

People's Assembly London demonstration: A smokescreen for the Labour and trade union bureaucracy

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Thousands attended a People's Assembly protest in London on Saturday demanding a general election and "grass roots action" to fight the cost-of-living crisis.

Held under the slogan "Britain is Broken", it was backed by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), major trade unions and middle-class protest organisations including Stop the War Coalition, Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion.

It was billed as a national event, with coaches laid on by the People's Assembly in 26 cities. Yet organisers could claim just 15,000 attendees, with many estimating a far lower turnout. It was a gathering mainly of lower-level trade union functionaries, members of the Labour Party, and of various pseudo-left groups including the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Counterfire, etc.

Former Labour MP Laura Pidcock, National Secretary of the People's Assembly and a protégé of Jeremy Corbyn, told the press, "We have to come together, as a movement, to organise on the streets and in our communities, and show that our voices will not be silenced and that we want fundamental changes to the way our country is run.

"We will not get that from the politicians, we will only get that from the strength of a united, vibrant movement of working-class people coming together, building together and making change together."

Pidcock, who was dumped by her North West Durham electorate in 2019, speaks for the very Labour and trade union bureaucrats who are strangling the explosive strike movement that erupted this summer. Despite hundreds of thousands of workers voting for strikes since June, the unions have blocked joint action to bring down the Conservative government, first under Boris Johnson, then Liz Truss and now Rishi Sunak.

Less than 24-hours ahead of the protest, Rail, Maritime

and Transport union (RMT) General Secretary Mick Lynch promoted as a "left-wing militant"—announced that his union's National Executive Committee (NEC) had cancelled strikes at Network Rail and 14 train operating companies on Saturday. He said the NEC was calling off action by its 40,000 members for two weeks to facilitate "intensive negotiations" with the Rail Delivery Group—the same bosses who have declared their determination to slash thousands of jobs, rewrite employment contracts and gut pensions and rail safety as part of the government's Great British Railways privatisation blueprint.

Days earlier, officials from the Communication Workers Union (CWU) announced they were cancelling six days of strikes by 115,000 postal workers starting November 2. Soon after, they announced two all-out strikes were off on November 12 and 14, with further action relegated to the end of the month. Late Friday, CWU officials issued a joint communique with Royal Mail Group executives confirming no further strikes will be held while negotiations proceed at conciliation service ACAS. CWU General Secretary Dave Ward committed to "a de-escalation of tension to avoid flashpoints and restoring calmness in the workplace".

None of this prevented Pidcock and her political allies in the Labour Party, the TUC and People's Assembly from portraying Lynch and Ward as the spearhead of a mass movement against the Tories.

The People's Assembly was formed in 2013 by sections of the Labour Party, trade unions, Stalinist Communist Party of Britain, the Greens, Counterfire, Socialist Resistance and similar pseudo-left groups. A front for the TUC, it forms the left flank of ruling class efforts to police an eruption of working class struggle, directing it behind a Labour government led by Sir Keir Starmer.

Saturday's protest was promoted by the *Independent* and *Guardian* newspapers. The *Independent* linked its coverage to a petition launched by the newspaper three weeks ago calling for a general election, which has gathered more than 466,000 signatures. The *Independent*'s "Election Now" campaign is promoting calls by Starmer, the Liberal Democrats and TUC for a new government to "end the political chaos" and bring "strong stable government".

A poll conducted for the *Independent* last week showed 61 percent public support for an early general election. A YouGov poll in late October showed 63 percent support for an early election.

The main slogan at Saturday's protest was "general election now". But People's Assembly speakers, including former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, his former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, former Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, and Labour MP Apsana Begum could not even bring themselves to mention the words "Labour Party".

So hated has the party become for its right-wing policies that any mention of Labour's record would raise the need for a socialist alternative in the working class, which Corbyn and company, as lifelong defenders of the Labour bureaucracy and the capitalist state are determined to prevent.

This explains the industrial scale hypocrisy and duplicity from the official speakers on Saturday. John McDonnell cited 330,000 deaths from Tory austerity between 2012 and 2019 but failed to mention Labour's complicity in what he described as "social murder". In December 2015, after being catapulted into the Labour leadership, he and Corbyn wrote to Labour-run councils instructing them to enforce Tory cuts and a legal budget. McDonnell declared to protesters, "if they want class war let's give them it! Bring on the strikes, bring on the picket lines, bring on the demonstrations, bring on the occupations, and we will defeat them in solidarity." This from a man who led Corbyn's "tea and biscuits" charm offensive among City of London financiers and who, alongside Corbyn, opposed any mobilisation of the working class against the Blairites, capitulating to the right-wing's every diktat.

Corbyn's political spinelessness was on display again when he refused to mention Starmer's removal of the Labour whip in 2020, meaning that Corbyn sits in parliament as an Independent. Starmer has no intention of restoring it, paving the way for Labour's deselection of Corbyn as a candidate in his Islington North London

constituency.

A speaker from Black Lives Matter declared, "I think it would be a fantastic idea of Jeremy Corbyn to stand as an independent MP", evoking only nervous laughter from Labour's former leader. Corbyn's cowardice is not merely a personal trait, it serves a political function in politically demobilising the working class and subordinating it to the Labour and trade union apparatus.

The RMT's Mick Lynch sought to deflect workers' unease over the prospect of a Starmer-led Labour government. He appealed to the party's rabid Blairites, "You've got to sort out which side you're on in these disputes. Do you sympathise and stand with the working class, stand with the strikers, stand on the picket lines... There are no neutrals in this struggle." His depiction of the Blairites as "neutral" is obscene. Starmer has purged thousands of left-wing party members whom he has slandered as anti-Semites. He has denounced strikes, banned MPs from visiting pickets, declared there is "no magic money tree" and that Labour is the party of NATO. Lynch has repeatedly called for Starmer's election as prime minister.

Lynch declared, "We've got to get everyone in a trade union, every trade union campaigning and every trade union taking on the bosses at every opportunity, to defend our people and to defend our class, and when we're ready to do that, we will have a movement that's unstoppable."

Over the summer, a national demonstration called by Lynch, Corbyn and their allies would have drawn a mass attendance. But these leaders are becoming ever-more discredited for their role in suppressing workers' demands for unified industrial and political action to defeat the Tory government's class war offensive.

The Peoples' Assembly—an alliance of the trade union bureaucracy with the Stalinist *Morning Star*, the Corbynite Socialist Campaign Group and representatives of Britain's pseudo-left—have stepped forward as a PR agency seeking to police workers' growing anger and shepherd them behind Labour and the pro-corporate trade unions.



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