

250,000 demonstrate against austerity in London

Our reporters
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A quarter of a million people took part in an anti-austerity demonstration in London on Saturday, according to the event's organisers, the People's Assembly. Media accounts put the turnout at between 70,000 and 150,000. Demonstrations also took place in Glasgow, Liverpool, Bristol and other cities.

The protests are an expression of the seething anger within the British working class and among youth over decades of austerity under Labour and Conservative governments alike. The Conservative government headed by David Cameron has pledged a new round of brutal austerity measures following elections last month.

As demonstrators took to the streets, news reports emerged of a major rise in child poverty in Britain, which grew from 2.3 to 2.6 million between 2013 and 2014. All aspects of life are being targeted for cuts. In London, for instance, the BBC reports that public parks are likely to become inaccessible to ordinary people because spending cuts are laying the groundwork for their privatisation.

Saturday's march started outside the Bank of England in the City of London and made its way to Parliament Square, where the crowd was addressed by politicians, union leaders and celebrities. A broad section of society took part, including workers, professionals, youth, retirees and immigrants. Participants held signs that read, "No Cuts" and "End Austerity Now".

However, the organisers of the People's Assembly—the Communist Party/ *Morning Star* Stalinists, the Labour Party "lefts", the Green Party and groups like Counterfire—have no perspective to offer those seeking a means to combat austerity.

Several speakers pointed to the fact that the Conservatives had received just 24 percent of the vote

in the May 7 general election and had no mandate for austerity. However, they sought to bolster the unions and Labour Party, which have participated in the assault on the working class. Some of the most brutal cuts were carried out under the leadership of Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair.

During the general election, the Green Party in England, Plaid Cymru (The Party of Wales) and the Scottish National Party offered Labour their support in a supposed "Progressive Alliance" against the Conservatives. Labour Party leader Ed Miliband rejected all such entreaties as a means of convincing big business of Labour's readiness to continue with an austerity agenda.

With Labour defeated and in the midst of a leadership contest dominated by pledges of "economic competence" and pro-business policies, Green Party MP Caroline Lucas advanced the People's Assembly as an external lobby for the Progressive Alliance. She appealed to any Labour MPs supposedly ready "to see the light."

"Those of us in that building [the Houses of Parliament] on the progressive side of politics need to be working together more. Only if other progressive politicians will defy their leaderships, vote down the kind of cuts that are coming, work together to bring your voices into that building ... maybe just then we will win."

This is a call for an alliance with an ever-dwindling Labour "left" whose function is to provide political cover for the right-wing, pro-corporate party. It serves to turn the millions of working people angered by Labour's betrayals back towards the party and seeks to channel social protest into the dead-end of parliamentary politics.

The People's Assembly also aims to provide cover

for the trade unions, which have worked with the Labour Party and the Tories in enforcing austerity and smothering opposition. This was expressed by co-chair and Green Party National Executive Trade Union Officer Roymane Phoenix. She described “our trade unions” as “the weakest trade union movement in the developed world, stripped of power by Thatcher, not put back under Blair and not successfully fought for in the build-up to the election.”

Phoenix asked, “If we cannot call a strike to protect the jewel in our crown, the National Health Service, what sort of organisation [the Trades Union Congress] can that be for us?” In response to her own question, Phoenix offered the services of the People’s Assembly to help cover up the unions’ refusal to fight. “We need to work with them, but we may have to step to one side and work in our communities and organise,” Phoenix declared.

A prominent place at the demonstration was given to Jeremy Corbyn, who is one of the four contenders in the Labour leadership ballot. The candidate of the “left” gave an anodyne speech stating that it was “all about a social movement” necessary to force the state and the community “to take responsibility.”

A much smaller crowd of around 2,000 gathered in George Square in Glasgow, Scotland. The effects of the austerity measures on the working class were woven into the Scottish independence narrative, and there was no mention of the SNP government’s own austerity measures administered through the devolved parliament at Holyrood.

Jeane Freeman from Woman for Independence and a columnist for the *National* newspaper was once an adviser to the former Labour Scottish Minister Lord McConnell. “We stand today on the shoulders of those who have fought for what we have today and Westminster is trying to take away,” she said. Throughout her remarks, Westminster in London was the one and only villain.



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