

Small turnout at Stop the War Coalition rally in London, England

Robert Stevens
14 December 2015

Between 2,000 and 3,000 protesters marched in London Saturday in opposition to British bombing in Syria, which began immediately after MPs endorsed air strikes on December 2.

The demonstration was called by the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), with protesters assembling at Portland Place, near to New Broadcasting House, the BBC's headquarters.

The small turnout in support for the STWC is in marked contrast to the groundswell of opposition to British air strikes in Syria, with a majority of the population opposed to intervention.

The dwindling popular support for the Stop the War Coalition does not express an absence of opposition to war in the working class, but rather the political bankruptcy of the organization, whose main aim is to channel anti-war sentiment behind Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party.

The attendance was reduced even from the last STWC demonstration on November 30, held on the eve of parliament's vote for war.

The bombing went ahead, with 66 Labour Party MP supporting the government after Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn allowed them a free vote. The free vote ensured that none of them would face censure or disciplinary action, with the pro-war Labourites left free to parade their contempt of the wishes of the electorate and of the party's membership, and Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron emboldened to describe anyone opposed to war as a "terrorist sympathiser."

The STWC is an alliance of pro-capitalist formations and pseudo-left groups, including the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Muslim Association of Britain and the Green Party. Its convener is Lindsey German, formerly a leader of the pseudo-left Socialist Workers

Party, and since 2010, of its Counterfire splinter. Its chair is Andrew Murray, a member of the CPB and chief of staff of the Unite trade union.

The STWC now openly functions as an advisory group for the British ruling elite, advocating a more "independent" foreign policy, not exclusively tied to following the United States.

On the morning of the demonstration, the *Guardian* published an interview with Murray by John Harris. In the exchange, Murray outlined the support of the STWC for parliaments' Conservative-dominated Foreign Affairs Select Committee.

Murray stated, "Our view is the same one, more or less, as the foreign affairs committee of the House of Commons: *that without ground forces, Isis is not going to be uprooted. Bombing on its own can't do it. A ground force that is going to do it has to be credible within the region ...* and the idea that the [Syrian president Bashar] Assad army could play that role is ridiculous."

The role of the STWC is to divert antiwar sentiment behind the dead end of support for Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. Following Corbyn's clearing the path for British military action in Syria, in the face of opposition to war by 75 percent of Labour's membership, the STWC has drawn even closer to him.

In the face of right-wing demands that Corbyn takes his distance from the STWC, Murray responded in the same interview, "We have to think about everything we say, and how we protest—how it'll not just impact on public opinion, but how it could impact on Jeremy, who is a very staunch friend of Stop the War."

"We have a lot of money in the bank with each other, as it were," he added.

In other words, the STWC is pledging that it will do nothing to cut across Corbyn's ongoing policy of

capitulating before his party's right wing. To this end, not a word was uttered by any speaker at the rally about Corbyn allowing a free vote on Syria. Indeed one would not have known that British planes were dropping bombs in Syria, based on the critical backing of Labour MPs, such the was distortion of events.

Instead, stating that he had an "important message to read out to you all", Murray read out a statement from Corbyn in which he said, "A large majority of all parts of the Labour Party, including the MPs, membership and shadow cabinet, last week opposed this government determination to extend UK bombing in Syria."

Despite stating before the parliamentary vote that there would be "no hiding place" for Labour MPs who voted for war, Corbyn's statement made no mention of them. Instead, he called on Labour's MPs to "hold this government to account for their conduct of the campaign and step up the pressure to bring the conflict to an end."

German defended Corbyn and the Labour Party to the hilt, stating of those in the political elite and the media who denounce anyone opposing war, "They can just about stand an anti-war movement, they can just about stand a left-wing Labour leader, but the two things together obviously send them completely wild and they can't stand it at all."

German held up another bourgeois government for Cameron's Tory party to emulate. "We should have a situation where our government behave a bit more like the Canadian government" and welcomes refugees, she said, "instead of keeping them at that camp in Calais where they're allowed to die."

While hailing Canada's government, German declined to mention its previous support and involvement in imperialist wars. Neither did she explain that new Liberal Party Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, while ending direct military action to placate anti-war sentiment, has pledged that Canadian forces will support and assist French military interventions in the Middle East and Africa, thus freeing up French forces for action in Iraq and Syria.

Speaker after speaker insisted it was possible for the Cameron government to see reason and end the geo-strategic war plans of British imperialism. Alex Kenny, a member of the National Union of Teachers' National Executive, said, "Our first job is to stay the hand of our

government."

A message was read out from Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey, who said, "I want to praise the stand of Jeremy Corbyn against war in Syria," before predicting, "The MPs who voted for war will repent their vote."

Murray ended the rally with further praise for Corbyn, stating, "We have been under attack because ... our power is growing politically. Because they are afraid of the way the Labour Party is going under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership."

The reality is that Labour under Corbyn has allowed the Tories to launch military action that was not even possible when Ed Miliband led the party.



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