

The Summit of Resistance: How Britain's pseudo-left police the class struggle

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8 April 2025

March 29 saw the Summit of Resistance convene in the courtyard of The Cause in London's Docklands. Earlier that week, the Socialist Equality Party wrote of its essential political purpose that the event:

...seeks to conceal the refusal of all its main participants to build a real political opposition to Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government.

Its invocation of "resistance" refers only to the organisation of various protests under the leadership of the Corbynite left, sections of the trade union bureaucracy and their pseudo-left apologists, aimed at putting pressure on the government to ameliorate its most right-wing policies.

The summit was specifically called to conceal the fact that months of discussions on the formation of a new party with former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn at its head have so far come to nothing.

Corbyn has rejected all entreaties for him to head such a party, declaring that his focus will be building local "grassroots" forums while his group of five Independent MPs continues to "congratulate the government when it makes positive changes to people's lives but call it out where it falls short."

Nothing that took place at the summit gave cause to revise a single word of that assessment. Rather, dissecting its proceedings will help workers—the younger generation in particular, who have little knowledge or experience of the organisations present—to understand how Britain's pseudo-left tendencies collectively function as the primary political defenders of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy. Their role is to ensure that the class struggle never breaks out of the constraints of protest politics that supposedly puts "pressure" on these sclerotic anti-working class organisations to change course.

Doing so has taken on a heightened importance for the labour bureaucracy, its "left" representatives above all, given the widespread hatred of the Starmer government due to its support for Israel's genocide of the Palestinians and the savage austerity measures it is imposing to pay for a ramping up of military spending targeting Russia.

The summit offered an overview of the ecosystem of the pseudo-left, gathering together most of its key players and its members making up the bulk of an audience of over 2,000—and therefore a significant portion of the "activists" within the trade unions and other less formal groups. Tendencies present included the Socialist Workers Party, its main offshoot Counterfire and various other splinters; the Socialist Party and its offshoots; organisations close to or influenced by the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain; and various ex-Labourites, often Muslims, who have recently broken with the party since Jeremy Corbyn surrendered the Labour leadership, and especially over Gaza.

This core milieu was peppered with speakers from groups protesting on

behalf of the disabled, trans rights, etc., and, of some significance, an organised delegation from Britain's Green Party.

An audience of ageing longtime members and younger people looking for a means to fight back were taken for a political ride lasting seven hours. Despite the appearance of democratic debate, the multiple speakers, the "workshops", contributions from the floor, etc., the meeting had a predetermined aim: to reject all calls for a new party opposed to Labour and to instead insist on the building of "local grassroots initiatives" and participation in a couple of national demonstrations.

It was necessary to sweeten this bitter pill given that a show of hands during one session registered overwhelming support for setting up a new party. This took the form of a constant gee-up claiming that by not setting "sectarian" political goals outside of invocations of "change", "hope, not despair," opposing benefit cuts and the far-right, the Summit was laying the basis for the "mass movement" necessary before there could be any "realistic" talk of a new party.

To this end, the meeting was hailed as being "so big" that people were still trying to get in half-an-hour after it was due to start, which was in fact solely due to very poor organisation.

Neutering the fight against the Labour Party

Opening session chair Louise Regan of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign made no mention of independent political organisation from Labour.

The parameters of discussion would be: "What demands does our movement need to make? What actions and activities do we need to build for? Whether it's the 7th of June People's Assembly demonstration, which I encourage all of you to get along to. Whether it's Welfare Not Warfare, DPAC [disability protest] actions or Palestine protests, we have to build a mass movement. And the third thing we want you to think about is how you can build networks in your local areas to build on today, to take back the message and to think about what we can do in our local areas."

Demands, actions, protests and "local network building" is a summation of the agenda insisted on by Corbyn and leading representatives of his Peace and Justice Project such as Yanis Varoufakis and Andrew Feinstein, all featured speakers. It is a list of caveats and cautions meant to postpone indefinitely any form of political break with Labour and confine workers and young people to protesting the government's worst excesses. Talk of a new party is "premature" and "putting the cart before the horse."

To the same end, speaker after speaker prioritised the fight against Nigel Farage's Reform UK, offering their protest movement as a way of blocking the far-right from making electoral advances at Labour's expense. Various speakers acknowledged that Starmer's own anti-migrant

agenda and attacks on the working class are the primary engine of growth for Farage and his ilk, but ultimately it is the pseudo-left's hostility to politically organising the working class against Labour that allows the right wing to pose as an alternative.

Lindsey German from the Stop the War Coalition/Counterfire gave full expression to how the pseudo-left disarms the working class.

During last year's general election, Counterfire joined in calls for a vote for Labour as an alternative to the Tories, except in the seats where candidates protesting Starmer's support for the Gaza genocide were standing. It extended this policy to Wales and Scotland, publishing an article by an ex-Labour member who had joined Plaid Cymru calling for a vote for "a left bloc including Plaid Cymru, SNP [Scottish National Party], Greens and independents—standing for socialist values, pushing for progressive policies, demanding a peaceful foreign policy, standing up to the warmongers and establishment lackeys" in order to "rein in the worst excesses of a Starmer Government."

German wrote immediately following "Labour's loveless landslide" with joy that "the Tories are in total disarray, and the left outside Labour did better than it has for a considerable time," before mildly suggesting a "lack of enthusiasm for Starmer."

She then insisted that "Labour therefore is potentially under pressure both from left and right in future contests." The "urgent series of tasks" before the "left" were to "fight the policies and priorities" of Nigel Farage and the fascist Tommy Robinson and build "socialist left organisation on a much bigger scale to present an alternative to the right."

Ten days after Starmer took office, Counterfire headlined "It's time for Labour to deliver".

At the Summit of Resistance, German nevertheless had the gall to express her surprise that the Starmer government was "much worse than even my worst nightmares," before again merely calling for everyone to be "united as one working-class movement fighting for better conditions".

Everyone present was waiting for the real keynote speaker, Corbyn. Introduced as "the People's Prime Minister" to rapturous applause, he thanked everyone for "having faith in a future based on justice, not a future based on greed, inequality and war". As for proposals for ensuring anyone has a future, he asked the question of questions, "So what is our alternative?", before offering up the Peace and Justice Project's new "dignity statement", which functions as a petition proposing, to no one in particular, a wealth tax, public ownership, rent controls and "A policy of redistribution of wealth and power within our community."

No mention was made of waging a concerted struggle against the Labour government and certainly nothing regarding the formation of a political alternative to the Labour Party. Just the trite moral appeals in which he has specialised for decades within the Labour Party and which helped ensure the triumph of Starmer and the Blairites and now neuters opposition to their government.

A new reformist party, but not now

The most significant of the sessions was held under the stewardship of the group Party Time. Under its banner, a series of five discussions have been held at Pelican House in London, where various "left" activists, according to the session chair Ben Beach, "came to understand" that "there was a strong consensus that a new left-party organisation was both necessary and desirable."

Given the politics of those who met at Pelican House, the desired new party would be explicitly reformist, "an electoral project" that also accepted that its "limits should not be at the expense of a wider social movement" as a get-out clause for the nominally revolutionary aims of the

pseudo-left tendencies.

Proof of the basis for this new party was the fact that "The Greens are now second in 39 seats. Five independent MPs have been elected. Four Green MPs have been elected. Multiple Labour MPs now sat as independents, having lost the whip on principle."

Ruled out was any need to draw the lessons of the failure of national reformism, as so graphically confirmed by Corbyn during his five years as Labour Party leader. Nor was there any consideration of the revolutionary and internationalist measures required to combat the turn by all the major imperialist powers to savage austerity, the destruction of democratic rights and cultivation of the far-right to facilitate a new struggle for the redivision of the world through trade and military war.

The only mention of revolution was to suggest that "revolutionaries" should be part of the constituency of a possible new reformist party.

Even after Beach's introduction, the session still did not focus on discussing the proposed new party, that, by show of hands, the majority of those present wanted to be formed. Instead, the question was posed as "Is it a new left party or national organisation" that must be built, "And what should it do?"

This was a cue for Andrew Feinstein, the former African National Congress (ANC) MP who stood against Starmer in the general election, to argue that forming a new party would come about at some unspecified time simply through activists taking "to the streets like never before" while linking such efforts to creating "a new movement, a new party, but a party that has its roots in our local communities."

Work in local communities, along the lines of the local forums established by Corbyn in Islington and Feinstein in Holborn and St Pancras, would "do away with the entire idea of professional politicians", instituting new forms of "representative democracy" and ensuring that "those who we send into the institutions of state power" would not "be corrupted by that state power."

Feinstein did not, as he usually does, boast of his work with the bourgeois nationalist ANC, which failed to be inoculated against corruption by the type of local discussion groups he advocated then and now and acted to preserve capitalist rule at terrible cost to the working class.

A notable result of the insistence that a new party need not be socialist was the ability of the Green Party to dominate the debate and pose as the already existing opposition to Starmer's government. With the party's deputy leader Zack Polanski having spoken at the opening session, Zoë Garbett, who sits on the London Assembly, was on the Party Time platform to make a "hard sell" for the Green Party as "incredibly democratic", "accountable", and doing their own "work locally and on a small scale."

Aside from various pseudo-left members on the platform and from the floor politely noting the right-wing measures every Green Party the world over has delivered when in power, the response more generally was, in the words of Irish TD Richard Boyd Barrett of People Before Profit, to "appeal to the Greens, unite with the left, fight against capitalism, the source of the problem."

Protest politics as usual

The final session featured announcements that mini Summits of Resistance would be held around the country. For the pseudo-left, like Corbyn, things will otherwise go on as before: endless discussions about uniting various protest movements, denunciations of Starmer, his Chancellor Rachel Reeves and the rest, organising the occasional march and protest and hoping they can persuade Corbyn or some other "left"

luminary to say a few words. All while the Labour government is left in charge to mount its brutal offensive against the working class and build up Britain's war machine.

Indeed, the only thing that will shift Corbyn and his acolytes into action on forming a party would be a recognition that failure to do so would open the door to the building of a genuinely socialist and revolutionary alternative to Labour.

To speak of the formation of any other type of party is itself a political betrayal of the working class, maintaining the illusion that reforming capitalism is still possible even as it descends into a crisis that threatens the survival of humanity.

To return again to the analysis made by the Socialist Equality Party of the Summit of Resistance, we quoted from a statement made in our general election campaign:

Every fundamental problem confronting workers is rooted in the deepening crisis of world capitalism. Above all, the danger of a new world war arises out of capitalism's fundamental contradictions—between the development of an interconnected global system of production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states based on upholding private ownership of the means of production...

...the international working class is the only social force that can stop the global eruption of war. The same contradictions driving imperialism to wars of global conquest provide the objective basis for social revolution by unifying the workers who produce all of society's wealth in a global system of production. This pits them against the common enemy of giant transnational corporations and banks that dictate the policy of every national government.

We concluded, "This is the programme which should be taken up by all those workers and young people who detest Starmer and the Labour Party and want to wage a real fight against them for socialism." Winning workers and young people to this perspective proceeds through the systematic exposure of the political counterfeit represented by the Corbynites and the pseudo-left groups that trail after them.



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