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Build the socialist opposition to Starmer's right-wing government!

Sir Keir Starmer takes his place at the head of a Labour government on a collision course with the British working class. He owes his “landslide” victory entirely to the hatred with which the Conservative government of the last 14 years was viewed, the thoroughly undemocratic first-past-the-post system, and the fact that widespread left-wing sentiment has found no organised socialist expression.

These factors have placed a new reactionary monster in power, far to the right of any previous Labour leader, with little more than a third of the popular vote on a near record-low turnout. Tony Blair took several years to earn his reputation as a criminal for his participation in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, and as a Thatcherite social arsonist for his encouragement of inequality and privatisation.



Britain's Labour Party Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer makes speech 10 Downing Street in London, Friday, July 5, 2024. Labour leader Starmer won the general election on July 4, and

was appointed prime minister by King Charles III at Buckingham Palace. [AP Photo/Kin Cheung]

Starmer begins his premiership with blood on his hands from his endorsement of the Gaza genocide and the Ukraine war, already voicing fierce opposition to the social demands of the working class, and committed to police repression of anti-genocide protesters. He speaks, in the language of the political right, of uniting the country and placing country before party. But “the country” is rent in two, and former chief prosecutor Starmer and his government stand on the side of the banks, the corporations and the military-security apparatus.

The question many workers and young people around the country will be asking themselves, just a couple of days after handing Rishi Sunak’s Tories an unprecedented electoral defeat, is: “How do we get rid of their replacements?” Starmer’s own personal majority in his local seat, and those of many of his ministers, were slashed by half or more even on election night.

Significant votes for independents, and to some extent the Green Party, show the desire for a political alternative. But the candidates receiving these ballots are representatives of the totally bankrupt protest, pacifist, pseudo-reformist politics which has defined “opposition” to the political establishment for decades and created the present sense of impasse and frustration.

As in Europe and the United States, there is a danger that this drives workers to the far-right in their search for a way out. Although the Reform Party largely gained its support by hiving off the extreme right of the Tory base, its 14 percent vote total is a warning that the rise of Trump and Le Pen is rooted in a global process of betrayals of working class interests.

The only way forward is through a struggle against pseudo-left politics. Workers who are serious about a fight for socialism in the UK must above all draw the lessons of the Corbyn experience.

Winning two commanding victories in the Labour leadership elections of 2015 and 2016, Corbyn had an overwhelming mandate to destroy the Tory Party mark two run by the Blairites. Instead, he gave every Labour MP protection inside his “broad church” party, where they plotted to slander and expel his supporters, sabotage his chances of election and remove him from politics. Starmer began his march to power from Corbyn’s own shadow cabinet.

Had Corbyn taken up a fight against his sworn opponents, the whole constellation of British politics would have been transformed. The former Labour leader won close to 13 million votes in the 2017 election, versus Starmer’s slightly more than 9 million. But he has maintained his prostration before the Labour Party to this day, even after being expelled from

its ranks for standing as an independent—a step he had to be forced into taking, and only at the eleventh hour.

Interviewed by the *Evening Standard* ahead of the election, Corbyn explained that he would “of course” be glad to see Labour win and that he would back the party in parliament on the “good stuff” it does. His campaign in Islington North was carefully limited so as not to conflict directly with Starmer.

Once again, Corbyn sat on the potential for a mass movement against the Labour Party. Trouncing Labour’s Praful Nargund, winning 50 percent more votes, he could have spearheaded a national movement against its candidates among workers and young people who instead voted anti-Tory and reluctantly for Starmer, looked to a disparate array of independents and Greens, or refused to vote.

It was, is and always will be, Corbyn’s choice not to do so because the alpha and omega of his politics is to prevent any clash between the working class and his beloved Labour Party—an organisation with more than a century’s history of betrayal of workers’ struggles and aspirations. He maintains a personal following for this position by relying on the pragmatism of electoral politics and cynicism towards the possibility of overthrowing capitalism.

Such debilitating conceptions must be broken with. They play far more of a role in keeping the Starmers of the world in power than any of their own non-existent strengths.

As if to prove the point, in just a few days’ time, Starmer will be flying to Washington D.C. to take part in a NATO summit of the political walking dead. He will join French President Emmanuel Macron, whose Ensemble party will likely have been barely kept in government by the grace of the New Popular Front. The senile US President Joe Biden, teetering on the edge of forced removal as the Democratic candidate, and the discredited German Chancellor Olaf Scholz complete the house of cards at the heart of the imperialist alliance.

But these invalids are nonetheless planning for a war and wartime austerity of staggering dimensions. The topic of discussion will be how to fight the next stage of the war between the imperialist powers and Russia in Ukraine and how to fund it through the ramped-up exploitation of the working class and the destruction of public services. Plans for conscription and state repression will also be high on the agenda.

For its part, Labour has already committed to an increase in defence spending costing tens of billions and a modernisation of its nuclear weapons, including building four nuclear submarines, costing billions more.

This is the fundamental contradiction at the heart of today’s world political situation, which comes down to the crisis of leadership in the working class. The ruling elite is taking

enormous risks out of the desperation of its weak and crisis-ridden social position, but if a revolutionary movement does not wrench power from them, they will plunge society deeper and deeper into barbarism.

Workers and young people are tasked with building that revolutionary movement. In Britain, broad opposition to the Gaza genocide must be made the starting point for a struggle against the Labour government and its programme of imperialist war.

The Socialist Equality Party will be taking up that challenge. Our election campaign was aimed at breaking the conspiracy of silence maintained by the capitalist media, the major parties, the trade unions and what passes for the “left” over the acute dangers facing the working class, and at building a socialist alternative to Starmer’s party of genocide and war. It was based on our rejection of Corbynism and our nine-year record of struggle against it.

That perspective has been totally vindicated. It must now be taken up by all socialist workers and young people throughout the UK.