

# An Open Letter to Oxfordshire Labour Party Activists

Dear Oxfordshire Labour Party activists,

26<sup>th</sup> June 2024

We are writing to you in light of grave failings within the Labour Party's senior leadership, as evidenced by mass resignations of elected councillors, party officials and members from the Labour Party.

It is evident that both the Chair of the Labour Party, Oxford East MP candidate Anneliese Dodds, and the leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, have expressed views that have shocked the majority of Oxford residents. Moreover, their evasiveness under questioning demonstrates that Labour has become a party which cannot be trusted by Oxfordshire voters.

**With the general election only days away, we therefore exhort you to distance yourself from what is reported below, or explain why you are willing to remain a member of a political party where this behaviour is tolerated.**

## Dishonest and duplicitous treatment of Labour's own members and supporters

The Labour Party is no longer a home for people who dare to think for themselves, but is instead a closed shop welcoming only to those who share a very narrow ideological position. There is now ample evidence highlighting Labour's strategy of purging those who dare to express alternative viewpoints. We are all aware of the treatment meted out to Diane Abbott MP – but a rather more devious approach has recently come to light in Banbury where the Labour Party went as far as giving tacit support to an opposition candidate against their own.<sup>[1]</sup>

Seven Slough councillors quit the Labour Party ahead of the General Election citing institutional racism and the abandonment of Labour values.<sup>[2, 3]</sup>

50 Chingford and Woodford Green Labour Party members, including a councillor and seven senior local party officers, have resigned over Faiza Shaheen's "anti-democratic" de-selection.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Inhumane attitude to the plight of Palestinians

Keir Starmer's statement that Israel 'has a right' to withhold power and water from citizens in Gaza, made at a time when medical supplies, water and food were cut off, demonstrated a callous lack of humanitarian concern for innocent civilians.<sup>[5]</sup> Showing his trademark lack of principle, the Labour leader has since tried to step back from his earlier statement, but many Labour councillors, officers and Party members are not convinced, as they are resigning from the Labour Party in significant numbers:

- Burnley councillors and leader quit Labour Party over Gaza stance <sup>[6]</sup>
- Nottinghamshire councillors quit over Labour leader's stance on Gaza <sup>[7]</sup>
- Seven Slough councillors quit Labour Party ahead of general election <sup>[8]</sup>
- A North Kensington councillor resigned from the Labour party because of Keir Starmer's attitude to Palestinian suffering <sup>[9]</sup>
- 10 parliamentary frontbenchers quit or were sacked amid mass rebellion over Starmer's Gaza ceasefire stance <sup>[10]</sup>
- A Shadow minister quit the Labour front bench over Gaza <sup>[11]</sup>
- The Local Labour party in Wales called on Starmer to quit over his Gaza stance <sup>[12]</sup>
- **Oxford Labour councillor resignations over Gaza** <sup>[13]</sup>
- Fifteen Scottish Labour officers resign over Gaza policy <sup>[14]</sup>

Local MP Anneliese Dodds similarly has shown little concern for the plight of civilians in Gaza. On 15 November 2023 she chose **not to vote** for a ceasefire, following the Labour Party whip's instruction to abstain. In November she chose **not to sign** an Early Day Motion (EDM) to end the siege of Gaza and allow aid in; and in December she chose **not to sign** an EDM to suspend UK arms export licenses to Israel.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Undue influence of the Party Whip

Unlike independent politicians, Labour MPs and councillors are subject to direction from their Party whip to ensure that they toe the party line. They are required to do this regardless of, and sometimes directly against, the needs and wishes of the local communities they have been elected to serve.

Ian Middleton, Green councillor in the Cherwell District Council, observed: “The problem with Labour is they are so ruthlessly whipped and told how to vote”<sup>[1]</sup>. In Pendle, twenty Labour councillors resigned amid bullying claims, with one stating “...senior party officials have attempted to impose their ideas at a local level. I was elected to serve the public, not party officials.”<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Disregard for the views of the people: Labour’s stance on LTNs and other traffic measures**

As incumbent MP candidate seeking to retain her Oxford East seat in the General Election, **Anneliese Dodds** was tight-lipped when asked recently by the Oxford Mail for her thoughts on contentious traffic measures in the city.<sup>[16]</sup> However, having realised that this won her few friends, she subsequently provided a response<sup>[17]</sup> claiming to be concerned about the consequences of LTNs but being careful to point out that ‘continuing with the roll-out of LTNs before bus prioritisation would worsen congestion’ and that LTNs ‘are designed to work with other measures to make travel easier in Oxford’ – In other words, she is in reality supportive of both the LTNs and the traffic filters (‘bus gates’) and not taking notice of all the harms they are causing to businesses, communities and to the lives of many people<sup>[32]</sup>. She has not apparently heard the complaints from the Co-Op<sup>[25]</sup>, Oxford bus companies<sup>[26]</sup>, Thames Valley Police, together with Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service and South Central Ambulance Service<sup>[27]</sup>, schools<sup>[24]</sup> and the many businesses that have cited LTNs as a major cause in their closure<sup>[28, 29, 30, 31]</sup>. Furthermore, Keir Starmer has recently declared that local councils will be able to impose LTNs under a Labour government.<sup>[19]</sup>

### **Confusion over gender rights**

It is not only in relation to LTNs that Anneliese Dodds is prone to a slippery vagueness in her statements. When interviewed on Woman’s Hour on International Women’s Day in March 2022 she could not give a clear definition of a woman, saying “it does depend what the context is”. Perhaps she did not want to be seen to contradict Keir Starmer, who had said previously that he believes one in 1,000 women have a penis<sup>[21]</sup> and that ‘transwomen are women’.<sup>[20]</sup>

Neither Keir Starmer nor Anneliese Dodds supported their colleague, Labour MP Rosie Duffield, when she suffered abuse for defending the rights of women and supporting the notion of protecting single sex spaces<sup>[18]</sup>. We wholeheartedly concur with the author JK Rowling’s condemnation of Labour MP Rosie Duffield’s treatment by the Labour Party. Ms Rowling is now distancing herself from Labour<sup>[22]</sup>.

However, in a now familiar move, Labour’s Leader has very recently changed his view. Apparently, following a biology lesson from Tony Blair, Keir Starmer now agrees that “a woman has a vagina and a man has a penis”.<sup>[23]</sup> Can you really trust a party whose leader’s opinions constantly bend to the ever-changing winds of public opinion?<sup>[33]</sup>

Cassi Bellingham, a former Labour councillor in the Cherwell District, stated she has seen “bullying” in the party and other women treated in a way that was “personal” and “nasty”.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **So, will you distance yourself from this appalling behaviour, and disassociate yourself from a party that is no longer true to its roots?**

“I’m a socialist and socialists aren’t welcome in the party now” - Cassi Bellingham.<sup>[1]</sup>

We are publishing this letter in the public interest.

Yours faithfully,

*Anne Gwinnett*

Dr Anne Gwinnett  
Chair, Independent Oxford Alliance

*David Henwood*

David Henwood  
City Councillor for Rosehill & Iffley  
IOA Parliamentary candidate for Oxford East

Information sources:

- [1] Ian Middleton was an MP candidate for the Green Party in Banbury in 2019.  
“At the time, the Labour leadership in Banbury had reportedly messaged him giving tips on how to win against the Labour party’s own MP candidate Suzette Watson who was seen to be more on the left and a supporter of Jeremy Corbyn.” Oxford Mail 18 June 2024:  
<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24389270.allegation-labour-purges-oxfordshire-town-banbury/>
- [2] Slough and South Bucks Observer 3 June 2024  
“We, the rank-and-file members, are left with no option but to resign. We must stay true to our values and conscience, even if the party we once believed in has abandoned them.”  
<https://www.sloughobserver.co.uk/news/24363678.seven-slough-councillors-quit-labour-party-ahead-general-election/>
- [3] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0ddl304wzmo>
- [4] Chingford News 11 June 2024  
“Our democratically elected candidate for Chingford and Woodford Green, Faiza Shaheen, has been deselected in an appalling and unfair manner. Faiza was selected by the constituency members in a fair and open contest, accruing more votes than the other three candidates put together. The process of deselection overturned this election result and is anti-democratic.” <https://walthamforestecho.co.uk/2024/06/11/50-chingford-and-woodford-green-labour-party-members-resign-over-faiza-shaheen>
- [5] The London Economic 11 October 2023 <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/politics/israel-has-a-right-to-withhold-power-and-water-from-citizens-in-gaza-starmer-360557/>
- [6] “We always felt it was our responsibility as elected members to work to effect change from within. However, despite our persistent endeavours, it has become apparent that Keir Starmer and the leadership either cannot or will not heed our concerns or acknowledge the sentiments within our communities.”  
<https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/23903217.burnley-councillors-leader-quit-labour-party-gaza-stance>
- [7] “The Labour Party’s failure to promptly and effectively denounce the atrocities in Gaza is the ultimate reason for my decision”; and “It is not what I stand for, and it goes against my principles.”  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-67168064>
- [8] “We, the rank-and-file members, are left with no option but to resign. We must stay true to our values and conscience, even if the party we once believed in has abandoned them.”  
<https://www.sloughobserver.co.uk/news/24363678.seven-slough-councillors-quit-labour-party-ahead-general-election>
- [9] “Many Arabs and Muslims within the party have felt unsafe and unrepresented for some time. The dehumanisation of Palestinians, which amounts to complicity in the atrocities carried out against them, has meant that many including myself could no longer in good conscience continue to represent the Party.”  
<https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/keir-starmer-palestine-israel-councillor-resignation-b1116269.html>
- [10] A total of ten members of the Labour leader’s frontbench resigned or were sacked as more than a quarter of his MPs defied him to support an immediate cessation in the fighting.  
Jess Phillips, shadow minister for domestic abuse, was the most high-profile member of the frontbench to quit.  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/keir-starmer-gaza-ceasefire-vote-result-b2448234.html>
- [11] Imran Hussain: Shadow minister quits Labour front bench over Gaza  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-67353019>
- [12] “We call on Sir Keir Starmer to resign forthwith as leader of the Labour Party.”  
<https://nation.cymru/news/local-labour-party-in-wales-calls-on-starmer-to-quit-over-his-gaza-stance>
- [13] Mr Rehman, the latest councillor to resign, said it was “beyond his comprehension” that the party would not call for an end to the fighting. He said it left his position as a Labour councillor “untenable”.

Six others who all quit at the same time said they had resigned over the “Labour leadership’s refusal to condemn collective punishment of Palestinians”.

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23929604.oxford-labour-councillor-resignations-gaza-explained>

- [14] Nine officers in a Glasgow ward, including a Labour peer, and six in Edinburgh stood down. The Glasgow Kelvin officers accused Scottish Labour of "stifling democracy" after a motion calling for an end to military action was ruled out of order. In a letter of resignation they said: “We have been informed by the general secretary and the Scottish general secretary that any motions relating to the situation in Israel and Gaza are out of order for all CLPs.” It said they were being “forced to shut down discussion”, and they refused to be “part of a party machinery which stifles democracy”. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-67191515>
- [15] “Sadly, over a recent period, senior party officials have attempted to impose their ideas at a local level. I was elected to serve the public, not party officials.” <https://labourlist.org/2024/04/labour-councillors-resign-pendle-quit-bullying-israel-gaza>
- [16] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24395052.mp-candidates-oxford-east-share-view-ltns/>
- [17] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24402675.oxford-east-mp-anneliese-dodds-criticises-ltn-roll-out/>
- [18] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cyxx243yr16o>
- [19] <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/starmer-says-local-councils-to-impose-ltns-under-labour-government/ar-BB1o6nWO>
- [20] <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/keir-starmer-debate-transgender-issues-trans-women-are-women-b987688.html>
- [21] <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11934045/Keir-Starmer-refuses-explain-suggestion-1-1-000-women-penis.html>
- [22] BBC 22 June 2024 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cndd65k06x8o>
- [23] The Telegraph 18 June 2024 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/18/keir-starmer-agrees-wth-tony-blair-on-gender-stance/>
- [24] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23859193.oxford-school-says-ltns-causing-staff-resign/>
- [25] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23854760.co-op-warns-east-oxford-ltns-affect-city-stores/>
- [26] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23852089.oxford-bus-companies-disappointed-ltn-recommendation/>
- [27] <https://cherwell.org/2023/10/24/oxfordshire-county-council-votes-for-ltns-despite-vocal-opposition/>
- [28] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/20164961.silvesters-stores-close-east-oxford-ltns-the-last-straw/>
- [29] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24386065.oxford-st-clements-business-blames-ltns-closure/>
- [30] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24002425.tool-shop-oxford-close-because-cowley-ltns/>
- [31] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23729880.oxford-depressed-business-owner-blames-ltns-closure/>
- [32] [https://independentoxfordalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/oxford\\_travel\\_focus\\_groups\\_report.pdf](https://independentoxfordalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/oxford_travel_focus_groups_report.pdf)
- [33] <https://www.politico.eu/article/all-of-keir-starmer-s-u-turns-in-one-place/> POLITICO lists 20 key walkbacks in Starmer’s spell as opposition leader.
- [34] <https://palestinecampaign.eaction.online/votingrecord/search> - Enter an Oxford East postcode to find A Dodds (e.g. OX4 4PB, Church of St Mary and St Nicholas)