

London protests: Stop the War Coalition promotes British parliament

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Britain's Stop the War Coalition (STWC) held a demonstration in London on Saturday. Called initially to protest an imminent military assault on Syria by the US and the UK, the demonstration instead attempted to sow illusions in the bourgeois parties and parliament in the wake of the defeat of the British government's pro-war motion on Thursday.

The parliamentary defeat came under conditions of huge popular opposition to military intervention against Syria, and divisions within the ruling elite.

The overwhelming majority of the population is hostile to an attack on Syria. With the experiences of the lies and misinformation circulated to justify the illegal attack on Iraq in 2003, most are rightly cynical of Washington and London's efforts to proclaim the Assad regime guilty of the chemical weapon strike in Ghouta. Fearful of this popular sentiment, sections of the bourgeoisie and the armed forces are also concerned as to the efficacy of the military action proposed.

Saturday's protest was attended by a few thousand people who marched past the Houses of Parliament and the prime minister's Downing Street residence before ending with a rally in Trafalgar Square.

In the days following the government's defeat, there has been a concerted effort by sections of the media to use the vote to claim the danger of war has passed and that Britain has given up on its imperial ambitions.

This, however, is not the major factor in the small numbers in attendance. It is rather the outcome of the politics of the Stop the War Coalition itself.

The STWC was founded in 2001 as an alliance of the Liberal Democrats, a few Labour Party MPs, the Communist Party of Britain, and the Muslim Association of Britain. The pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party played a leading role in its formation.

In 2003 it worked to divert opposition to the Iraq war

behind support for the United Nations, as well as Germany and France, which were nominally opposed. Since then, the petty-bourgeois layers that make up much of the pseudo-left have swung sharply to the right.

In the case of Syria, they have led demands for military intervention on the side of the opposition, which is heavily comprised of Muslim fundamentalists and Al Qaeda elements. The ex-radicals have sought to dress up their pro-imperialist line with the specious claim that the intervention they are in favour of is "limited" to arming the opposition. Their portrayal of London and Washington as the saviours of the Syrian population has played a major role in enabling the ruling elite to even consider, let alone plan, yet another bloody military venture.

In line with their subservience to British imperialism, the various constituent parts of the STWC didn't even mobilise their own membership for Saturday's demonstration, which was given over to trying to bolster illusions in the supposed anti-war credentials of the Labour Party.

The selection of the speakers was indicative of this, including Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn and the octogenarian ex-Labour MP Tony Benn. Also sending his support to the rally was Labour MP Peter Hain.

Various speakers from the Stop the War Coalition lauded Thursday's vote in parliament as a "victory", making hardly any reference to the fact that the US is still determined to attack Syria.

STWC convenor Lindsey German, a member of Counterfire, a splinter group from the Socialist Workers Party, said Thursday's vote "was a victory in parliament. It was a vote that the politicians should have had the guts to hold 10 years ago and they didn't."

German made clear the purpose of STWC is to remind British imperialism of its national interests, “We’ve said for some years that one of our aims as a movement should be to break Britain from following the US in every step of its foreign policy,” she said. “This week we made that possible”. An article on Counterfire’s web site the previous day stated, “Parliament has finally—under the weight of long-term pressure—come close to reflecting public opinion.”

Tariq Ali, a political opportunist of decades standing and a former leading member of the Pabloite United Secretariat, continued the theme. “We have to say clearly and openly, thank you to all the members of parliament, from all the parties, who decided not to vote for the government resolution committing this country to war,” he said.

Ali’s praise was boundless. He said that after living “in this country for 40 years or more ... It feels for the first time you are living in an independent country.”

STWC President Tony Benn also played down the danger of the imminent war plans of the Obama government. “This is an occasion when we are here to congratulate ourselves,” he said of the vote. “All the campaigns we’ve been engaged in have culminated in the decision taken by parliament last week”.



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