

What way forward in the fight against the far right in the UK?

**Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (UK)
15 August 2024**

The anti-immigrant riots that erupted in Britain July 30, culminating in fascist gangs setting fire to asylum-seeker hotels on August 4, have shocked and angered millions.

It is necessary to understand the fundamental causes of the far-right violence and to review the response of counter-protests organised by Stand Up to Racism (SUTR), led politically by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Such a balance sheet shows there can be no effective strategy to combat and defeat the far right outside of the independent political mobilisation of the working class against capitalism.

This fight—fundamentally international in character—entails not only the necessary defence of immigrants and Muslims from violence instigated by fascist thugs such as Tommy Robinson and egged on by Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. Above all, it means a fight against the Starmer Labour government and its allies in the trade union bureaucracy, who are working to block the necessary socialist offensive by the working class.

It is no coincidence that anti-immigrant riots broke out less than a month after Labour came to power in the July 4 general election. While the pretext for the riots was the killing of three children, falsely blamed by Robinson and Farage on Muslims and asylum-seekers, the toxic atmosphere that produced vigilante attacks against immigrants was created over decades by successive Labour and Conservative governments.

As the SEP wrote in its August 4 statement:

The growth of fascist and far-right tendencies is a concentrated expression of imperialist politics and capitalist decay. The ruling elites are promoting extreme nationalism and xenophobia to divert explosive social tensions in a right-wing, anti-immigrant direction, to further Britain's predatory imperialist wars and to prosecute war against the democratic and social rights of the working class.

Labour's election campaign promoted virulent nationalism, militarism and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Sir Keir Starmer pledged billions to NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, alongside total support for Israel's genocidal assault in Gaza. He demanded tougher border controls against immigrants, attacked the Tories for "failing to stop the boats," and declared that austerity would

continue in accordance with Labour's "fiscal rules."

Labour's first act in government was to dispatch Foreign Secretary David Lammy to Israel to pledge support for war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu. Starmer then attended the Washington, D.C. NATO summit laying the groundwork for military escalation against nuclear-armed Russia.

On July 21, Home Secretary Yvette Copper announced a "summer blitz" of police raids on immigrants and an end to hotel accommodation for asylum-seekers—a dog-whistle to the far right.

On July 23, after seven Labour MPs voted for an amendment opposing the two-child cap on benefits, Starmer sacked them. On July 29, Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced plans for £23 billion in spending cuts, including axing the winter fuel allowance for around 10 million elderly people.

Riots erupted just one day later.

Mass working class opposition to Labour's right-wing programme has been blocked by the trade union bureaucracy, which moved post-election to close down any remaining industrial action based on paltry pay awards, making Britain a strike-free zone. The pseudo-left SWP and Stop the War Coalition, representing affluent sections of the middle class, have closed ranks with the Starmer government, claiming it is being pushed to the left!

Their efforts to block widespread opposition to Labour's agenda of imperialist war and capitalist austerity is epitomised in their response to the riots.

Stand Up to Racism calls for "unity"

Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) issued a statement, "Stop the far right: Unite against racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism." Its signatories included leading trade union bureaucrats and a small minority of around 20 current and former Labour MPs, including Jeremy Corbyn leading five newly elected "Independents."

SUTR's statement makes no reference to Labour's role in stoking anti-immigrant poison, which is why it was backed by the "left" Labour MPs.

Hand in hand with its political amnesty for Labour, the "unity" statement promotes illusions that fascism can be defeated through protest politics. SUTR is silent on the social and class basis of

fascism, rooted in decaying capitalism. This omission is deliberate, facilitating their building a multi-class bloc led by Corbyn aimed at suppressing the independent struggle of the working class. Their statement declares: “The far right are a threat to all decent people.”

Starmer responded to the riots with a law-and-order crackdown. While far-right forces are their initial target, he made clear Labour’s new measures will be used against all those who pose a threat to “public order.”

Labour has announced a new national police force of 6,000 targeting political and social discontent. More than 1,000 arrests have followed, using facial recognition technology and assembly-line courts based on those pioneered by Starmer during the London riots in 2011, threatening sentences of up to 10 years.

Corbyn: Labour’s shadow

Corbyn plays a politically despicable role, defending Labour and preventing a break by workers and youth from this right-wing party.

On August 5, he published a letter to Home Secretary Cooper “requesting an urgent meeting in light of the far-right riots.” He wrote: “we expect our government to call out the bigotry and Islamophobia and the bigotry behind them and stand shoulder to shoulder with its victims.”

This was akin to asking Heinrich Himmler to condemn the SS. Cooper, described as “Labour’s Iron Lady,” embodies the “country first, party second” authoritarianism at the core of Starmer’s government. Her targeting of immigrants and boosting of police powers are the expression domestically of Labour’s commitment to imperialist militarism and war, which strengthens, and ultimately rests upon, the mobilisation of the far right against the working class.

Corbyn’s letter, signed by all five “Independents,” brings to mind Leon Trotsky’s description of the reformist leaders of the 1920s and 30s, who responded to the fascist threat in Italy and Germany with impotent appeals to King Victor Emmanuel III and President Paul von Hindenburg:

Fearful of the revolutionary mobilization of the workers, the Italian reformists banked all their hopes on the “state.” Their slogan was, “Help! Victor Emmanuel, exert pressure!” The German social democracy lacks such a democratic bulwark as a monarch loyal to the constitution. So they must be content with a president—“Help! Hindenburg, exert pressure!”

By blocking working class opposition to the Labour government, Corbyn strengthens authoritarianism, driving sections of the middle class and workers toward Reform UK, and lumpen elements into the arms of fascists such as Robinson. While most of Farage’s support comes from former Tory voters, he announced

on election night, “We are coming for Labour.”

The political disenfranchisement of the working class produces a highly distorted image of class relations. A YouGov poll found 82 percent of the population is opposed to the far-right riots. In Britain and throughout the world there is overwhelming popular opposition to imperialism, fascism, genocide and social inequality.

But single-issue protest cannot stop the rise of the far right. This requires the political and industrial mobilisation of the working class, the overwhelming majority of the population, for socialism.

A counteroffensive of strikes and protests must be prepared, mobilising workers and youth on demands that express the masses’ objectively revolutionary opposition to capitalism.

For this purpose, the Socialist Equality Party proposes the following demands:

No to the Gaza genocide! Stop war with Russia, dismantle NATO!

Workers must block the production and delivery of arms to Israel, and demand Britain’s immediate withdrawal from NATO. End the war against Russia in Ukraine, which threatens nuclear war. Dismantle Britain’s Armed Forces. Billions for the National Health Service (NHS), not bombs!

Stop the persecution of refugees and immigrants! For the international unity of the working class!

Repeal all anti-immigrant laws and abolish the Prevent programme and other anti-Muslim measures. End the barbaric detention of asylum-seekers! For open borders and full democratic and legal rights for immigrant and foreign workers.

End austerity, billions for healthcare, housing and decent pay!

Workers must reject Starmer’s lie that there is “no money” for vital social programmes and wages. Impound the hundreds of billions seized by the financial aristocracy through bank bailouts that helped turn London into a playground for the super-rich.

For the United Socialist States of Europe!

Workers and youth have powerful allies among the millions of workers across Europe and worldwide opposed to war, fascism, genocide and austerity. Build rank-and-file organizations to break the grip of the pro-company trade union bureaucrats. Forge a political movement to transfer power to the working class and replace capitalist Britain and the European Union with the United Socialist States of Europe.

Victory in this fight means the building of a new revolutionary leadership. We appeal to workers and youth to join the Socialist Equality Party, British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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