

Ontario NDP doubles down on witch hunt of pro-Palestine legislator Sarah Jama

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When a reporter last week asked Marit Stiles, the Ontario New Democratic Party (ONDP) Leader of the Opposition, whether the party would stand a candidate against the expelled NDP legislator Sarah Jama in the next provincial election, Stiles declared, “As far as I know, it won’t be her, (who will be the party’s candidate) and I’m the leader.” This comment underscored that Canada’s social democrats are doubling down on their support for Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians, which Jama was thrown out of the NDP’s parliamentary caucus for speaking out against in October 2023.

Stiles’ terse statement will come as no surprise to anyone. It is of a piece with the NDP’s position both federally and provincially—supporting the Israeli government’s ongoing, US and Canadian imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza, while shedding a few crocodile tears over the extent of the slaughter in a pathetic attempt to salvage even a shred of what remains of the party’s political credibility.

Throughout the relentless attacks launched against Jama, federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, who previously served as deputy leader of the ONDP, has maintained a despicable silence and continued to support the pro-genocide Trudeau Liberal government.

Jama, a rookie MPP, holds the heavily working class seat of Hamilton Center. Her “crime,” from the standpoint of the Canadian political establishment, was her issuing of an Oct. 10, 2023 statement on X (the former Twitter) comparing the oppression of the Palestinians with apartheid and demanding an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

As Israel’s savage bombardment of Gaza got under way, Jama called “for an immediate ceasefire and de-escalation. We must look to the solution to this endless cycle of death and destruction: end all occupation of Palestinian land and end apartheid. Canada must hold true to its tradition of peacemaking, and refrain from military intervention. My heart genuinely goes out to all those impacted by this ongoing violence.”

In the past, Jama’s statement would hardly have seemed exceptional. As numerous United Nations’ resolutions have

affirmed, Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands captured in the Six Day War of 1967—including its de facto imprisonment of 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza—is illegal. Prior to October 7 2023, Israel’s systematic and brutal regime of oppression against the Palestinians was described as akin to apartheid by many Israeli legal scholars and by Amnesty International, hardly an organization renowned for its radicalism. But today, under conditions in which the imperialist powers have fallen over each other to demonstrate their full-throated support for the far-right Netanyahu government’s extermination of the Palestinians, such statements are intolerable.

Jama’s statement prompted a torrent of abuse and threats from all quarters, and served as the starting gun for a smear campaign and state assault on all anti-genocide protesters, supported by the entire political establishment. Right-wing forces raised the demand that Jama “go back to Somalia,” her family’s homeland. She was universally denounced by the capitalist media, hard-right Ontario Premier Doug Ford, and Zionist organizations as an “antisemite” and a “defender of Hamas terrorists.” Editors and columnists demanded that Jama remove her tweet, apologize and resign her seat.

After her office was inundated with death threats, Jama was forced to work from home. Premier Ford poured political fuel on this fire. He demanded Jama be ejected from the legislature, citing her “history of antisemitism, which supports the rape and murder of Jewish people.” Unbowed, Jama went on the offensive, and launched a libel suit against the Ontario Premier, a perfectly justified act of self-defence. Ford, undeterred, expanded his offensive against pro-Palestinian demonstrators by agitating for increased police oppression as protests grew throughout the winter.

In response to the initial torrent of denunciations, Jama issued a short appendix to her initial tweet, stating, “I understand the pain that many Jewish and Israeli Canadians, including my own constituents, must be feeling. I apologize. To be clear, I unequivocally condemn terrorism by Hamas on thousands of Israeli civilians. I also believe that Israel’s bombardment and siege on civilians in Gaza, as was also

noted by the United Nations, is wrong. As a member of the Ontario NDP caucus, I stand by the position of our federal party, and believe that violence against civilians is never justified, and that there is no military solution to this conflict.”

Her retreat only encouraged the hard-right agitators, who stepped up their calls for Jama to resign. With no resignation forthcoming, Ford’s government then moved to officially censure Jama, which would remove her right to even speak in the legislature. At every point, the right-wing political witch hunt was facilitated by the NDP. Before her expulsion from the caucus, Stiles had insisted that Jama enter into an “agreement” with her, the purpose of which was to effectively muzzle Jama from expressing her views on the massacre in Gaza.

“Those of us committed to Palestinian life refuse to be distracted,” Jama stated before she was censured. “I restate my call for an immediate ceasefire by Israeli forces and for the immediate restoration of food, water, fuel and electricity in Gaza,” she continued. “I ground my words in the realities of the Israeli apartheid and Israel’s ongoing domination and occupation of Palestinian lands. Governments and institutions in Canada are trying to use their voice and weight to silence us, to silence workers, students, educators and peace-loving people who dare to support Palestine.”

Ford’s majority government then passed the censure motion, which imposed a gag order preventing Jama from speaking in the legislature. Shortly thereafter, Stiles kicked Jama out of the NDP caucus. She now sits as an independent and has since garnered support amongst her constituents to stand in the next election as an independent, a prospect which has riled NDP officials who fear that vote splitting may lose them the seat.

Stiles’ statement last week was aimed at making clear to the ruling class that a government led by her party and backed by the NDP’s trade union sponsors would witch-hunt anti-genocide protesters just as ruthlessly as Ford and Trudeau. It would continue to endorse the Toronto Police Service’s “Project Resolute,” which has been involved in the arrest of dozens of activists, and whip up hysteria over student protests on university campuses calling for a halt to the butchery.

The NDP’s treatment of Jama is typical for a party that has consistently barred pro-Palestinian candidates from contesting elections on the party ticket and suppressed discussion of pro-Palestinian motions and resolutions at its conventions. At the federal level, with the full support of the trade union bureaucracy, the NDP still secures the parliamentary viability of the pro-war Trudeau government, which has been no less emphatic in its support for the Israeli regime than the Biden administration.

Although Singh formally ended the confidence-and-supply agreement with the Liberals in early September after almost two and a half years, he and his party have continued to promote the big business Liberals as a “progressive” ally in the fight against the far-right Tory leader Pierre Poilievre. This “progressive” government is the same one that has massively hiked Canada’s military spending and positioned Ottawa as a key player in US imperialism’s war on Russia and preparations for war with Iran and China.

The critical task facing young people and workers outraged by the NDP’s bitter hostility to the rights of the Palestinians and contempt for democratic rights is to draw a political balance sheet of—and break from—this right-wing party of austerity and war. Like social democratic parties around the world, the NDP long ago abandoned even the most tenuous association with a reformist program aimed at ameliorating capitalism’s worst excesses in favour of an open embrace of unrestrained corporate profiteering and imperialist war.

The continuing genocide in Gaza and the expansion of Netanyahu’s war into Lebanon and Iran with the full-throated support of all the western powers underscores that the orientation of those organizing the anti-genocide, pro-Palestinian protests towards pressuring the Liberal-NDP-union alliance to change course is a dead-end. The fight to put an end to the genocide requires a turn not to the powers that be, who are enabling mass suffering and death, but to the working class, the only social force capable of stopping war and genocide. The struggle against war and imperialist barbarism must be aimed at its root, the capitalist system. The urgent task for those seeking an end to the Gaza genocide is to build a mass anti-war movement led by the working class to fight for the socialist transformation of society.



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