

Sharp fall in numbers on Trades Union Congress London demonstration

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The Trades Union Congress (TUC) “Future that Works” demonstration in London on Saturday was much reduced in size from its only previous march and rally, 18 months ago. According to estimates, between 100,000 (the police figure) and 150,000 (the TUC’s figure) were in attendance.

The TUC’s “March for the Alternative” demonstration in March 2011 had attendance estimates of between 250,000 and (a much-exaggerated) 500,000.

The demonstration held by the Scottish TUC Saturday was a small affair, with estimates of 2,000 to 5,000 people in attendance. In Belfast, fewer than 1,000 were at a related demo.

The smaller numbers involved indicate that many workers have drawn negative conclusions regarding the refusal of the trade unions to mount any opposition to the Conservative/Liberal Democrat’s austerity programme. The March 2011 demonstration was supposed to be part of the union’s pledge to fight the attacks on public sector pensions. Instead, it was the beginning of a protracted wind-down of any struggle.

The TUC’s hostility to the basic interests of the working class was epitomised in the fact that Labour Party leader Ed Miliband told the rally that a future Labour government would continue to make cuts. The media described it as a “brave speech”, but the Labour leader was speaking to a demonstration consisting of many like-minded union officials, Constituency Labour Party branches and members of Stalinist and other pseudo-left groups.

Miliband said, “Of course, there will still be hard choices. With borrowing rising not falling this year, I do not promise easy times. I have said whoever was in government now there would still need to be some cuts.”

The Labour leader solidarised with the police over the

recent resignation of Conservative Party chief whip Andrew Mitchell.

Mitchell had been accused by the police of referring to officers outside the prime minister’s Downing Street residence as “plebs”. Following his alleged comments, the Police Federation, backed by the Labour Party, called for him to step down and for a full inquiry into the affair. Their aim is to insist that the government’s spending axe does not fall on the police force but more heavily still on public sector workers. Miliband thanked “all the off-duty police officers here today.... Let us say we stand with them as they seek to protect front-line policing and improve communities across Britain.”

It was left to the pseudo-left organisations, clearly deeply disturbed by the low turnout, to put the best face on proceedings. The Socialist Workers Party resorted to flat-out lying, claiming in an article posted on Saturday afternoon that some 200,000 were in attendance on the demonstration and citing the false estimates from the Scottish TUC, “that over 10,000 marched through Glasgow, while up 10,000 marched through Belfast”.

The Socialist Party (SP) felt obliged to acknowledge the lower turnout because “Without doubt, having experienced the capitulation of the leadership of the TUC in the battle against pensions, some workers stayed away because they doubted that this demonstration would be the launch pad for an escalation of the battle against the Con-Dems.”

However, it went on to insist that “This demonstration opened a new phase in the war against austerity” and made great play of what it claimed was “huge support” for its own demand for a 24-hour general strike.

The SP and SWP glorified the speeches of Unite trade union leader Len McCluskey, Bob Crow, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers

union, and Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union.

Fresh from their betrayal of the pensions fight, none of these bureaucrats has made a single concrete proposal to organise anything. All McCluskey could offer was a gimmick, hailed by the SP, when he asked the sparse audience in front of him to raise their hands if they supported a general strike.

The function of McCluskey and his pseudo-left cheerleaders was to act as a cover for the right-wing programme of the Labour Party and TUC. Unite's own most recent endeavour is a campaign calling on its members to "to join the Labour Party and be part of shaping a future Labour Party government that really represents ordinary trade union members."

The call for a "general strike", divorced from a struggle against the Labour Party and the TUC, is a fraud. The TUC has called just one general strike in its history, 86 years ago in 1926. And it was betrayed by trade union leaders whose left-talk would put McCluskey et al's hollow rhetoric to shame, aided by the Stalinised Communist Party's refusal—under the demand "All power to the TUC"—to mobilise workers independently of and against the union bureaucracy.

Outgoing TUC leader Brendan Barber told the BBC Saturday that there were no plans by the unions to call a general strike, stating, "I don't hear too many people calling for a general strike."

The pseudo-lefts are well aware that the function of one-day strikes, regularly called by the trade unions in Greece and Spain, is to allow workers to let off steam and safeguard the interests of the ruling class in conditions of acute crisis.

The TUC speaks openly as a representative of capital. A 16-page brochure distributed at the rally, "Austerity is Failing. We Need a Future that Works," contains a section, "The USA shows the way."

It hails President Barack Obama for having "launched a second stimulus, cutting taxes to put extra money in people's wage packet each month and help to boost spending."

The truth is that there has been no end to recession conditions for the vast majority of the US population. While the banks and corporations have returned to profitability, tens of millions live in grinding poverty and increasing desperation. Massive subventions have been made to big business at the expense of jobs, wages

and conditions.

Of particular note, Obama organised the bailout of the Big Three car companies in the US when he worked with the United Auto Workers (UAW) union to slash the wages of new-hires in half, ban strikes for six years and impose other devastating concessions. In a move that will have earned him the affection of trade union bureaucrats everywhere, for services rendered, the White House gave the UAW majority control of Chrysler, with 55 percent of the company's stock, and a 39 percent ownership stake in GM, making it the second biggest GM shareholder.



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