

A portrait of Mick Whitley MP, a middle-aged man with grey hair and a mustache, wearing a dark suit and white shirt. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is a blurred industrial or urban setting. A red banner is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Mick Whitley MP

Building a Better Birkenhead

Mick's Message to Members

October 2023

Introduction

The recess for the conference season means that I have hardly been in parliament over the last month. I did, of course, attend the Party Conference held just over the water. I made a point of visiting campaign and trade union stalls of which there were plenty despite press suggestions that big business had taken over our conference.

And it was great to meet with friends from the WASPI women campaign fighting for pension justice and Unite the Union which is spearheading so many vital industrial struggles. The conference - held in my good friend Kim Johnson's constituency - was perhaps not the most vibrant politically I have been to, but it was a real pleasure to meet up with comrades and friends and showcase the radical socialist politics that are a hallmark of Merseyside.

However, there is only one topic I intend to comment on in this bulletin, so please forgive its brevity. Please forgive too my inability to attend tonight's CLP meeting due to a longstanding previous commitment of mine.

The war in the Middle East

On 7 October, the Hamas rulers of the Gaza strip in occupied Palestine launched attacks on Israel. Countless rockets were launched at Israel. Hamas fighters entered southern Israel and unleashed an assault of unspeakable barbarity against innocent Israeli civilians.

Over 1400 people were murdered and around two hundred were taken hostage. I have no hesitation in condemning this as a brutal terrorist outrage. There can be no excuses for murdering civilians in any conflict. It has rightly been denounced by our Party and by me in my statement published immediately after this awful event.

The events of 7 October have caused heartache for many Israeli families. The consequence of this action led the Israeli state to unleash war on the Gaza strip. This war – supposedly only targeting Hamas – has created yet more tragedy. The 2.3 million Palestinians crammed

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into the tiny (141 square miles) strip of land – over half of whom are under 18 – have been subjected to a relentless bombing campaign and a blockade starving the people of food, fuel, water, and medicines.

The events have provided the perfect excuse for the leaders the USA, UK, France, and Germany to form a chorus line of uncritical support for the Israeli state's response. Israel had every right to self-defence in the face of the Hamas attack, and a military response was inevitable. But the scale and nature of that response has now seriously crossed a line. The indiscriminate bombing of the Gaza strip has destroyed countless homes, created thousands of refugees with no safe place to go and killed over six thousand Palestinians – most of them women and children.

Thousands more face death, if not from the torrent of bombs and missiles raining down on Gaza then from the lack of food, fuel, water, and medicine. A humanitarian crisis of enormous proportion lies in store for those two million or more Palestinians who have been lucky enough to dodge the bullets and bombs so far.

As many observers have pointed out this is a form of collective punishment of Palestinians and is a breach of international law.

I want to present you all with the facts from a neutral source of information, the independent charity, Oxfam. As of 24 October, it reported:

- As of October 24th, the number of people killed in Gaza has reached 5,791 – of whom 68% are women and children. According to UN OCHA, this steep rise in death toll follows the most intense bombardment since the conflict began.
- Oxfam analysis of UN data shows that just 2% of food that would have usually been delivered has entered Gaza since the total siege, leaving 2.2 million people in urgent need of food. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) strictly prohibits the use of starvation as a method of warfare and as the occupying power in Gaza, Israel is bound by IHL obligations to provide for the needs and protection of the population of Gaza.
- Sixty-two trucks of aid have allowed to enter southern Gaza via the Rafah crossing since the Saturday, however only thirty contained food. Oxfam is pleased to see aid trucks entering through the Rafah crossing, but this is not nearly enough. Prior to the escalation in violence, over one hundred trucks per day were crossing into Gaza (one truck every 14 minutes). The aid that is currently reaching Gaza is a drop in the ocean relative to the scale of need and is still being delivered in an erratic and precarious nature.

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- Moreover, these trucks have not contained any fuel, meaning that generators for hospitals and other essential services cannot run, and the aid entering Gaza cannot be transported through Gaza. Some essential food items, like flour, oil, and sugar, are still stocked in warehouses that haven't been destroyed. But as many of them are located in Gaza city, it is proving physically impossible to deliver items due to the lack of fuel, damaged roads, and risks from airstrikes.
- Additionally, without fuel, water pumps cannot function, and without water, it is challenging for people to cook some of the limited food that is being delivered, such as rice and lentils. More aid, including fuel, is urgently needed. However, Rafah cannot be relied on as the only crossing. Israel must lift the total blockade of Gaza and allow aid trucks to deliver through Israel too.
- Crucially, humanitarian aid without a ceasefire is futile. Delivering aid under bombs, shells, rockets and bullets puts humanitarian actors and civilians at huge risk. Fortunately, all Oxfam staff are currently accounted for, but UNRWA report that thirty-five of their staff have been killed, highlighting the danger that humanitarian actors are operating in. The UK Government must work to ensure an immediate ceasefire so that essential humanitarian supplies can get to those who desperately need them as soon as possible.

These facts indicate that we are no longer talking about legitimate self-defence on the part of the Israeli state. We are now talking about war crimes – a revenge mission that has no end in sight. That is why I believe the Labour Party urgently needs to change its policy stance. The party needs to get behind the Early Day Motion from Richard Burgon. It reads:

“This House utterly condemns the massacre of Israeli civilians and taking of hostages by Hamas; agrees with the United Nations Secretary-General that these horrific acts do not justify responding with the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; expresses its deep alarm at the Israeli military bombardment and total siege of Gaza and the resulting deaths and suffering; believes that the urgent priority must be to stop the deaths and suffering of any more civilians in Gaza and Israel; welcomes the joint statement from 12 leading aid agencies, including Oxfam, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Medical Aid for Palestinians and Islamic Relief, calling for the Government to use its influence to help protect civilians, to ensure adherence to international humanitarian law and to guarantee civilians have access to critical life-saving humanitarian support; and to this end supports their call for the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary to urgently press all parties to agree to an immediate de-escalation and cessation of hostilities, to ensure the immediate, unconditional release of the Israeli hostages, to end to the total siege of Gaza and allow for unfettered access of medical

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supplies, food, fuel electricity and water, to guarantee that international humanitarian law is upheld and that civilians are protected in accordance with those laws.”

This policy outlines a route out of the current maelstrom of war. It can end the carnage. Labour must adopt it and campaign to make it a reality.

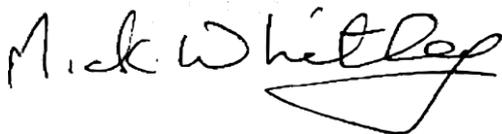
Thank you!

As a result of the boundary changes the Party has, this month, reconstituted its Constituency Labour Parties (CLP) along the new boundaries that have been introduced for the next general election. Which means that this meeting of the CLP is the last one of the party organisation that selected me to be the candidate for the last general election.

I was honoured to be selected by the CLP as its candidate. Following my election in December 2019 I was both proud and privileged to be the Member of Parliament for Birkenhead. Throughout my time as the MP, I have worked tirelessly to serve the town, its people, and the CLP. I am eternally grateful for the support you have shown me. Together I believe we have made a real difference to the town.

I am sure that as the new CLP comes into being you will continue that work. I want to thank all of you, from the bottom of my heart, for your hard work and for providing me with the opportunity to serve the town of my birth. Let us keep to the pledge I made at the start of building a better Birkenhead.

Solidarity and thank you,



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