

UK's Stop the War Coalition: A bogus antiwar movement in the service of the Labour Party

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The Stop the War Coalition (STWC) held a protest outside UK Prime Minister David Cameron's 10 Downing Street London residence Saturday.

The central aim of the demonstration was to divert antiwar sentiment behind the dead end of support for Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party, which, it was asserted, had merely been "mistaken" in their previous support for various imperialist wars over the last 15 years. The bankruptcy of this perspective ensured an attendance of less than 5,000 people.

The only proposal offered was to spend the next few days lobbying Labour's pro-war MPs so that they "learn the lessons" from the outcome of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

STWC held a number of rallies in city centres around the country, which were also poorly attended, with around 100 people in Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester.

The STWC is not a genuine antiwar movement but a lobby group urging the development of more coherent foreign policy strategies for the British ruling elite. In 2007, it issued a statement calling for the then-Labour government to "Pursue a foreign policy independent of the administration of the United States of America."

In 2013, after Labour MPs allied with 30 Tory rebel MPs to veto British military action in Syria, STWC leader Lindsey German, formerly of the Socialist Workers Party and since 2010 a leader of the Counterfire splinter, stated, "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," adding, "This week we made that possible."

Prior to the London protest, the STWC put out a 7-point rebuttal of Cameron's statement to Parliament

last Thursday in which he outlined his case for military action in Syria. Its opening point stated that Cameron did not "outline a coherent strategy to defeat ISIS" [Islamic State] and "was unable to explain why British bombing will be any more effective than that which has been conducted by the much larger US forces with their allies over the last 13 months."

British imperialism, along with the US, should instead be involved in a power "transition and negotiations." It notes, "Military action will complicate and hinder not hasten existing negotiations. The chaos of civil war is creating the conditions in which ISIS can thrive. A political solution is necessary for people of the region to be able to tackle ISIS."

Their final point of friendly advice to Cameron is, "Bombing is not the only available foreign policy" and "crucially Britain and the US should pursue rather than impede peace negotiations."

STWC's line is indistinguishable from that of significant sections of the British bourgeoisie. It amounts to urging the Tories to support an alliance with Russia and the regime of Bashar al-Assad as the best means of defeating Islamic State. But such an alliance would only ever be of a temporary character, paving the way to military intervention in the region under a different constellation of forces and with the bonus of appearing to be nonpartisan and "progressive."

Each of the speakers lauded Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn for his statement in opposition to the British air strikes in Syria. No doubt, many of those in attendance would have been confused as to why he was not present on a demonstration taking place just days before a vote is to be held on British bombing of Syria. In the run-up to the vote in parliament in August 2013

to veto military action in Syria, Corbyn was among the main speakers on a demonstration, also held outside Downing Street. He was a founding member and the chairman of the STWC from 2011 to 2015.

However, in order to placate the party's right-wing, soon after his election he cancelled plans to address a Stop the War Coalition meeting and announced his resignation as its chairman. Corbyn has refused to confront the pro-war majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, despite their overt campaign to remove him as party leader.

The tone of the rally was set by opening speaker Andrew Murray, the chair of STWC and a leading member of the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain, who urged, "tens and hundreds of thousands of us" to say to Labour MPs "stand behind Jeremy Corbyn."

John Rees, another former leader of the Socialist Workers Party, now of Counterfire, endorsed not just Labour, but also the Scottish National Party and the Green Party. "The Scottish National Party are opposed to this bombing and we congratulate them," he said. "The Green Party are opposed to this bombing and we congratulate them. The policy of the Labour Party is to oppose this bombing and we congratulate them."

"The entire Labour Party should stand behind its leader," he continued, urging pro-war Shadow Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn to "learn the lesson" from the Iraq war. "You were wrong then and you're wrong now."

Labour MPs "know what happened in Scotland when you supported the Tory party [their electoral meltdown in May's general election]. Don't make the mistake of dragging your party into the mire again."

He advised Labour's warmongers, "If you want to be an opposition, if you want to save lives, if you want to stop war—start standing up and fighting with the antiwar movement."

Guardian journalist Owen Jones was the most open in advancing a pro-imperialist line. He gave his endorsement to the removal of Assad—the main goal of the US and Britain aimed at securing their geostrategic interests in the region.

He said of Islamic State, "The day that organisation is wiped from the face of the earth is a good day and we will work for that day. We all agree on that. It's how we get there."

Jones continued, "The vast majority of people being

killed in Syria are not being killed by ISIS, they are being killed by the [Assad] dictatorship."

He concluded, "[T]he only solution to this, a lasting solution, is a national unity government" that can "bring together all the regional players to make sure that happens. So let's stand up for that settlement."

Tariq Ali, a bourgeois commentator and former leading Pabloite, also lauded the SNP and Greens and the "best of Labour" for opposing war. Corbyn was "the most left-wing leader the party has ever had as far as imperialism is concerned," he said. As well as Labour's previous support for war, "there is a tradition within the Labour movement staunchly hostile to imperialism and we are with the current which has been staunchly hostile to imperialism." He ended by calling for "a big, big appeal to Cameron and his friends in the Labour Party ... 'Don't bomb Syria'."

Although not speaking at the rally, Ken Livingstone, a prominent STWC supporter and Corbyn ally, went on record over the weekend in favour of ground troops being sent into Syria—but not British ones, as "they're too discredited after Iraq and Afghanistan".

Livingstone, who Corbyn has given the post of co-chairing a review of Labour's defence policy, advised that instead, "[W]e should look to countries like China. China would jump at the opportunity to get involved because it would bring them on to the global stage. They have got millions of troops."



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