

Britain's pseudo-left endorse a vote for Starmer's Labour Party

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Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's announcement of a snap general election for July 4 has sparked a mad scramble by Britain's pseudo-left groups to line up behind calls for a victory for Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party.

The strident posturing of groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire, the Socialist Party and the newly established Revolutionary Communist Party (formerly Socialist Appeal) as opponents of Starmer's support for Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza and his broader pro-business agenda has been stripped bare in a matter of days.

Aside from a half-hearted call to back a few independents, most prominently expelled former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, some fielding of their own protest candidates, and disagreements over whether to also back George Galloway's right-populist Workers Party of Britain, the universal message is: Grit your teeth! Vote Labour to get rid of the Tories, and "prepare to fight" once you have all put Starmer in office, with our blessing!

In all cases the pseudo-left's political decision to back Labour is justified with the assertion that "This is where the workers are at. There is no realistic alternative," etc.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is calling for a Labour vote, except in a handful of constituencies where it is backing protest candidates based on the stated criteria that they must "help build the movement over Palestine and break with Labour's politics."

Even this is a political fraud. Almost all of the "Independent" candidates claim explicitly to stand in the "Labour tradition", with the most high-profile group built around by Corbyn in Islington North. Known only as Collective, it also includes expelled former Labour MP Claudia Webbe and ex-African National Congress MP, Andrew Feinstein. Its leading lights do not call themselves a party because, until last week, Corbyn was campaigning to stand for Labour. Moreover the group's literature specifies realising Corbyn's 2019 Labour election manifesto as their goal—a manifesto that accepts NATO membership and nuclear weapons, containing a handful of reforms so mild that they could be acceptable to the party's Blairite right-wing.

As for Corbyn, he has mouthed a few platitudes about Gaza and "peace", while continuing to say nothing negative about Starmer or the Labour Party.

Aside from this circumscribed "protest Gaza" caveat, the SWP proclaims that the "pleasure" of a "chance to dump the Tories sooner rather than later" is only "reduced by the awareness of what a Labour government led by Keir Starmer will be like."

The SWP even goes on to complain that "The main threat to a Labour victory is that Starmer is so wooden, uninspiring and cautious that birds nest in his limbs and the voters stay at home. Labour wants a boring campaign because it offers no real alternative."

Starmer being boring and off-putting to potential Labour voters is highlighted above the fact that he is supporting genocide in Gaza.

Counterfire, a breakaway from the SWP, is the leading tendency in the

Stop the War Coalition, and has been at the forefront of insisting on the slogan "No Ceasefire, No Vote!"

But now the election is underway, Stop the War's convenor Lindsey German can barely summon the pretence of opposition. Once again "millions of people are looking to Labour" to get rid of the Tories, she writes, "but here too are problems."

Listing these problems, aside from a title reference to Starmer being "bland", begins with his having rewritten Jeremy Corbyn's now sacred 2019 manifesto and "dropping everything that remotely challenges the Tory agenda," which is once again afforded greater importance than his support for genocide in Gaza.

This will "cost him votes in this election," to various protest candidates, but "it will be extremely hard for most of these to win outright. Hopefully Jeremy Corbyn will succeed, and maybe one or two others."

In the end, all of the bluster of the past months is reduced to the hope that these protest votes will send "strong signals to Starmer and to the ruling class generally that they cannot continue their international and domestic policies without a challenge." There follows a specific call to vote for "several Labour MPs who have supported a ceasefire and end to arming Israel... without endorsing Starmer". Which means, of course, calling for a Labour vote, as "The stronger the left vote overall the better in aiding the struggles to come."

The Socialist Party stresses that "we are heading towards a Starmer-led government. Millions will vote Labour because they see it as the best means to get rid of the Tories, and there will be huge relief when they are finally booted out."

It then also argues for a continued orientation to Labour beyond July 4, insisting that "like any pro-capitalist government" it can "be forced to give concessions under mass pressure from the working class."

The primary vehicle for this mass working class pressure is "the trade union movement," which the SP claims must "take industrial action against Starmer's Labour, as it has done against the Tories"—a one-sentence apologia for the series of rotten betrayals of a strike movement that had the potential to derail the Tory government over a year ago.

It then bestows the role of political representatives of the working class to "a bloc of workers' MPs, including Jeremy Corbyn and others," who "could be elected and from day one force Starmer to at least look over his left shoulder."

To this end the SP urges the creation of a "union-backed list of workers' candidates" to "act as shop stewards in parliament," tasked with putting Starmer "on notice" and giving him "100 days to deliver."

The newly established Revolutionary Communist Party, like the Socialist Party, came out of the old Militant Tendency, which spent decades as an entry group in the Labour Party, insisting that it could become the vehicle for achieving socialism as a party based on the trade unions. The RCP now claims to have undergone a rapid growth in membership and to have transformed into an avowedly revolutionary tendency.

In reality it continues to insist that the working class is wedded to the Labour Party and that, as Rob Sewell wrote, the RCP “will be delighted to see the back of” the Tories, “Roll on 4th July.”

After again insisting that “given the lack of a mass alternative, millions will turn towards Labour,” Sewell offers as a battle-cry, “The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) says: get the Tories out. But we also say: no trust in a Starmer government!”

The RCP states that “We must build the revolutionary alternative to the Tories and Labour in the stormy period that lies ahead,” but makes clear that the “stormy period” of opposing Labour only begins after Starmer is in Number 10.

On May 24, Sewell wrote by way of an apologia for his tendency’s support for Labour, “Given the short notice, the RCP will not be standing candidates in this election,” which he decried as being in any case “the lowest form of class struggle.”

It was not until May 28 that the RCP had a slight change of heart, deciding to field just one candidate, Fiona Lali, because she secured a large audience after a spirited challenge to then Tory Home Secretary Suella Braverman on the right-wing GB TV News channel. This is described as its new “bold revolutionary approach”.

The essentially for-the-record nature of the opposition to Labour presented by these tendencies is firstly epitomised by their exclusive focus on the demand, “No Ceasefire, No Vote.” What this translates to in practice is a political betrayal of all those seeking an end to genocide in Gaza. It means that the pseudo-left can pose as opponents of Starmer when it comes to the mass murder of the Palestinians while still supporting his formation of a government that will continue backing Israel.

Moreover, the Labour “lefts” supported on this basis will dutifully take their positions on the government benches as loyal representatives of the party and the crimes it will commit against the British and international working class.

This is confirmed by the pseudo-left’s near blanket refusal to mention the NATO-provoked war against Russia in Ukraine, even after Sunak declared that this is a war election in which the main issue to be decided is how British imperialism takes forward NATO’s offensive against Russia and China. Isolating Palestine from this war enables the pseudo-left to obscure the irreconcilably pro-imperialist character of Labour, Starmer’s “party of NATO”, and the fact that the majority of its nominal “lefts” are fully behind a conflict that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives and which British, US, French and German imperialism are actively demanding is extended onto Russian territory.

Citing the likely majority of workers who will vote Labour solely out of hatred of the Tories as justification for actively supporting the election of a Starmer government is sophistry of the worst sort. The fact that workers feel it necessary to hold their nose and vote Labour is the political responsibility of the pseudo-left groups who have opposed the building of a revolutionary alternative and then backed whatever “left” element exists within the party and the trade unions as the “natural” leaders of the working class.

None of them will enjoy being reminded that, for five years, Corbyn’s leadership of Labour was hailed as the start of its possible transformation into a working-class party that they could all then join in the fight for “socialism”. Instead, Corbyn maintained the prescription on them all, even kicking some out of his campaign group, Momentum, as he capitulated before the Blairites on every issue of principle and allowed his own supporters to be witch-hunted out of the party accused of antisemitism.

Corbyn, who these parties all still venerate, is only standing as an independent because his entreaties for peace with the right-wing handed the party over to Starmer, who then expelled him. He didn’t jump, he was pushed. Corbyn’s former shadow chancellor John McDonnell and shadow

home secretary Diane Abbott remain in the party and firmly on the stump for Starmer.

Summing up the Corbyn experience in May 2021, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained:

Corbyn’s aim as Labour leader was to block the leftward movement of the working class and its younger generation and corral it behind the Labour Party. He spelled this out in 2015, immediately prior to being elected party leader, explaining that his aim was to prevent Labour’s “Pasokification”—a reference to the implosion of PASOK and other social democratic parties throughout Europe... Under advisement from leading Stalinists and members of pseudo-left groups, he emphasised that the development of a new ‘broad left’ in the UK must proceed through the Labour Party, not outside of it...

The Socialist Party defined the “Corbyn insurgency” as an attempt “to re-establish a new workers’ party”, emphasising Labour’s connection with the trade unions as “the collective voice of millions of workers” The Socialist Workers Party called it proof of the “rebirth of social democracy... The wellspring that gave life to social democracy long ago still pours forth and will find a channel for expression if given the opportunity, whether that be in Syriza, Corbyn or another vessel.”

What politically animated such claims was opposition to the struggle to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class, by forces whose political origins are in the ranks of the Stalinist parties or as opponents of Trotskyism who had broken from the Fourth International decades previously.

In opposition, the WSWP stressed:

The rightward lurch of Labour and other social democratic parties, together with the transformation of the trade unions into adjuncts of corporate management and the state, is not merely due to bad leaders who can be replaced by better ones advocating left reformist policies. The globalisation of production and the integration of the world market has rendered bankrupt policies based on securing reforms without challenging capitalism and the repressive apparatus of the nation state. The old nationally-based labour bureaucracies and parties everywhere have responded in accordance with their history, pro-capitalist programmes and privileged class interests —by repudiating reformism and openly embracing their role as guardians of the bourgeois order.

The working class must now undertake to build a party whose programme corresponds to the realities of globally organised capitalist exploitation and the irreconcilable conflict between the capitalist class in every country and the international working class—the Socialist Equality Party in Britain and its sister parties within the International Committee of the Fourth International.

The SEP warned that the “No Ceasefire, No Vote!” campaign was a political dead end.

We also explained that the only tendency pledging to stand a national slate of candidates, Galloway’s Workers Party of Britain, was doing so by recruiting opportunist elements—mainly Muslim, from the Labour, Liberal Democrat, and even Tory Party—concerned only with their own political future due to mass opposition to the Gaza genocide.

Moreover, the programme of the party is a variant of right-wing

populism, advanced as a return to “traditional Labour values”. This includes law-and order, pro-police rhetoric pitched as a condemnation of “soft-hearted liberals”, clamping down on migration through strong borders, especially targeting refugees, and a defence policy that, while opposing support for Israel’s war on the Palestinians and NATO’s de facto war in Ukraine, still pledges that “We will avoid war but we will also ensure that we are prepared for it... Any threat to our country or our interests will be met with a highly effective military response.”

Most importantly, the SEP rejected the call to sink political differences to bring about one big anti-Labour Gaza protest vote: “This is only the latest desperate manifestation of the insistence by myriad pseudo-left tendencies that Labour can be pushed to the left by mass pressure, coupled with an offering of a possible new Labour-style party at some future point, formed through a political regroupment under the leadership of various left-talking ex-Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats...”

The SEP also rejects the lie of a “lesser evil” vote for Starmer’s party, or any Labour MP who might formally back a ceasefire. This, we warned, was a backdoor through which to continue support for Labour—and we have been proved correct.

The task for the SEP and our small number of candidates during this election is to speak plainly and clearly to the most politically advanced workers, especially the young generation. To insist that the building of a new and genuinely socialist leadership must begin now, to draw the essential lessons from the decades of failure to push Labour “to the left” that came to a head under Corbyn, and to advance the programme on which this new leadership must be built.

Our appeal is for a rejection of the lie that Starmer’s Labour Party is all that can be expected as an alternative to Sunak’s Tories. There is literally nothing to choose between them.

The SEP stands for the mobilisation of the British and international working class against the Gaza genocide, against war in Ukraine and the Middle East, to oppose all attacks on democratic rights and the destruction of workers’ living standards. It is time to join the SEP.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact