at by the most right-wing post-war Labourite.

It says everything that the formal launching of Collective as a party is to be delayed until *after* the general election, most likely to accommodate Corbyn, the much-desired figurehead of the party, who wants to contest his Islington North seat as an Independent and not challenge a Starmer election victory.

This is what is offered up to workers and youth whose opposition to Labour is above all based on opposition to its naked warmongering.

What is the real record of the Corbyn project Collective is seeking to revive? A mass movement of workers and young people seeking a reckoning with the Blairites blocked and demobilised; proclaimed opposition to war turned into an acceptance of NATO, nuclear weapons and a free vote on airstrikes in the Middle East; councils instructed to enforce Tory austerity; capitulation before an antisemitism witch-hunt now used as the basis for the criminalisation of mass protests against the Gaza genocide.

The product of these betrayals is a party led by Starmer, who hails Margaret Thatcher for dragging “Britain out of its stupor by setting loose our natural entrepreneurialism” and hails Labour as “the party of NATO” and unswerving defence of Zionism and the genocide of the Palestinians.

The self-imposed rout of the Corbynites is so complete that, according to internal Labour Party polling, and after membership has fallen from 552,000 in 2020 to 336,000 today, four out of every five members back Starmer’s leadership.

Under such circumstances, to suggest that Labour can be placed under progressive popular pressure, and its “left” wing be revived, is risible. For the same people responsible for the Corbyn fiasco to put themselves forward as the leaders of a new “alternative” to the Labour Party is insulting. In any line of work other than politics, people with such a disastrous record would be thrown out of their profession.

Whatever distance the SWP and SP now take from Collective and, in the SWP’s stern words, “a Labour Party mark II under Jeremy Corbyn”, their record proves that they would quickly align themselves with the organisation should Corbyn take up the seat reserved for him at its head, with all “criticism” either muted or framed as friendly advice.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects any support for these bankrupt tendencies and their efforts to stem and politically neuter the rebellion now underway against Labour.

The SEP will be participating in the elections on a programme of socialist internationalism, aimed at mobilising the international working class against war and the attacks on democratic rights and living standards this demands.

Doing so means opposing *every* Labour MP. Regardless of their formal position on a ceasefire, they represent a party of genocide and war. It means rejecting every campaign which puts forward figures like Corbyn or his associates in the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs as allies. These initiatives are not the wave of the future, but a block on a mass radicalisation of workers and young people which must be carried through to its full revolutionary conclusion in the building of a mass Trotskyist party.



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