

Oppose Starmer's campus crackdown on Gaza genocide protest!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (UK)
10 April 2025

Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government is leading a crackdown on students protesting the genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza and is working arm-in-arm with fascist US President Donald Trump.

Trump's kidnap, detention and threats of deportation against student protesters like Mahmoud Khalil, Momodou Taal and Rumeysa Ozturk recall the actions of the German Nazi and Latin American dictatorships—disappearing political opponents. They have outraged workers and young people around the world. But they are only the sharpest expression of the same policy being pursued by all the imperialist governments.

In the UK, a student at SOAS university has been charged, and another arrested, under terrorism legislation for speaking in support of the Palestinian people's right to resist an illegal occupation. Many more have faced investigation, suspension and expulsion for their activism—well over 100, according to rights group Liberty.

A climate of fear is being created on campus, with university administrations, private security firms, the police and Zionist groups working together to silence pro-Palestinian speech and protest—all under the direction of the Labour government.

Beyond the universities, young activists are being targeted by what amounts to a political police force. Members of Palestine Action have been arrested and imprisoned for protesting against Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems, making use of powers granted to police by counter-terrorism legislation.

Six attendees at a Youth Demand event in a Quaker Meeting House in London were arrested for “conspiracy to cause a public nuisance” by a squad of 30 police officers, some armed, who stormed the building. A series of dawn raids were launched against 12 others.

The national protest movement against the genocide in Gaza, which has mobilised millions over the last year and a half, is under threat. Seventy-seven protesters—including leading members of the Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign—were arrested in a pre-planned police

ambush on January 18, and participating members of parliament including former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn were questioned at police stations.

Starmer's police state takes shape

Labour's intention is to criminalise all protest against the Gaza genocide, paving the way for the repression of any political opposition to British militarism and imperialism. As in the United States, attacks on the democratic rights of students are a first step in rolling out this broader agenda, following a series of house raids and airport arrests of critical journalists.

These are long-held plans, and Labour was brought into office by the British ruling class to fulfil them, replacing a Conservative Party in meltdown.

It was the Labour Party that played the leading role in advancing claims of “left-wing antisemitism” as a means of outlawing opposition to Zionism and the crimes of the Israeli state: a witch-hunt directed in the first instance against Corbyn and his supporters, aimed ultimately at all workers and young people who oppose war, militarism and austerity.

Corbyn's capitulation to this witch-hunt, paved the way to Starmer and all that has followed.

Since coming to office last July, Labour has not only kept authoritarian anti-protest legislation passed by the Tories on the books but significantly expanded its use. And it is deploying “counter-terror” legislation and the Prevent scheme established by the previous Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, putting them to their always-intended purpose of savaging the democratic rights of workers and students.

Labour can rely on a compliant and complicit layer of university administrators to oversee the first phase of this crackdown being carried out on campus. Well-heeled university vice-chancellors—paid an average of over

£400,000 a year across the Russell Group of universities—oversee institutions with millions of pounds invested in Israel and the arms industry and engaged in extensive partnerships with both.

Nor does the government need to worry about the invisible National Union of Students or the pro forma protests of the University and College Union, which has done nothing to stop the political persecution of students taught by its members.

British imperialism prepares for war

Building a movement to defeat these attacks on democratic rights means understanding the class and imperialist interests behind them. The Labour government is leading the UK into a new struggle for the violent redivision of the world, spearheaded by the Trump administration.

In the Middle East, Israel's drive for a final solution of the Palestinian problem is carried out in concert with Washington as part of plans to isolate and subjugate Iran—extending to the destruction of Yemen, Lebanon and Syria. The UK plays a major role, carrying out surveillance flights over Gaza, making its Cyprus airbase available for the transfer of military equipment, participating in airstrikes in Yemen and sending warships to the Red Sea.

In Europe, Trump has reversed the strategy of the Biden administration to fuel a prolonged proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, instead seeking a deal with the Kremlin securing Ukraine's de facto colonisation by the US while reorienting towards conflict with China.

Starmer is playing the leading role in European plans to sabotage this effort and stake the claim of Britain, France and Germany to Ukraine's, and ultimately Russia's resources. His "Coalition of the Willing" aims to place NATO "troops on the ground, and planes in the air" in Ukraine aimed at Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

Military spending is being increased by billions of pounds to fuel this war policy, up to 2.5 percent of GDP by 2027, if not before, and soon far beyond. This is being paid for by slashing what remains of social spending, with Labour implementing sweeping cuts to vital services and support.

Young people are first in the firing line. Chancellor Rachel Reeves has made clear her intentions to slash benefits most fiercely for the those in their late teenage years and early twenties. At the same time, she has stressed the "opportunities" available to young people in the armed forces. A generation is being prepared for slaughter.

Socialism and class struggle the only answer

Starmer and the Labour Party know they cannot proceed with this agenda democratically. There is enormous opposition, especially among young people, to war in the interests of the rich and a new round of austerity to pay for it.

Starmer's strategy is to defeat this opposition with force. We need our own to mount a decisive political counterattack.

A wave of encampments at UK universities last year, following the example set in the US, showed the determination of students to put an end to one of the worst crimes of the 21st century. Hundreds of thousands have turned out on mass demonstrations month after month.

But the balance sheet of these protests is clear. The universities are silencing dissent; the Labour government continues to back Israel to the hilt. The genocide of the Palestinians and the attack on the democratic rights of their supporters cannot be defeated by placing "pressure" on Starmer and his gang of warmongers.

Labour is enacting the policy of a British ruling class mired in the terminal crisis of world capitalism, driving a global eruption of war and move to dictatorship. A mass anti-war movement must be built in an opposed social force with the power to stop Starmer's militarism and police state crackdown and put an end to the capitalist system at the root of this descent into barbarism. That force is the working class.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on students to mobilise the widest possible opposition to the attack on democratic rights. Above all, they must take up the fight to rebuild a Marxist tradition and revolutionary leadership among workers. Join the IYSSE today to:

- Stop the anti-democratic attacks on students!
- Build a working-class anti-war movement!
- Fight for socialism!



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