Stop the War rally tries to restore Corbyn's tattered anti-war credentials

Robert Stevens
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Saturday's London protest opposing war with Iran, organised by the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), attracted fewer than 2,000 people. Other events around the UK were tiny dispirited affairs, made up almost exclusively of members of pseudo-left and Stalinist groups.

The paltry numbers involved is testimony to the political bankruptcy and collapse of Britain's official anti-war movement. Concerned primarily with arguing for British imperialism to pursue a foreign policy more independent from Washington, it offers no genuine way for millions of people to articulate their deeply held anti-war sentiment.

Indeed, the more dangerous the world situation becomes, with the US threatening to wipe out entire nations with the backing of Britain and other imperialist powers, the less the STWC, which turns its face squarely to the rightward lurching Labour Party and trade union apparatus, is able to mobilise popular support.

Saturday's protest was not a demonstration that had anything to do with a fight against imperialist war. Speakers at the rally repeatedly called for "de-escalation" from "both sides" and for Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson to "stand up" and oppose US President Donald Trump.

The STWC leadership—made up of Counterfire, a split-off from the Socialist Workers Party, and a handful of ageing Stalinists and other pseudo-left figures—was far more concerned with the fate of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn than the Iranian people. Theirs was a rally dedicated to the political rehabilitation of Corbyn and burnishing his badly tarnished anti-war credentials.

In September 2015, on taking the leadership of the Labour Party, Corbyn cancelled plans to address a Stop the War meeting and announced his resignation as its chairman. To placate the Blairites in his party, the man who spoke against the Iraq war in 2003 delivered a free vote in Parliament for Labour MPs to back air strikes on Syria in 2015. His 2017 general election manifesto pledged Labour to NATO membership, committing at least 2 percent of GDP to military spending and the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system.

His 2019 election manifesto declared that "our armed forces are versatile and capable of fulfilling the full range of roles and obligations." It decried a situation in which "Trained army personnel have been cut from 102,000 to just over 74,000" and warned that "The security challenges we face know no borders… a Labour government will undertake a Strategic Defence and Security Review to assess the security challenges facing Britain, including new forms of hybrid, cyber and remote warfare."

Having been rejected by millions of workers in December's general election, who had no faith in his claims to represent a left alternative to the Blairites, Corbyn is due to be replaced as Labour leader in April. He has therefore decided to return to his past practice as a loyal backbencher issuing personal declarations committing him to precisely nothing. Even now, such is his determination to do nothing to upset his right-wing allies that he spoke on Saturday not as Labour leader, but as the vice-president of the largely defunct Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)!

Corbyn's speech began by drawing an equivalence between US imperialism and Iran. Tehran's admission that it had accidently shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet killing 176 people last week, at the height of the most recent US war scare, was "part of a whole pattern of appalling acts across the region."

"There's no excuse for shooting down an airliner, there's no excuse for a targeted assassination by one state against another," he said. One wouldn't have known that it is the US that has launched war after war over the past 30 years in the Middle East, invading, occupying and

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using its proxy armies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Libya.

His message was received loud and clear by the Blairite *Guardian*, whose report of the rally was headlined, "Jeremy Corbyn: Iran has 'no excuses' for shooting down airliner. Outgoing Labour leader tells anti-war march that missile attack was an 'appalling act'."

According to Corbyn, there was nothing the imperialist powers could not achieve in the cause of peace. Those attending "this year's non-nuclear proliferation treaty review conference" should "make it a real one for once where we recognise the potential power of the non-nuclear proliferation treaty to end the proliferation of nuclear weapons and help to bring about nuclear disarmament."

Banning nuclear weapons at May's conference would be an "opportunity to review the Iranian deal to bring about a conference to end weapons of mass destruction all across the Middle Eastern region and help to bring peace, justice and human rights to all the peoples of that area of the world."

Johnson himself could be a peace broker, said Corbyn, as he called for the UK to "stand up for international law, for peace and for justice all around the world… Our message today… is that we want a British government that will follow those principles, that will take those principles to the UN and make those principles the centre of its foreign policy…"

Salma Yaqoob, former leader of the pseudo-left Respect Party and now seeking to be Labour's candidate for West Midlands' mayor, asked of Johnson "How low are you prepared to go on bended knee to Trump?... stand up man!"

Opening the rally was Andrew Murray, a close adviser to Corbyn. A former chair of STWC, he is also chief of staff at the Unite trade union and was introduced to the rally by CND leader and fellow Stalinist Kate Hudson as speaking "on behalf of Unite."

Murray stated, "All of us here today wish that Jeremy Corbyn was in 10 Downing Street and there is a battle going on to defend the foreign policy which Jeremy Corbyn has always championed on platforms like this one, a policy that is needed more than ever."

He added, "I urge everyone standing for leader of the Labour Party to make it absolutely clear they are not going to heed the advice of Tony Blair who says Labour must return to support the western foreign policy as he puts it."

What a fraud. Thanks to Corbyn's political cowardice, he will likely be succeeded by the Blairite Sir Keir Starmer. Moreover, the likely winner of the position of deputy, backed by Corbyn's shadow chancellor John McDonnell, is Angela Rayner, who has praised the unindicted war criminal Blair, and insisted--taking her cue from Corbyn--that "all shades of red are needed in our UK Labour party to take on this nasty Tory government who are wrecking our country."

Despite caveats about the US having no right to be in the Middle East, the Pabloite Tariq Ali insisted from the platform Saturday "that both sides have to de-escalate."

Introducing Corbyn, he grovelled, "I want to say on your behalf to him, welcome home Jeremy we need you here… We need Jeremy here to help us fight and to help you lead the fight, for as long as he can or as long as he wants to. But we need him out here with us. We need him to be the voice of the anti-war movement in this country…"

Some of the leading figures in STWC, including Ali and John Rees of Counterfire, are also leading personnel in the Don't Extradite Assange campaign. They have spent months claiming that Corbyn could not speak up in defence of imprisoned WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange—facing extradition and a 175-year sentence for exposing US war crimes—because this would be used against him by the media to prevent his election. One month after Labour's defeat, Ali et al not only joined Corbyn in his continued silence on Assange but closed ranks to protect him from criticism.

When Corbyn was challenged on Saturday as to why he did not speak out on Assange, he scowled in obvious disgust, as did Andrew Murray. He was then bundled away by his minders.

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