

UK National Education Union backs conference resolution opposing genocide in Palestine, defying antisemitism slurs

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In defiance of a campaign of intimidation by Britain's Conservative government and the mass media, delegates to the annual conference of the National Education Union (NEU) voted for a resolution in defence of the Palestinian people against "genocide" by a "racist apartheid Israeli government".

The resolution, passed overwhelmingly by the largest teaching union in the UK with over 465,000 members, gave expression to the deep-seated opposition within the profession to Israel's war against the Palestinians. It delivered a blow against the relentless slanders by the Tory government and the Labour opposition under Sir Keir Starmer, who denounce opponents of the Israeli genocide as "antisemites."

The effort by a small element of pro-Zionist members within the conference to push the intimidatory line that the event was a "mass anti-Zionist rally" was decisively rejected. Arguing against an amendment that referenced the International Court of Justice's ruling that Israel must take measures to prevent genocide, pro-Zionist delegate Peter Block said there had been an "avalanche of hatred directed against Jews".

He drew shouts of "shame" after telling delegates that the conference "has taken on the character of an anti-Zionist rally not quite of Nuremberg proportions but approaching it." and claiming the motion was a "glorification of Hamas."

The resolution was nothing of the sort. The text adopted insisted, "The siege of Gaza, and the collective punishment of its people, must end immediately" adding, "Israel's hard-right, racist government is the main driver of conflict, violence and war".

It calls on the UK to stop "being an enabler of Israel's apartheid policies", while an amendment was passed stating that "attempts to clamp down on the right to

protest and discuss the issue must be opposed."

The head of the Palestinian mission to the UK, Dr. Husam Zomlot, addressed the conference and was given a lengthy standing ovation, with many participants wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh and chanting "Free, Free, Palestine" after his speech. Some shouted "From the river to the sea", and were joined by others responding, "Palestine will be free." Dr. Zomlot denounced the "normalisation of the mass murder of children" in his speech.

Speaking after the passing of the motion, NEU General Secretary Daniel Kebede said, "The relentless Israeli bombardment of Gaza has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians since 7 October, over 70 percent of whom are women and children.

"Children should not pay the price of war. Yet more children have been killed in Gaza in four months than in four years of worldwide wars according to the UN. More than a million of Gaza's children are displaced and education has completely stopped, with more than 80 percent of all school buildings damaged or destroyed."

Secretary for Education Gillian Keegan, having attempted to whip up a reaction against the resolution in the lead-up to the conference, responded by claiming that the votes were "wholly inappropriate and completely ignore the horrific terrorist attacks committed by Hamas on 7 October... These motions reflect the NEU's divisive ideology, which I don't believe is representative of our teachers."

Keegan made veiled threats against teachers who oppose the genocide in Gaza that the draconian Prevent legislation could be used against them. Prevent has been used in schools and the public sector to require workers who believe a student or staff member may be "susceptible to radicalisation" to inform the police for

assessment. Radicalisation, according to the Department of Education, is “the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups”.

Keegan insisted, “Teachers have a duty to remain politically impartial and to ensure all sides of contested views are presented fairly and without bias or prejudice. These proposals will cause significant hurt to members of the Jewish community and the thousands of Jewish children and parents in British schools.”

Having claimed that the resolution passed is in support of Hamas, Keegan has set the terms for an escalation of the witch-hunt of teachers and students. Prevent guidance documents are already circulating identifying “socialism”, “communism” and “anti-fascism” as gateways to terrorism. This deeply authoritarian definition provides for the suppression of virtually any form of political opposition and eviscerates the rights to free speech and political association.

The latest Home Office figures show that between April 2022 and March 2023, (before the Israeli war on Gaza) 6,817 people were referred to Prevent. Over 2,100 referrals were for children under the age of 14, including 256 individuals under the age of 10. The education sector made the highest number of referrals (2,684 or 39 percent), followed by the police (1,943 or 29 percent). Since data recording began in 2015/16, education referrals have accounted for 33 percent of all referrals.

Islamophobic stereotypes of “extremism” and “terrorism” play a major role in Prevent referrals, with people of Muslim faith referred eight times more frequently than non-Muslims in the healthcare sector, according to Amnesty International.

Another amendment put to the NEU conference also supported by delegates called on the union to campaign for the abolition of the government’s Prevent anti-extremism laws.

Mat Milovanovic, who proposed the text, told attendees that he faces potential disciplinary action for failing to be politically neutral while at work: “It shouldn’t be political to express grief and sympathy for 30,000 murdered people,” he said.

Last month, the Department for Education announced a ban on pupils missing school to attend protests after thousands of children walked out of classrooms in November to march in protest at Israel’s war. This mass opposition has not been stifled. Millions have participated in mass demonstrations globally and have opposed the lie that opposition to the fascist crimes of the Israeli state is

antisemitic.

The NEU resolution can only be successful and effective to the extent it is acted upon by rank-and-file teachers in a unified struggle with students and pupils as part of a broad-based mass movement of the working class.

The union bureaucracy is not about to do this. The conference was also tasked with implementing a mandate for strike action over wages and working conditions following an indicative ballot days before the event. The NEU leadership overruled this mandate in favour of talks with the genocide defender Keegan, while spreading illusions that Labour, when in office and led by the genocide supporter Starmer, will offer concessions.

Teachers must take matters into their own hands, building independent rank-and file-committees to organise the necessary struggle to prevent genocide and war, as well as defend workers’ conditions:

- No collaboration with the Prevent legislation. Teachers must call urgent meetings in the workplace and insist their members refuse to hand over any names of staff or pupils to Prevent.
- Mass walkouts to defend colleagues and pupils who are disciplined for speaking out against genocide in Palestine or opposition to the government’s war agenda, including in Russia and Ukraine.
- Billions to be made available for funding schools and education; no funding for the war machine.
- Repeal all anti-strike legislation and measures such as Prevent aimed at criminalising dissent.
- Demand strike action against the attacks of the Sunak government or a replacement Labour government under Starmer.
- Implement all necessary measures to protect staff and children from the ongoing COVID pandemic.

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