

Labour “left” refuse to fight Starmer after his anti-migrant “island of strangers” speech

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The response to Monday’s anti-migrant rant by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer by what remains of Labour’s nominal “left-wing” was a blanket refusal to oppose the government’s continued lurch to the right.

MPs who continue to sit on Labour’s benches as the government ratchets up tensions with Russia, backs Israel’s genocide in Gaza and imposes savage austerity measures on the working class made clear, notwithstanding their anti-racist posturing, that they will also reconcile themselves to Starmer’s plans to close Britain’s borders and expel tens of thousands of migrants.

Of even greater significance was the refusal of Jeremy Corbyn, the party’s expelled former leader who sits as an Independent MP, to act any differently by calling for a break with Starmer’s party of warmongers, Thatcherites and nationalist xenophobes.

Starmer’s speech deliberately invoked Enoch Powell’s notorious “Rivers of Blood” speech, in which he spoke of white Britons who “found themselves made strangers in their own country.” Starmer translated this into a warning that without strict immigration controls, “we risk becoming an island of strangers.”

As could be expected, a few “left” and not-so-left Labour MPs feigned outrage over the political pedigree of Starmer’s diatribe. How could they not, when every fascist on the planet knows the meaning of the words. Speaking to *The Independent*, Zoltan Kovacs, the state secretary of Hungary’s far-right prime minister Viktor Orban, commented, “We see Sir Keir Starmer saying the exact sentences and words actually we’ve been talking about for the past 10 years.”

This is Labour’s agenda and would be whether Starmer chose to invoke Powell or not. His spokesperson made a pro-forma denial of any connection to Powell’s speech, insisting that Starmer “made his argument in his own language” and stood by it. The spokesman added, “The British public rightly expects the government to get

control of immigration in a way that the previous [Conservative] government lost control of immigration,” to “get down the sky-high levels of immigration...”

Corbyn was expelled from the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) by Starmer as long ago as November 2020 and is advanced by Britain’s pseudo-left groups as the natural leader of an electoral left challenge to Labour. His supporters in the Collective grouping mooted that this would possibly emerge by December last year.

But just days before Starmer’s comments, and with the far-right Reform UK now polling well above Labour, Corbyn said in a low-key meeting in Huddersfield, “I hear the call for a new political party,” before adding that something, not specifying a party, could come together “by next year’s local elections” or possibly sooner.

Responding to Starmer, Corbyn again confined himself strictly to suggestions of what Labour should be doing, while offering no means of opposing what it is actually doing. He therefore limited himself to uttering a few homilies about how valuable immigrants are to the UK economy, especially in the National Health Service (NHS) and social care sectors.

Responding to Home Secretary Yvette Cooper introducing the White Paper “Restoring Control over the Immigration System,” Corbyn asked, “Will the home secretary explain why in the introduction of this white paper, the language of Enoch Powell was used by the prime minister” and noted that migration “has kept our NHS running, our education service running, and so much more...”

Instead of improving “community relations” and dealing with labour shortages in the NHS and the care service, he added, Starmer was “trying to please, these people, who unfortunately sit in front of me,” referring to the anti-immigrant Reform UK MPs, including their jubilant leader, Nigel Farage.

On X, Corbyn wrote of the “problems in our society”

being caused by “an economic system rigged in favour of corporations and billionaires,” before suggesting that if Starmer’s government “wanted to improve people’s lives, it would tax the rich and build an economy that works for us all.”

Corbyn’s former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has been suspended from the PLP for a year, after he and six others voted against Starmer’s refusal to scrap the punitive two-child benefit cap brought in by the previous Tory government.

Desperately seeking readmission to the PLP, he did not even mention Starmer by name as he cited on X his Irish ancestry, wrote of living in “one of the most diverse communities in the country” and of how shocking was the use of language that “echoes” Powell’s.

In February after four of the seven two-child benefit cap rebels had the whip restored but not him, McDonnell declared, “Relaxed about my own position as I’ve made clear I don’t expect [the] whip back until we know whether police are to charge me following a recent Palestinian demo after which I was interviewed under caution.”

One who did wage a successful months-long fight to return to Starmer’s fold was Corbyn’s former Shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott. She allowed over 24 hours to pass before finally commenting on X: “This was a shameful day in British politics and a shameful day for the Labour party. It will not end well for either.”

Richard Burgon, secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group representing the remaining few dozen “lefts” among Labour’s 402 MPs, told *LBC Radio* that he was “shocked” at an “act of desperation” by Starmer due to the rise of Reform UK. He suggested an apology “needs to be made for it because it creates an impression that isn’t the impression we want. A Labour government exists to raise living standards. It also exists to bring people together, not to divide communities.”

Zarah Sultana, also without the Labour whip, said that echoing Powell “today is a disgrace. It adds to anti-migrant rhetoric that puts lives at risk. Shame on you, Keir Starmer.”

Having spoken regularly on protests in London against the Gaza genocide, which have been subject to crackdowns by Downing Street and Metropolitan Police, and criticized Starmer in Parliament over his support for Israel’s war crimes, Sultana has concluded that there is no way back into Labour’s ranks. But for the rest of the Corbynite “left,” far more polite protests are the order of the day.

Whether they toe the party line or not, the main political concern of the “left” is to preserve the stranglehold of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy over the working class. And one of the primary ideological mechanisms for doing so is to warn that Labour’s demise will open the door to Reform UK. But this is made increasingly difficult when Labour openly apes the far-right.

In Parliament Wednesday, Farage said to Starmer that Reform “very much enjoyed your speech on Monday, you seem to be learning a very great deal from us.” He then asked whether Starmer would “declare the situation in the English Channel as a national security emergency?”

Starmer replied, “The situation is serious, the last government lost control of the borders” and boasted that Labour’s Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill gives “terrorism-like powers to law enforcement, precisely so that we can get in before the crimes are committed, before people get to this country.”

The Socialist Equality Party was correct in every word we said about Corbyn and his backers, who, having taken the leadership of the party from 2015 for five years, refused to lift a finger to oppose and expel the Blairites—which was the mandate Corbyn was given by hundreds of thousands of Labour members and supporters who voted for him.

Failing to do so, they have facilitated the sharpest lurch to the right of any party in Europe over the past decade, handing the Labour leadership over to Starmer and Blairites such as Cooper, now carrying out the anti-immigrant offensive.



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