Why is the Socialist Equality Party standing against Andrew Feinstein?

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28 June 2024

Campaigners for the Socialist Equality Party in London's Holborn and St Pancras constituency have been accused by supporters of Independent candidate Andrew Feinstein of splitting the anti-Gaza genocide or anti-Keir Starmer vote.

The SEP rejects such narrow electoral considerations.

We are standing against Starmer and Labour on a diametrically opposed political perspective to that advanced by Feinstein. His is a standpoint shared by numerous candidates protesting party leader Starmer's support for genocide while either continuing to support a Labour vote elsewhere or holding out the prospect of forming a political party separate from Labour at some unspecified future date.

Most often, as with Feinstein, this is associated with calls for former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to head such a party of the future, based on the programme of minimal reforms he advocated in the general elections of 2017 and 2019.

We address these issues directly in our election manifesto, which anticipated the criticisms we now face.

The manifesto declares as its perspective: "No to Gaza genocide and NATO war against Russia! Fight for a socialist alternative to Starmer's Labour Party! Build a socialist anti-war movement!"

It explains:

The SEP rejects calls to sink political differences to bring about one big Gaza protest vote. The promise by the Stop the War Coalition and various pseudo-left groups of "No Ceasefire, No Vote" means supporting some protest candidates while calling for a vote for Labour everywhere else. It ends with the formation of a government that will continue backing Israel and waging NATO's wars…

The only reason Starmer is poised to enter 10 Downing Street is that Corbyn and his backers, elected by a landslide to lead the Labour Party in 2015, faced down demands from workers and youth to drive out the Blairites. Corbyn capitulated on all fundamental issues, including NATO membership and nuclear weapons, and then politely handed the party over to Starmer. The refusal to fight the lie of "left antisemitism" laid the basis for mass expulsions and now the grotesque depiction of Gaza protests, also attended by hundreds of Jews, as "hate marches."

Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party thanks to a mass influx of workers and young people who supported his pledge to fight for an alternative to the Blairites, defend the working class and, above all, take a stand against British imperialism and its wars. But once Labour leader, he sat on all opposition to the Blairites and handed them victory after victory.

While Feinstein and his co-thinkers were holding up Corbyn as someone whose leadership would transform the Labour Party into a vehicle for realising socialism, the SEP was subjecting his political retreats to sustained criticism. This included standing Tom Scripps against Starmer in the 2019 general election when he was Corbyn's Shadow Brexit Secretary.

We were told then that we should stand aside for Corbyn's Labour Party. Fundamentally the same argument is now being made to insist that we bow out to allow Corbyn and followers such as Feinstein a monopoly of opposition to Starmer's Labour Party.

The working class, in Britain and internationally, confronts enormous dangers. Labour is committed to war with Russia, the Gaza genocide and to being the "most pro-business" government in British history. It has joined forces with the Tory government in criminalising anti-war, anti-genocide protesters with "hate speech" laws.

Starmer is in a position to do this thanks to Corbyn, who, even while Starmer was preparing the "party of NATO" for government, was trying desperately to stay in its ranks until he was finally booted out. Even now his closest allies on the Labour "left" such as Diane Abbott and John McDonnell are campaigning for a Starmer government, with McDonnell an enthusiastic advocate for NATO's war in Ukraine.

It is noteworthy that those most incensed by the SEP's standing in Holborn and St Pancras are far more forgiving of these so-called "lefts". Feinstein, still a Labour member until this year, is a founder of the new Collective organisation backing a number of independent candidates, which states explicitly that "most Labour candidates in the Socialist Campaign Group will also continue to be supported" by the organisation.

Collective was only founded in May, after Corbyn declared he would be standing against Labour in Islington North. It calls for Corbyn to come to the head of a new party. But for now this is left at the level of a fond wish for the future, because even after being expelled Corbyn refuses to mount a national challenge to the Labour Party—advancing himself as the historic candidate for Islington North while still supporting the election of a Starmer

government.

Feinstein and others within Collective dutifully tailor their demands to Corbyn's still pro-Labour agenda. Like his mentor, he too combines criticisms of Labour's support for the Gaza genocide and other right-wing policies with political formulations that reject any struggle for the political independence of the working class.

His is a "People's Manifesto for Camden", advocating the locally determined politics of a "community MP" as the basis for a new system of "representative democracy" that "should serve local people, not party machines or corporate interests." This is the tired rhetoric of so many populist and pro-capitalist tendencies that rely on broad hostility to the parties of big business in order to oppose the fight for socialist political representation for workers.

What does such an invocation of the unity of all classes mean, for example, under conditions where the ruling class in every country, backed by every one of their major parties, has either explicitly backed and armed Israel, or made only token calls for a ceasefire?

Feinstein tries to bypass this reality by insisting that Starmer is out of step with "Many Camden residents", with Camden "crying out for better on Palestine and Gaza". What then if, as is expected, Starmer is elected in Camden? Accept this as the express wish of its "people"?

Feinstein is advocating a return to a type of "municipal socialism" that was already rendered historically obsolete by the formation of the Labour Party, which, though not socialist, advocated a nationally based programme of reforms. He argues that he is pioneering a system locally that will eventually inform a national "People power" strategy. But this too is a well-worn path to betrayal and defeat.

The African National Congress (ANC), for which Feinstein was an MP, had its own "Freedom Charter". Under the ideological guidance of the South African Communist Party, the ANC demobilised the revolutionary mass movement of the black working class and, from 1990-1994, negotiated a deal with the old apartheid parties to rescue capitalism based on insisting that establishing majority rule was a necessary stage before socialism could be contemplated.

This perspective subsequently allowed for the cultivation of a layer of black capitalists, whose regime Feinstein now proclaims to be corrupt without offering any explanation of how this is rooted in its bourgeois class character.

He now wants workers in Britain to repeat, under a rerun of Corbyn's disastrous leadership of the Labour Party, the bitter experience of creating "broad left" formations such as Syriza in Greece that sabotaged the struggle against International Monetary Fund and European Union dictated austerity.

The failure of Corbynism to provide a viable opposition to the rightward evolution of the Labour Party is not the result merely of poor leadership.

The development of transnational production and the global integration of finance and manufacturing has dramatically undermined the viability of the old trade unions and Stalinist and social democratic parties that were embedded in the nation state system, to which they all responded by junking their former reformist programmes.

The Labour "left" shares the right-wing's nationalist and pro-capitalist programme, differing only in their advocacy of a few of the reforms the Blairites have abandoned.

Today, only a socialist and internationalist programme offers a way forward for the working class.

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.

Our manifesto explains that 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.

The SEP is fighting in these elections for the formation of a mass movement against genocide and war based in the working class, one that is international, anti-capitalist and socialist.

Our aim is to link this fight to the growing struggles against inequality, poverty and the attacks on wages, jobs, healthcare, education and all the social rights of the working class. We intend to build a new socialist leadership, completely independent of and hostile to all political parties and organisations of the capitalist class, the Labour Party above all.

That is what distinguishes us from Feinstein and his political co-thinkers.

Attend our election rally in London on June 30th.

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