

UK Labour's filthy manoeuvre over the ICC's arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant

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The British Labour Party's Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy, a vociferous apologist for Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, is attempting to posture as a defender of the international rule of law.

Speaking in the parliament on May 20, Lammy supported the possible arrest of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant should the International Criminal Court (ICC) issue a warrant. Lammy declared that the UK and all governments that have signed up to the Rome Statute underpinning the ICC "have a legal obligation" to comply with its warrants and "Democracies who believe in the rule of law must submit themselves to it."

International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Karim Khan is requesting the arrest warrants as he has "reasonable grounds to believe" that Netanyahu and Gallant "bear criminal responsibility" for crimes committed since 8 October, including using starvation as a weapon of war, murder, intentionally attacking civilians, extermination, persecution and other crimes against humanity.

But a decision on the request by the ICC is expected to take around two months, after the July 4 general election. And Lammy stressed that "Arrest warrants are not a conviction or determination of guilt, but they do reflect the evidence and judgment of the prosecutor about the grounds for individual criminal responsibility."

It should also be noted that should the judges agree to issue arrest warrants, neither Netanyahu nor Gallant face any immediate risk of arrest, since neither Israel nor the US has signed up to the Rome Statute.

Nevertheless, Lammy's remarks are out of step with

the Biden administration which, like Israel, does not recognize the authority of the ICC and denounced the arrest warrants as outrageous. Members of the US Congress, supported by secretary of state Antony Blinken, said they would seek to impose sanctions on the ICC if it issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak likewise refused to recognise the ICC's jurisdiction in the war and would not confirm whether his government would comply with a warrant should one be issued.

Lammy's statement was therefore denounced by the right-wing Tory press, with Retired Army commander Colonel Hamish de Bretton-Gordon writing in the *Daily Mail*, "If Labour intends to pigeon-hole Hamas—a proscribed terror group by the UK government—with the Israeli government which is democratically elected, then their judgement is very questionable. This is something the British people should understand and contemplate before the coming election."

The Telegraph demanded, "Labour must sack David Lammy for backing this absurd ICC warrant," stressing, "[party leader] Keir Starmer's sensible stance on Israel risks being undone if he does not think about what is right and in Britain's interests."

Despite such rhetoric, there is not one iota of principled content to Lammy's remarks. They express only tactical disagreements between war criminals and defenders of genocide.

Firstly, the fact that Labour has felt obligated to support the ICC highlights the crisis within the party provoked by its support for Israel. Leader Starmer has insisted that Labour is "the party of NATO" and of Zionism. He has given his full support to Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinians, which is part of a

broader effort by US imperialism—backed by the UK—to redivide the world and its resources by waging war against Iran and its allies in the Middle East, Russia in Ukraine, and preparing to take on China.

A barrister specialising in human rights and a former Director of Public Prosecutions, Starmer has endorsed Israel's savagery under the mantra of "Israel's right to defend itself" which he knows has absolutely no legitimacy under international law.

This has provoked a storm of opposition among millions of workers and youth, so that in local elections earlier this month Labour lost a third of its vote in areas with a Muslim majority and could face a similar backlash in the July 4 snap general election. On Tuesday, May 21, pro-Palestine protesters heckled Lammy as he tried to speak at an anti-corruption event hosted by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), a pro-Labour think tank. They interrupted continuously for 10 minutes as he sought to defend Labour's position on the slaughter in Gaza.

Secondly, and of perhaps greater long-term significance than a belated and transparent attempt to placate popular opposition, Lammy's response mirrors those of France and Germany, whose leaders likewise have given their full support to Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinians throughout the last seven and a half months.

The Labour Party has joined them because it fears that to openly defy international law and dismiss a priori a possible arrest warrant against a head of government it supports would damage the authority of a court that hitherto has been a useful instrument in reinforcing British imperialism's pretensions to uphold international humanitarian law, used as a pretext for war.

Lammy stressed last Monday that the Labour Party "supports the ICC as a cornerstone of the international legal system... whether it is in Ukraine, Sudan, Syria or Gaza."

The last significant arrest warrant issued by the ICC, this time with enthusiastic US backing, was for Vladimir Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, on March 17 last year. Putin and his commissioner for children's rights were charged with the unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation to further the demonisation and attempted isolation of Russia by the

NATO powers.

Labour, like France and Germany, has framed its "support" for the ICC as carefully as possible, making clear it has not endorsed an arrest of Netanyahu and Gallant, only the right of the ICC to do so. Each of them has decried the announcement of recommended arrest warrants alongside those for three leaders of Hamas, for suggesting an equivalence between "democratic" Israel and "terrorists".

For four days Starmer himself remained silent on the issue, until a May 24 appearance in Glasgow, Scotland. When he was asked by reporters, "If the International Criminal Court issues an arrest warrant for Netanyahu, would you honour it?", *The National* reported his evasive response as "that's completely hypothetical because, you know the procedure in the court, which is the prosecutor asks or seeks the warrant, the court, in due course, or a chamber within the court, in due course, will make its decision. So, we'll wait and see."

However, irrespective of Labour's cynical manoeuvring, Lammy and Starmer are playing with fire. In a May 22 perspective, "League of imperialist criminals denounces the International Criminal Court," the *World Socialist Web Site* noted the comments of arch-reactionary Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who, when advocating sanctions against the ICC, warned that "If they do this to Israel, we will be next."

Graham has every reason to make such a warning. The broad mass of the world's population are absolutely clear that what is taking place in Gaza is a crime against humanity, whose perpetrators and their accomplices, including Britain's Labour leaders, must all end up in the dock, like the Nazi criminals at Nuremburg.



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