

The struggle for socialism against British imperialism and the Labour Party

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The following speech was given by Thomas Scripps, the assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), at the International May Day 2024 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 4.

No other imperialist country has seen more massive and sustained popular opposition to the Gaza genocide than Britain. Hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets almost every fortnight since Israel's war began. Up to a million demonstrated in a single protest in London last November: the largest in the country since the demonstration against the planned Iraq War in 2003.

Those protesting give voice to the anger felt by millions of workers and young people in the UK and shared with the billions internationally watching the imperialist-backed slaughter of the Palestinians with horror.

There are many reasons for the scope and tenacity of this movement.

Generations of workers in the UK have grown up with a hatred of British imperialism, reinforced by its every bloody intervention abroad and its every assistance lent to the forces of reaction around the globe—including as Washington's chief partner in crime in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and now Gaza.

They are part of a multiethnic class whose own origins are bound up with Britain's long and brutal history of Empire.

Many have had painful and personal experience of the weaponisation of Islamophobia to support imperialist interests in the Middle East and attack democratic rights.

This includes substantial numbers of British Jews, who have stood in defence of their Palestinian brothers and sisters against the torrent of lies and slander

depicting anti-genocide protests as antisemitic hate marches.

For all these reasons, opposition to the war on Gaza has catalysed smouldering social discontent, especially in the younger generation. In the movement against the Gaza genocide, broad opposition to war, to environmental destruction, poverty and inequality, the criminal pandemic policy of herd immunity, and increasingly authoritarian forms of rule finds a focus.

It is a movement that pits workers and youth against the entire political establishment. The Conservative government, whose 14 years in power have delivered nothing but war, impoverishment, the decimation of social services and the evisceration of democratic rights. But also, and most significantly, the opposition Labour Party under Sir Keir Starmer, which is now indistinguishable from Rishi Sunak's Tories.

There is not a trace of exaggeration in this remark. The Labour Party has been careening to the right for decades; nothing has halted it, including the election and five years of leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, who only served to confirm the total impotence of what passes for the party's left.

But Keir Starmer has brought this process to its nadir. He will enter an election campaign this year leading the self-proclaimed "party of NATO," committed to war with Russia, having boastfully confirmed his willingness to massacre millions in a nuclear war, and standing in the front ranks of the supporters of Israel's genocide.

He has expressed his admiration for former Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, tied for the position of most-hated capitalist politician in the British working class with Tony Blair—another of Starmer's idols.

He has declared his intention to continue with the

austerity economics of the Tory government which has reduced millions in the UK to outright desperation, utilising the services of the trade union bureaucracy that systematically sabotaged last year's strike wave encompassing over 2 million workers.

Labour and the Tories confront the working class as a single party of war.

Speaking in Poland last week, Sunak pledged to raise military spending to 2.5 percent of GDP by 2030, lifting the annual budget by more than £22 billion. This was, he said, to place the defence industry "on a war footing" in preparation for taking on an "axis of authoritarian states... Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China."

Labour has responded by launching a political arms race, with Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey railing that "the Tories have shown time and time again that they cannot be trusted on defence..."

The development of a mass socialist movement in the working class in Britain has always depended on its rejection of Labourism and breaking from the stranglehold of the trade union bureaucracy on which the Labour Party rests.

The conditions for this to take place are rotten ripe.

Whether the Labour Party is elected to government as expected or not, its days are numbered, especially since it is most strongly despised by young people.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality have intervened energetically in the mass movement over Gaza, confident that a major political shift is underway opening the door to a rapid growth of the socialist movement.

Against Labour's slavish loyalty to the super-rich, we call for the pursuit of the class struggle, in opposition to the pro-company corporatism of the trade union leaders, to secure workers' control of economic and social life and a massive redistribution of resources to meet human needs in the UK and around the world.

Against the escalating wars, we call for socialist internationalism and the solidarity of the global working class; a programme of strikes and blockades to bring the military machine to a halt.

We have held a national series of public meetings to discuss this programme with workers and students, and to raise the vital issue of the defence of anti-war journalist Julian Assange, still held prisoner by the UK

pending extradition and trial under the Espionage Act by the US government.

In the general election this year, we will stand candidates who will wage a campaign with the fight against war at its centre: the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and the threat of a regional war against Iran in the Middle East and of imperialist war against China.

We will oppose all efforts to boost the Labour Party, including so-called Labour "lefts," and all candidates who insist that workers must wait to settle scores with this right-wing, warmongering organisation and resign themselves to placing pressure on a Starmer-led government.

This is the perspective put forward by the Stop the War Coalition, encouraging a vote for candidates prepared to declare for a ceasefire in Gaza. It aims to reinforce the propaganda of the trade union bureaucracy, whose leaders call for a vote for Starmer's Labour as a "lesser evil" to Sunak's Tories.

We insist, and Gaza proves this, that there is no "lesser evil" choice available to workers, when the Tories and Labour operate as a single imperialist party of austerity and war.

We are fighting to build the Socialist Equality Party as the leadership of a mass socialist movement against war and the capitalist system that gives rise to war.

We act as part of an international political offensive alongside our comrades standing in the European elections and the US presidential elections, to build the International Committee of the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

This is how we honour the internationalist traditions of May Day.



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