

Opposing Gaza genocide demands a political struggle against the Starmer government

Chris Marsden**18 September 2024**

The protest at the Labour's Party congress in Liverpool this weekend highlights the fact that the struggle against the Gaza genocide in Britain now centres on a political struggle against Keir Starmer's government.

The essential question posed is how such a struggle must be waged, on what programme and through what methods.

The organisers of Saturday's demonstration, above all the Stop the War Coalition and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), for months confined protests to placing pressure on Sunak's Conservative government to end its collusion with Israel's mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. At the same time, everyone knew that the Labour Party was totally at one with the Tories in backing the genocide, citing the filthy excuse that Israel was exercising its "right" to defend itself.

The cost of this Labour-Tory alliance, maintained for the nine months up to the July general election in the face of mass popular opposition, was a recognised death toll of 40,000, and an estimated 180,000 lives lost, as Gaza was reduced to rubble.

Despite this, the political parties who make up the Stop the War Coalition, including Counterfire, the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), all backed the election of a Starmer government while supporting a few independent and Green candidates opposing the genocide—with pride of place given to expelled former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Five independents and four Greens were elected, amid broad opposition to Labour among workers and youth that saw it win power with just 33 percent of the popular vote, thanks above all to the collapse of the Tories.

In the aftermath of the election, Labour has not only continued to fully back Israel's genocide but confirmed its role as a right-wing government of savage austerity, anti-migrant measures, attacks on democratic rights and advocating for the use of long-range NATO missiles that

would transform the proxy war in Ukraine into a direct war with Russia. Moreover, since Labour took office in July, Israel has escalated its war on the Palestinians not only in Gaza but in the West Bank, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu et al are preparing to open up a full-scale war in Israel's "Northern front" targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria as an antechamber for a regional war against Iran.

Yet Stop the War, the SWP and similar pseudo-left groups are frantically claiming that their policy of pressing for a change of UK foreign policy is finally bearing fruit because Labour is being forced to make certain tactical adaptations to its pro-Israel stance. The call for Saturday's demonstration declares, "Labour's decision to reinstate funding for UNRWA and the abandonment of a proposal to block the [International Criminal Court] warrants against Netanyahu are victories for our movement. Now, we call on them to suspend all arms sales to the apartheid Israeli state."

No mention is made of the fact that Labour was by then alone, apart from the US, in blocking UNRWA funding, which is not reaching Gaza anyway, or that we are presently dealing only with a request for a warrant for Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant that has not been granted.

An accompanying reposted *Tribune* article by Anna Stavrianakis and Andrew Feinstein, the former African National Congress MP and independent candidate against Starmer in the July general election, adds to this argument that Labour can be pushed to abandon Israel by describing Foreign Secretary David Lammy's suspension of just 30 of 350 arms export licences to Israel as "remarkable. For the first time, the government has acknowledged that weapons supplied by Britain might be used to violate the laws of war."

This shift, which does not include licences for F-35 fighter jet parts, was universally recognised as a face-

saving exercise that will have no impact on the war in Gaza or any other front opened by Israel. But this doesn't stop Feinstein from urging continued "pressure on the government because it is making a difference."

Labour, Feinstein insists, is "clearly moving on the issue" because "hundreds of thousands of people across the country have come out to protest in solidarity with Palestinians for decades and especially in the last eleven months," "voted for independent and Green candidates in the general election," held student encampments, and taken direct action to demand "an end to military cooperation with Israel," etc. "Now is the time to keep pushing."

This is what is offered to all those millions of workers and youth involved in eleven months of mass protests—the bogus prospect that Labour will fold with just one more push!

To this are added reports that the Trades Union Congress (TUC)—whose affiliated unions have stood by and done nothing for months while men, women and children have been slaughtered—backed an emergency motion on Palestine committing member organisations to a national workplace day of action on October 10 and formally opposing arms supplies to Israel. Similar days of action have already been held, largely consisting of a few trade union bureaucrats and workers assembling at dinner time outside their workplaces, while the weapons the TUC now claim to oppose are in fact made, sold and exported under the watchful eye of these same trade unions.

PSC leader Ben Jamal nevertheless writes in the *Socialist Worker* of the "demands" the trade unions must now "put on the Labour government", including a full arms embargo. "The Labour government must choose whether it stands with a state committing the crimes of genocide, occupation and apartheid, or with the millions of people in the unions and in Britain who want to see freedom, justice and equality for Palestinians."

Both the Labour government and the trade union bureaucracy have made abundantly clear where they stand on Gaza—with British and US imperialism and their murderous Zionist attack dog. It is not a question of exerting more pressure on Starmer and Lammy to change course, but to begin the construction of an independent anti-genocide, anti-war movement that is based on the working class and is anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and socialist.

On this basis many effective actions can be taken against the UK's role in backing genocide, including

boycotts and strikes. All of them will involve a direct confrontation with a Labour government that will meet opposition to its war agenda with police repression and with a trade union bureaucracy that functions as an industrial police force for the corporations and the state.

Britain's pseudo-left groups collectively constitute a last line of defence for the Labour government and the trade union bureaucracy, constantly sowing illusions that they can be made to change their spots.

There will in fact be no retreat by Starmer. Support for his election within ruling circles was primarily motivated by concern that the crisis-ridden, corrupt and widely despised Tory party could no longer be relied on to impose the social and political attacks required by war. As the Socialist Equality Party insisted, "Sir Keir Starmer wants to form a government that continues the Conservative Party's support for the Gaza genocide and the UK's leading role in the US-led war with Russia."

The primary concern of Britain's ruling elite and its imperialist allies is to ensure that mass opposition to the Gaza genocide does not become the focus for broader opposition to the US-NATO imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine, a growing war in the Middle East and the ever-escalating conflict with China. They are determined to prevent this movement from meeting up with a re-eruption of working-class struggle in defence of jobs, living standards and essential social rights anticipated by the 2022-23 anti-Tory strike wave that was betrayed and demobilised by the trade union bureaucracy.

Realising such a movement requires the building of the SEP as the revolutionary leadership urgently needed by the working class.



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