

Starmer and the Labour Party roll in the nationalist gutter

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It has become impossible to picture Prime Minister Keir Starmer without a Union Flag backdrop. But this week's Labour conference in Liverpool took the party's jingoism to a new and repulsive level.

Delegates were all provided with small Union Flags, English St George's Crosses, Scottish Saltires and Welsh Red Dragons, which they waved as "proud patriots of great nations" as Starmer delivered a keynote speech seeking to compete with Reform UK, especially on immigration control.

Labour organised the spectacle after a year in which the display of the St George's Cross has been associated with an unprecedented campaign of far-right agitation against migrants. What this proved, Starmer explained, was that Labour is the party of "national renewal", "secure borders" and of listening to "reasonable concerns about immigration". A party prepared to "smash the gangs", "crack down on illegal working" and "remove people".

As these words were spoken, US President Donald Trump was sending more National Guardsmen to US cities, advancing his plans for dictatorship, under the pretext of repelling an "invasion" by illegal migrants.

The Labour leader's speech followed announcements that the UK government would be tightening restrictions on indefinite leave to remain, and trailed proposals to "reinterpret" international law over small boats crossing the Channel—including Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights preventing the deportation of those facing torture in their home country.

Starmer's nationalist and anti-migrant diatribe was grotesquely cast as the politics of "decency" versus the "division" represented by Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, named four times as someone "sowing fear and discord across our country." A "moral line" between the two parties meant Labour celebrated Britain as a "tolerant", "compassionate country" which rejected "racist violence and hatred".

Starmer's was a pitch for a slightly more multi-ethnic nationalism, just as jingoistic but coupled with a caution not to get carried away and attack British Blacks and Asians.

His criticisms of Farage were an attempt to win over his voter base, whose views he portrayed as both legitimate and the genuine voice of the working class.

He delivered a long anecdote of having met a Labour voter in Oldham over tea and biscuits who was afraid to express her disgust at "a group of men from Eastern Europe" who "sat on her wall", didn't "put the rubbish out at the right time" and "spat on the ground", for fear of being thought racist by a "party that patronised working people."

No more! Labour would not "ignore the crisis in our asylum system" and the "reasonable demand" for "secure borders".

Starmer's attack on Reform UK was then linked to Farage's perceived unreliability on economic and foreign policy issues.

He lumped Reform together with his unnamed opponents on the left as people indulging in a populist "ideological fantasy" and refusing to accept the need for "decisions that are not cost-free or easy", "tough decisions", "firm and fair decisions to control our debt". They were "snake oil merchants, on the right, on the left," with no "interest in national renewal."

As always, the appeal to a national community was cover for the waging of a vicious social war by the super-rich minority against the working-class majority.

Like Margaret Thatcher in drag, Starmer promised to "unleash British enterprise", grow "productivity" and "confront the blockers that strangle a thriving private sector." Attacking the idea of "a wealth tax that somehow solves every problem," he declared he would replace "handouts or help" with "wealth creation".

Wagging his finger at working people seeking an end to

a years-long cost-of-living crisis, the Labour leader scolded, “It does not matter if it’s unfunded tax cuts or unfunded spending, the result is the same: you lose control of the economy... That’s why the fiscal rules are non-negotiable.”

He warned, “A Labour Party that cannot control spending is a Labour Party that cannot govern in our times.”

This is how Starmer set up a budget in November, where Chancellor Rachael Reeves will deliver tens of billions in spending cuts and tax rises.

Starmer’s second major attack on Reform was to indict Farage as one of those who “equivocate on Putin and Ukraine”. Labour, on the other hand, was committed to carrying on the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine—to “investment in defence” to “defend our continent from Putin’s aggression”. His boast of “Our support—iron clad and never wavering—for the brave people of Ukraine”, with “The yellow and blue flag flying on churches and village halls”, earned him a standing ovation from an audience of politically deranged warmongers.

The UK government has made some efforts in recent weeks to distance itself from the other bloodbath it supports, the genocide in Gaza, including by recognising a Palestinian state. At conference, Starmer moved seamlessly from this empty commitment to welcoming Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu’s slavery or death ultimatum to Hamas to accept the ethnic cleansing and US takeover of Gaza.

Liverpool was billed as the relaunch of Starmer’s premiership, the most unpopular in British history, and a turning point in his government’s political fortunes. But it only demonstrated that Labour is a party utterly divorced from the sentiments of the vast bulk of the working class, and especially young people, whose reaction to Starmer’s version of the Last Night of the Proms will have been one of disgust.

A party that functions solely as a transmission belt between the banks, the corporations and the military and policymaking in parliament is doomed to electoral and organisational collapse.

What Labour thinks it knows of the working class is what it is told about it by Reform and its own “Blue Labour” faction: that its guiding principles are Blue Labour’s own slogan of flag, faith and family. The same goes for the media figures spilling pages of ink speculating whether Starmer’s newfound “passion” will be enough to win voters from Farage.

One would hardly know from reading the mainstream

media that Reform represents less than a third of voters in the polls, and the Tories and Reform combined less than half. Among people aged 25-49, they muster barely a third between them; among 18-24-year-olds, fewer than one in five.

For most workers and young people, Starmer’s speech will only have convinced them that he and Farage are equally reactionary, and that the claims of Labour’s remaining Corbynites such as John McDonnell that there would be a turn to the left at conference were outright lies.

The mood among millions is for a fight to bring down this government of genocide, militarism, flattery for the far-right and the fascist in the White House, and vicious hostility to the working class and its social conquests like the National Health Service.

Which raises the decisive question in British politics today: what sort of organisation must be built to wage such a struggle?

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has been forced to reluctantly lead the formation of a new party, into which all hopes for a left-wing challenge against Starmer are being channelled.

But the further the Labour government proceeds with its agenda, in concert with the governments of America, Germany and beyond, the clearer it becomes that Corbyn and Your Party’s programme of minimum reforms pursued through council chambers and parliamentary manoeuvres is a path to political impotence.

Around the world, the ruling class is waging a reactionary offensive unprecedented since the 1920s and 1930s, mobilising the full force of the state to wage war and crush domestic resistance. Fighting back will require the mobilisation of the full social force of the international working class. For this, a revolutionary socialist and internationalist party is required.



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