Thousands attend anti-fascist protest in London

Robert Stevens
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Around 20,000 people demonstrated in London on Saturday against the rise of racism and fascism, marching from Great Portland Street and rallying at Whitehall.

The march followed recent events in Europe, including fascist riots in Chemnitz, Germany, the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in the United States, and UK protests in support of English Defence League founder Tommy Robinson.

Contingents arrived from all parts of the country, with coaches laid on by trade unions and rally organisers. Many who marched were politically affiliated, reflected in the large number of local Labour Party and union branch banners.

While protesters registered their opposition to the rise of the far right, the nationalist and pro-capitalist programme of rally organisers provided no basis for workers and youth to fight the far right. This was reflected in the event's official title, "National Unity Demonstration Against Racism and Fascism."

The perspective of "national unity" against fascism is aimed at suppressing the independent mobilisation of the working class against capitalism. This was summed up in the frontpage slogan of the Stalinist *Morning Star*, distributed free of charge on the day, which stated, "Tens of thousands rally today for simple human decency."

An appeal for the rally was made on November 1, with a statement published in the *Guardian* signed by a long list of Labour MPs and trade union bureaucrats, including key Corbyn allies John McDonnell and Dianne Abbott.

"The impact of neoliberalism and austerity … has driven the growth of the far right," wrote the signatories, without mentioning that austerity and cuts are currently being enforced by Labour councils across the country on behalf of the Conservative central government.

Their statement also included Labour's own election slogan, "We are the many. They are the few." Much of the rally had the character of a pro-Corbyn event. Despite this, neither Corbyn nor Abbott nor McDonnell addressed the demonstration. Also absent was TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady.

This did not stop the various pseudo-left groups—led by the Socialist Workers Party via Stand Up To Racism, the Socialist Party, Counterfire and the Stalinist Communist Party of Great Britain—from building the march on a pro-Labour perspective. Rally speakers included Labour MP Catherine West, Labour MEP Claude Moraes and union officials Len McCluskey, Mark Serwotka, Kevin Courtney, Mick Cash and Matt Wrack.

A message from Dianne Abbott, read out to the rally, attacked the "hostile environment" enforced by the Conservative government against immigrants, but Labour's own election manifesto calls for managed immigration on the bogus pretext of protecting jobs, embracing the central claims of the far-right that immigration contributes to unemployment and "pressure" on social services. "Let's not stop until these Tory policies are defeated," her message concluded.

Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, declared that "in fighting racism we also need to fight austerity and for jobs and homes." Yet just four months ago, when PCS members voted by 85.6 percent for strike action to defend jobs, wages and conditions, Serwotka and his fellow PCS officials enforced the Tory government's anti-strike laws, declaring that strike action would not go ahead because members had failed to reach the 50

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percent ballot threshold.

Saturday's rally was ended by Labour Party national executive member Claudia Webbe, who told demonstrators, "We need a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government as soon as possible."

The event was sponsored by Stand Up To Racism (SUTR), Unite against Fascism and LoveMusic HateRacism. All three organisations are supported by the Trades Union Congress, the Socialist Workers Party and its offshoot, Counterfire. In August, McDonnell had declared, "It's time for an Anti-Nazi League-type cultural and political campaign to resist" because "we can no longer ignore the rise of far-right politics in our society."

The bankrupt politics of the SWP-led Anti-Nazi League, and the UAF and Stand Up To Racism provide no way forward. Counterfire, a splinter group from the SWP, most accurately defines the pro-capitalist perspective of Stand Up To Racism, based on appeals to the institutions of the state and its political representatives: "The central job for everyone anxious about the rise of the far right is to call out Robinson and his core supporters as the Nazis they are, to drive them out of *mainstream politics* and off our streets" (emphasis added). "Of course there are different approaches to tackling the far right and those need to be respected and discussed. But on the 17 November we need to be marching together."

It is precisely the politics of the "mainstream" parties and the media—their continual promotion of anti-migrant chauvinism amid the constantly escalating attacks on the working class—from which the far right gains strength. Political figures such as former UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage and Robinson have been afforded blanket media coverage, while last week, the US fascist Steve Bannon spoke at the Oxford Union and was interviewed by BBC Scotland at the News Xchange conference in Edinburgh.

By contrast, not a single national newspaper reported Saturday's demonstration, focusing instead on a much smaller protest of around 6,000 people organised by the Extinction Rebellion environmental group. The group organised a peaceful sit-in on five of London's bridges—Southwark, Blackfriars, Waterloo, Westminster and Lambeth—that lasted for most of the day. The media reported with barely disguised glee the 85 arrests made by police, under the provisions of the Highway Act.

The only way to halt the growth of the far-right is by breaking with all the pro-capitalist parties and trade unions whose betrayals over decades have allowed the fascists to channel social discontent in a reactionary course. In the UK, this means opposing the suppression of the class struggle by the trade unions and Corbyn's Labour Party. It demands the building of a genuinely independent socialist movement based on the mobilisation of the working class across Europe and internationally.

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