

UK: The rotten politics of the SWP's Stand Up to Racism

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The July 14 Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) protest against fascist provocateur Tommy Robinson is a political dead end.

SUTR links its demonstration against Robinson to the protests against Donald Trump because the US president deliberately seeks the support of and gives succour to the far-right in the UK and throughout Europe—with the Breitbart website and its founder, Steve Bannon, acting as Trump's point man.

Over the past month, the rump of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the English Defence League (EDL) have come together around the recently founded Football Lads Alliance (FLA) or Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA). Their stated aim is to form a far-right force equivalent to Alternative for Germany (AfD) or the French National Front (FN), which have a sizeable constituency.

Breitbart was heavily involved in promoting rallies demanding Robinson is freed from his imprisonment on contempt of court charges. The largest in London was backed by up to 15,000 people and was addressed by UKIP leader Gerard Batten and Geert Wilders of the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands.

This is a worrying development, especially given the deliberate cultivation of far-right forces across Europe by the ruling elite. But the threat of a fascist movement growing in the UK under Breitbart's tutelage is being separated by Stand Up to Racism's political leadership, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), from any critique of the political forces that have created the conditions for the far-right's growth.

The SWP's overarching aim is to promote the "progressive" credentials of the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn and of the Trades Union Congress, which funds SUTR, in opposition to the development of a socialist political movement against capitalism.

To this end, SUTR is participating in the anti-Trump protest within the Stand Up to Trump coalition, made up of the pro-Corbyn Momentum group, the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain, the People's Assembly, Stop the War Coalition, the National Union of Teachers and others.

This group has united with the Stop Trump coalition, fronted by the *Guardian's* Owen Jones and supported by several trade union leaders, under the banner, Together Against Trump. This is based on an agreement not to discuss political differences with the Blairites, Liberal Democrats and Greens involved, especially regarding the pro-European Union stance of Jones, et al. It dutifully follows Corbyn's insistence that all issues of principle are subordinate to Labour Party unity.

The SWP burying itself in SUTR also avoids the awkward question of Jones and other anti-communists refusing to work with the party, utilizing its handling of unproven allegations of rape levelled against one of its leaders in 2013. Only last year Jones described SUTR as "a front for the SWP" and refused to collaborate with it.

The SWP spends all its efforts reassuring the Labour Party and TUC of its unswerving servility.

The anti-Robinson demonstration is being promoted through a letter they boast has been signed by "Over 50 parliamentarians, trade unionists, faith leaders and anti-racism campaigners." Aside from a single Green, the "parliamentarians" are all Labour, but this is not stated explicitly so as to reinforce the message that everyone must "come together to defend our multicultural society from those who spread hatred and division."

However, pride of place in the list is given to Corbyn's key allies, Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and General Secretary of Unite Len McCluskey. This endorsement by the Corbyn leadership is central to the SWP's political agenda, which was laid out clearly in an article in the SWP's *International Socialism Journal*, "Darkening Prospects," by its leading theoretician, Alex Callinicos.

"Internationally the neoliberal order continues to implode," he writes, citing Trump's intent on pursuing trade wars with China, the European Union and Canada as "undermining the post-war liberal international order."

This, he adds, finds consummate expression in his undisguised hostility to Germany.

Callinicos then details the crisis over Brexit in Britain, which is tearing apart the Conservative government of Prime Minister Theresa May.

He complains that whereas the situation should be "better for the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn," he too faces a "fifth column" in the shape of a strident group of "Remainers" on the Labour right that he has not fought—especially regarding bogus allegations of anti-Semitism.

Under a subhead "The high cost of caution," he writes of a "more general stance" including McDonnell's "wooing" of big business and "equivocation" on "the biggest issue of all—race and migration ..."

He comments that though Corbyn and Abbott "both have an excellent record defending the benefits of migration (and individual migrants threatened with deportation), their policy is

shot through with qualifications.” This includes Corbyn abandoning “his previous support for free movement in and out of Britain for Europeans” and invoking this anti-immigration stand “to justify opposing Britain remaining a member of the EEA or the European Single Market.”

It is because Corbyn’s innumerable retreats and political betrayals have exposed his leftist pretensions that Callinicos advises him to use the politically cheap adrenalin shot of making a public campaign against the far-right—emulating the supposed “comprehensive defeat inflicted on the National Front by the Anti-Nazi League [ANL] in the late 1970s,” led by the SWP:

“SUTR’s conferences have been impressive for the support shown by leading figures in the Labour Party, starting with Corbyn and Abbott themselves. But this needs to be reflected at the grass roots with the development of local anti-racist coalitions deeply embedded in their working-class communities, at the same time as a massive propaganda campaign comparable to the ANL at its height takes place at the national level. The statement initiated by SUTR and signed by leading Labour MPs, trade unionists, and anti-racist activists on 19 June is a good start, but much more needs to be done.”

Callinicos is unabashed in his political cynicism. Corbyn is capitulating before his party’s right wing, seeking the support of big business and retreating on “the biggest issue of all”—race and migration. But his political authority must be reinforced through protests to “take back the streets” from the far-right.

The real impact of such rotten politics can be gauged from an examination of the role played by ANL—cited by the SWP as the best example of how “to deny the fascists the streets” and “through confrontation to split off the hardcore Nazi leadership from the wider racist periphery in order to push back the movement.”

In an article from 2009, ANL National Secretary Paul Holborow states that the fascist “National Front (NF) grew in the 1970s against the backdrop of a Labour government that had let working class people down. Unemployment was rising and wages were falling. That provided the background for the Nazis to exploit the growing misery and insecurity—and try to direct that anger at black and Asian people ... The ANL was launched in November 1977, aiming to unite everyone who opposed the Nazis. By April of the following year we could put on a carnival that attracted 80,000 people.”

What he does not say is that the ANL served to disorient layers of workers and especially young people faced with a Labour government under James Callaghan that had done far more than “let down” the working class. Rather, its austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund provoked the public-sector strike wave of 1978-79, known as the “Winter of Discontent,” in which more than 29 million workdays were lost.

The ANL focused on urging physical conflicts with the NF that ended on Monday, April 29, 1979, with the death of teacher and activist Blair Peach at the hands not of the fascists, but the police—and reggae band Misty in Roots singer Clarence Baker comatose for five months.

Four days later, the NF were routed in a general election forced on Callaghan—with its 303 candidates all losing their deposits and

the party securing just 0.6 percent of the vote. But far from a victory for the strategy pursued by the ANL, the election brought the Conservatives to power under Margaret Thatcher—which launched a savage assault on working people that has continued to this day, including under Labour from 1997 to 2010.

One element of Thatcher’s victory was that she won over the support base for the NF with her declarations that Britain was being “swamped by people with a different culture”—to the extent that the Tory Matthew Parris wrote in the *Times* on October 29, 2014, “We had been averaging 500-700 letters a week when, discussing immigration in a TV interview, Mrs. Thatcher used the word ‘swamped.’ In the following week she received about 5,000 letters, almost all in support, almost all reacting to that interview. I had to read them. We were swamped indeed: swamped by racist bilge.”

It was in recognition of the services rendered by the ANL that, in 2003, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) was set up by the TUC and Weyman Bennett of the SWP made one of its officers. Its bona fides as an “opposition” to the right wing were not helped by the endorsement of David Cameron, who became leader of the Tory party in 2005 and prime minister in 2010.

In practice, UAF was superseded by SUTR in 2013 to distance the group from the sex scandal that had rocked the SWP. But aside from this name change, the only difference between 1979 and today is that the potential price to be paid for the SWP’s efforts to tie the working class to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy is far higher.

The attacks waged by Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and now Theresa May are only a down-payment on the savage offensive to come—as British, European and world capitalism plunges ever deeper into crisis. In Britain, four decades of unrelenting right-wing political and social nostrums, anti-immigrant rhetoric and national chauvinism, especially in the aftermath of the global crash on 2008, have created the toxic breeding ground for the far-right, just as it has throughout Europe with movements such as the FN and AfD, and in the US.

But this same crisis finds its most crucial expression in the extreme growth of class antagonisms produced by the plunder of social wealth by the financial oligarchy and the war waged on working people.

Halting the growth of the far-right means breaking with all the former reformist parties and trade unions whose betrayals have allowed the fascists to channel social discontent in a reactionary course. Here in the UK, everything depends upon throwing off the political stranglehold on the class struggle imposed by the trade unions and rejecting Corbyn’s soporifics regarding a return to social peace with big business. It demands the building of a genuinely independent socialist movement.



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