

Stop the War Coalition demos offer no way forward

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The Stop the War Coalition's (STWC) "Day of Action" this Sunday to "Stop the War in Ukraine" underscored the organisation's inability to build a mass opposition to war.

Some 3,000 people attended the main protest in London, inevitably inflated to 5,000 in the group's own reports. The other "40+" rallies organised around the country were attended by at most two-hundred people in the larger cities, and for the most part less than that.

Stop the War's demonstrations were held amid a warmongering campaign designed to encourage support for a confrontation with Russia and they reflected the impact of that campaign in their small size and political composition.

The protests were called under the slogans, "No to war in Ukraine; yes to negotiations and peace", "Russian troops out" and "No to NATO expansion". Despite this last demand, a significant section of the demonstrators supported the "right" of a "sovereign Ukraine" to join the NATO alliance. A smaller number even described themselves as favourable towards NATO and its supply of arms to Ukraine. Many Ukrainian flags made an appearance, as did signs likening Russian President Vladimir Putin to Hitler.

Most who turned up who were not affiliated with a political tendency were animated by a genuine concern about the war in Ukraine and the danger of a wider escalation.

The rally was distinct from those organised by the pro-NATO warmonger Paul Mason, which lend open support to the right-wing Ukrainian regime and its fascist-infested armies, and to NATO's anti-Russian aggression. But the STWC is incapable of effectively combating the narrative of the conflict spun by the government and the corporate media.

Instead, the organisation is adapting itself to the relentless anti-Russian war drive, foregrounding the anti-Putin records of its leaders and downplaying criticisms of NATO and the imperialist powers.

This is summed up by Stop the War's political figurehead Jeremy Corbyn. On March 1, he responded to attacks branding him and others supportive of the STWC as "Putin's useful idiots" with a video statement stressing his record of criticisms of the Russian government.

Former Labour Party leader Corbyn argues, "There is no solution in Ukraine which involves a war with Russia", but the word "NATO" does not pass his lips. His only reference to the war drive of the imperialist powers is the oblique, "It's very easy for a politician in any parliament in the West to get up and say, 'go to war'."

To varying degrees, the same approach is taken by all Stop the War's spokespersons. It is entirely possible, as the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board wrote on February 28, "to oppose imperialism without adapting to Russian nationalism, and to oppose Russian nationalism without adapting to imperialism." In fact, this is the only programme of political struggle through which the current war and the danger of a global conflagration can be ended.

The STWC cannot advance such an opposition because it is a petty-

bourgeois protest movement, which sees its role as advising imperialism to temper its worst excesses. It opposed the 2003 Iraq war by attempting to cobble together enough parliamentary figures to persuade the British ruling class to follow the purported model of Franco-German military "restraint" and "independence" from US foreign policy. Given this lead, the largest anti-war protests in British history were driven into the ground and scattered.

With the war in Ukraine, Stop the War proposes "a massive, unified response by peace-loving people around the world", calling for a ceasefire and "a negotiated settlement", "taking both Ukraine's integrity and Russian security concerns seriously."

The torrent of imperialist propaganda being turned on the population cannot be fought on this flimsy basis. Building a mass anti-war movement means more than announcing the time and location of a protest and asserting a vague opposition to war. It means opposing the war plans of all governments, imperialist and the nationalist response of the Russian oligarchy on a worked-out socialist and internationalist programme of political class struggle, and a determined, unyielding fight for that perspective in every neighbourhood and workplace.

The WSWS and the Socialist Equality Parties oppose the criminal Russian invasion of Ukraine and the imperialist designs of the NATO powers which prompted it and threaten to turn it into the staging ground of a Third World War. We fight to popularise this perspective in the working class as part of the struggle for an international socialist movement which alone can bring an end to capitalist wars.

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WSWS reporters spoke to some of those attending Stop the War Coalition rallies on Saturday. Socialist Equality Party members distributed the WSWS statement, "The war in Ukraine: The questions that must be asked".

London

Victoria worked in the human rights sector and is now retired. She said, "I feel anti-war generally. I feel this is a mistake. I feel like Ukraine won't have a chance against the Russian military and the destruction will be very long-lasting.

"Putin shouldn't have invaded, but I think peace negotiation should be the priority and I think everybody should be working towards that objective." She was concerned that if a no-fly zone was imposed over Ukraine, and "there are two major states involved in armed conflict then the risk becomes substantially greater."

Asked about NATO's expansion to Russia's border over the last 30 years, Victoria replied, "I feel the problem's been the failure to stand by commitments and to manage the end of the Cold War, and to uphold a

commitment to peace and non-military engagement, and it's NATO expansion that's been progressively going on despite the fact that the Warsaw Pact was dismantled is really hugely problematic and provocative."

Cath from south east London came to the rally because of "what we're seeing on the news with people suffering and being under siege and the fear and also I want to feel some solidarity with people.

"I don't know what you think about the timing of it because I work in learning disability services and I was talking to one of my clients about it and she was saying 'oh we've just got through COVID and now this.' And then you think well now what's going on and really you do start to mistrust whatever you hear.

"The Conservative party and Boris Johnson and all this Partygate stuff, we don't hear about that anymore do we? What happened to Sue Gray's report into Johnson breaking lockdown rules? I mean who cares now we've got people dying."

Amir, a database administrator, said, "It's not only about Ukraine but I thought I should join and put out my voice to stop the war. Stop Putin and stop NATO expansion. It is absolutely shocking what is happening in the world, and the points that you make are that it's dangerous what the world leaders are doing. It is not only the Ukraine, but the Middle East, China and Taiwan. It is dangerous and I think the situation in Ukraine is possibly showing the direction of the future."

Manchester

Ryan, a physics student from Manchester University and member of the Labour Party, attended the small STWC demonstration held in the city's St Ann's Square. He said, "The invasion of Ukraine is in the context of an increasing aggressive policy against Russia. In 2014, the Ukraine government was overthrown and replaced with a so-called US backed democracy.

"The expansion of NATO raised tensions in the region. None of these actions are sufficient to justify an invasion. If you say an invasion of Iraq is wrong, you must say an invasion by Russia is wrong. As a socialist I have no sympathy with either side.

"Already you can see liberals calling for a no-fly zone which could escalate into World War III. It's terrifying that people like this, calling for an escalation are those with influence.

"If they can topple Russia they can topple China. The goal of sanctions is the removal of Putin, and there's a number of far-right candidates to take his place. Sanctions will hurt the Russian people, just to replace one dictator with another. They're willing to sacrifice Ukraine. It's socialism or barbarism."

The WSWS raised that in his time as Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had made retreat after retreat to Labour's right on the issue of NATO, nuclear weapons and threats against Russia. Ryan replied, "Corbyn did capitulate. It shows you that he failed as everyone of his reforms came undone in a year. I'm sure I will be resigning from the Labour Party soon because of their pro-war stance. I don't think I'll last much longer, I'll be kicked out."

Sheffield

In Sheffield around 100 people assembled outside the Sheffield Town Hall. Brian, a student in journalism from Hallam University said, "People need their understanding lifted in terms of the background to the conflict.

Context is important and people do need to understand before they rally to a position.

"I agree that the US and NATO are not peace loving. I just started to research the Afghan War after US withdrawal. That was a Western intervention which was all about oil, money and power, like Iraq.

"I consider myself left-wing and just turned voting age, but I could never vote for Labour. I do think to a degree the war is being used to divert attention from the pandemic and other social issues. There should have been a co-ordinated response internationally to COVID-19. Much more could have been done with vaccines and other measures to save lives. Instead, it has been used to line the pockets of the private medical companies and you've had all the contracts for PPE to the private sector and then you have had 'partygate'. There is a huge cost of living crisis with inflation, fuels costs and they don't want to talk about any of that."

Cardiff

The WSWS spoke to Ryan, a retired doctor at the STWC demonstration Cardiff. He said, "NATO could invoke Article 5 in terms of mutual assistance. There's no end to the spiral of violence that this could result in. Russia is convinced that its conventional weapons are inferior to the entirety of NATO, and they would use nuclear weapons as a last defence. Therefore, it could be the end of us. This danger should be pointed out to the broader public.

"We have this event but when it comes to the question of how we stop the war machine, you need to be clear on who is causing the problem. My view is that some things were left out here today. So you cannot indiscriminately without any qualifications support Ukraine. Ukraine in the western part is pro-western historically. In the eastern part where more than 50 percent speak Russian and, in the Donbas, more than 90 percent, they associate with Russia. So if people in the Donbas say that they don't accept any more being bombed by Ukraine, which they have been for eight years and 'we want Russian assistance' then that is the case.

"We don't want war and they don't want it either. So you cannot just start by saying that Russia is causing this war. If that is all that you are saying then you will not be effective in stopping it.

"I understand that Russia will not accept and cannot accept NATO extending to its borders. Like in 1962 when the United States could not accept that there were Soviet missiles in Cuba 90 miles from Florida, Moscow cannot accept that there are nuclear missiles five minutes flying time from Moscow.

"I do understand that Russian military action is illegal and desperate, violating international law. But I take into account that 2014 [the removal of Ukraine's pro-Russian government in a far right coup] was illegal as well. It was instigated by the United States, by the CIA. Victoria Nuland [US State Department] said openly that they spent \$5 billion to foster regime change in the Ukraine.

"I'm afraid going by the mass media there is no clarity as to where the problem is coming from. It is only bashing Russians, irrespective of their association with Putin. In Germany this has resulted in casualties. People have been beaten up. Russian shops have been vandalised. This is like the 1930s Germany. People should be ashamed that something like this is possible in Europe.

"We all need to stand together, because what is happening is unimaginable. It will be far worse than we have seen from any COVID measures. Many thought that this was an abuse of human rights. Compared to what would happen in war, that would be a walk in the park. There would be no freedom of speech. People would be forced to have a certain opinion.

“I cannot put into words a comprehensive picture of what would happen if this plan, which is masterminded by the Pentagon, goes through. More people need to wake up and say ‘no, we are not going along with it.’ But that implies an understanding of where the impulse for war is coming from.

“I’m very concerned about NATO war mongering in the Ukraine. All recent US presidents have started wars. They do this habitually, not because the American people are bad but unfortunately people don’t have an impact on what the government does.”



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