

Mass protests erupt against UK's far-right: The way forward

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Wednesday night witnessed an outpouring of opposition in Britain to over a week of far-right-led riots and pogrom-style attacks on asylum seekers, Muslims and black workers.

August 7 was announced on social media as a night when fascists would target immigration and asylum services and immigration lawyers throughout England. But these plans were met by a mobilisation of tens of thousands of anti-fascist protesters facing a few thugs, or none.

Seven thousand mobilised in Bristol, 5,000 and 3,000 respectively in Walthamstow and Finchley in London, 2,000 in Brighton, 1,500 in Liverpool, 3,000 in Newcastle, 1,500 in Sheffield, 1,000 in Birmingham and several hundreds in many towns and cities.

Groups of workers, including firefighters, railworkers, and civil servants, were involved. The turnout was spontaneous, a sharp refutation of the atmosphere generated by the media portraying the anti-migrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric of the far-right as a reflection of popular public opinion, even while denouncing their resort to violence, arson and looting.

It also served as a partial exposure of Labour Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's insistence that law and order and the strengthening of the police is the way to combat the far-right. Wednesday saw the police protecting the fascists to maintain their right to "protest", or they would have been summarily dealt with.

Nevertheless it is essential that millions of workers and youth are not led to believe that such an essential defence of migrants and Asian and black communities is enough to beat back the far-right danger.

The Socialist Equality Party's August 4 statement, "Britain's far-right riots: The class issues," explains that "The growth of fascist and far-right tendencies are a concentrated expression of imperialist politics and capitalist decay."

Everywhere, including in the United States, France, Germany and Italy, ruling elites are promoting extreme nationalism and xenophobia to divert explosive social tensions in a right-wing, anti-immigrant direction, to further predatory imperialist wars and to prosecute war against the democratic and social rights of the working class.

They are the outcome of the naked turn by the ruling class to militarism, war and austerity.

And in Britain, it is the Labour government that leads these developments in promoting nationalism, supporting war against Russia in Ukraine, genocide in Gaza, imposing continued austerity and pledging to round up and deport "illegal" immigrants.

Given the character of this government, its announced law-and-order measures to combat the far-right, including a national policing unit "to tackle violent disorder", will inevitably be employed against the working class and the left to impose the war and austerity agenda demanded by big business.

The SEP insisted that there could be no successful struggle against the far-right danger that did not base itself on the fight to mobilise the entire working class against the ruling capitalist class and the war and austerity agenda of its Labour government. Only such a socialist programme of

struggle can cut across the divisions among workers systematically cultivated by the political elite and the media and cut the ground from under the far-right.

Stand Up To Racism's "Unity Statement"

Such a political turn depends upon workers and young people rejecting the programme advanced by those who called Wednesday's protests, Stand Up To Racism (SUTR). The "Unity Statement" originally titled "Say No to Tommy Robinson and the far right" and since changed to "Stop the Far Right: Unite Against Racism, Islamophobia and Antisemitism", advances a call by "Anti-racist campaigners, MPs and trade union leaders" for "action against the far right and racism."

But the political perspective advanced by SUTR to bring this alliance together prevents any action being taken against root causes of the far-right.

The statement speaks of how "Racism and Islamophobia in Parliament is leading to racism and Islamophobia on the streets." But this observation is made only regarding Nigel Farage's Reform UK and a single Tory MP, Suella Braverman. Aside from these forces and the fascist right, led by Tommy Robinson, the SUTR call is for "all decent people" in Britain to come together "in a united mass movement powerful enough to drive back the fascists."

Signatories include genuinely concerned artists and others with a record of opposing racism. But its core consists of three groups:

- Representatives of Britain's pseudo-left and Stalinist groups, including Socialist Workers Party member Weyman Bennett—the co-convenor of Stand Up To Racism—Lindsey German of the Stop the War Coalition, Kate Hudson of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and Ben Chacko, editor of the Stalinist *Morning Star*.

- A group of 15 Labour MPs, former and now expelled party leader Jeremy Corbyn and his four allied Independents elected on an anti-Gaza genocide platform, two members of the Scottish parliament, including former Scottish National Party leader Humza Yousaf, and a few Lords.

- Trade union bureaucrats including 10 general secretaries such as Sharon Graham of Unite, Daniel Kebede of the National Education Union, Mick Lynch of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, Mick Whelan of the train drivers union ASLEF, and Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union, joined by two union presidents.

Precluded by such an alliance is any fight to unify all workers, British and immigrant, in a struggle against the capitalist profit system, which is the root cause of nationalism and xenophobia.

Nor can there be any call for a political accounting with Starmer's Labour government, or a warning that its introduction of repressive measures only strengthens the state apparatus on which it must ultimately

rely to police rising discontent in the working class.

The pseudo-left advocates of this alliance know this very well.

The SWP's *Socialist Worker*, for example, warned on August 5 that "Labour is using fascist violence in an attempt to legitimise the present anti-protest repressive powers and to call for more of them... And most trade union leaders and Labour MPs will go along with him." An August 6 article, "Racist rhetoric from top fuels fascism on streets," grouped Tory leader Rishi Sunak with Labour Home Secretary Yvette Cooper and Labour MP for Tamworth Sarah Edwards as advocates on anti-Muslim measures.

But the SWP and its main splinter Counterfire are past masters of making orthodox statements to conceal political practices that subordinate the working class to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

The Anti-Nazi League, Unite Against Fascism and Stand Up To Racism

Prominent in the list of those endorsing the Unity Statement are the twinned signatures of Lord Peter Hain and Paul Holborow, identified as founders of the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). Holborow is a member of the SWP, and Hain a former anti-fascist activist who began his political life as a Young Liberal and bureaucrat in the Communication Workers Union, later becoming a leading member of the New Labour governments of Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown.

The ANL was formed in November 1977, with the backing of some trade unions and Labour MPs, including Neil Kinnock—later to become leader of the Labour Party, notorious for his attacks on the miners' strike in 1984-85.

It was established at a time when the working class was in direct conflict with the Labour government of James Callaghan, which was imposing International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity measures including a pay clampdown. This culminated in the 1978-79 Winter of Discontent, which saw almost 30 million workdays lost as 4.6 million workers took strike action. The strike movement placed the party's nominal "left" under the spotlight, including the Secretary of State for Energy, Tony Benn, who wrote in his diary that "there is no doubt I am compromised up to the hilt by remaining in this bloody awful government."

Under these conditions, the ANL was formed one year after 500 National Front (NF) members had been met and attacked by thousands of protesters in Lewisham, London, who then fought battles with 5,000 police leading to 214 arrests and over 100 injuries. Capitalising on rising hostility to the NF, the ANL professed as its goal, as summarised by Holborow, to "unite everyone who opposed the Nazis," thereby focusing workers and young people on a struggle against the NF on a perspective no different to that now advanced as a "Unity" platform and which also gave Labour a political amnesty.

The ANL diverted workers into physical conflicts with the NF with the aim, as expressed by the SWP, of "through confrontation to split off the hardcore Nazi leadership from the wider racist periphery in order to push back the movement." For the most part, these conflicts were with the police not the fascists, including on April 29, 1979, when teacher Blair Peach—a member of the SWP—was killed by the police Special Patrol Group during an anti-fascist protest in Southall that also saw reggae band Misty in Roots singer Clarence Baker left comatose for five months.

Four days later, the NF were routed in the 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 this election brought Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government to power, which was to launch an unprecedented political offensive that that drove millions into

unemployment and began an historic decline in the social position of the working class to this day.

Far from splitting the hardcore Nazis from the "wider racist periphery," Thatcher won power in large part by seizing the NF's support base with her pre-election declaration that Britain was being "swamped by people with a different culture."

This perspective of isolating the far-right from the "acceptable" mainstream right is still a declared goal of the SWP, now cast as preventing an alliance forming between Robinson's thugs and Nigel Farage's Reform UK.

The political assistance given by the ANL to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy did not pass without notice. In 2003, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) was set up by the Trades Union Congress and Weyman Bennett of the SWP made one of its officers. The UAF was superseded by Stand Up To Racism in 2013.

SUTR has always been relied on to offer a platform to politicians wishing to pose as "progressives." This included David Cameron, who was a founder signatory of UAF in 2003 before becoming Tory Party leader two years later and prime minister of a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 which imposed "an age of austerity."

During Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party in 2018, as he was busy capitulating before the Blairite right on all fronts—including supporting immigration controls—SUTR staged a rally opposing Tommy Robinson and urged Corbyn to utilise the campaign as a means of building "unity."

Trotskyism and the struggle against fascism

The SWP employing language associated with the struggle waged by Leon Trotsky in the 1930s to mobilise the working class against the growth of fascism in Germany is a fraud.

Trotsky raised the demand for a united front against the position taken by the German Communist Party, under the Stalinist leadership, which rejected common action with the social democrats, whom they denounced as "social fascist."

Directed to parties with a mass base in the working class that professed to socialism, the aim of Trotsky's united front was to break the influence of the Social Democratic leaders that millions of workers continued to support. Trotsky fought for the German Communist Party to propose a united front with the Social Democratic Party to organise joint action against the Nazis and in defence of workers' organisations.

This would enable the Communist Party to take the lead in uniting the working class and either expose the Social Democracy for refusing to mount common defensive action against the class enemy or prove the superiority of the leadership of the revolutionary party in such mass struggles.

He insisted, however, that it was impermissible to subordinate the revolutionaries within a united front to the reformist bureaucracy, or to conceal programmatic differences.

The practices of the SWP are the opposite of such a revolutionary perspective, dedicated not to the independent political mobilisation of the working class under a revolutionary leadership but subsuming the working class into a general protest movement that uses its "inclusive" character to foreground a handful of Labourites and trade union bureaucrats. The central task of this movement is to defend a Labour government that would not back anti-fascist protests under any circumstances, and who no one expects to do so.

Above all, the SWP is opposed to any genuine struggle against the trade union bureaucracy. The *Socialist Worker* wrote August 7 of how "The

punish methods of the trade union leaders and Labour MPs won't cut it in the face of a society of mass hardship and poverty, the sense of no future, war, environmental collapse and oppression." But its only appeal directed to the union leaders was, "Shouldn't there be a call for work stoppages, even for half an hour, to ram home the danger and organise resistance" and "There must at least be a clear demand for total support and mobilisation for every counter-protest against the far right now."

This invitation has now been formally accepted by the various general secretaries and presidents who have endorsed the SUTR "Unity Statement," safe in the knowledge that it commits them to nothing and will not disturb their cosy relationship with the Labour government. On the contrary, endorsement offers them not only a political cover, but the assigned role of policing opposition to the far-right and insulating the Labour government from mounting social and political discontent.

The SEP reiterates the central warning made in our August 4 statement:

The SWP and similar organisations represent the interests of the affluent middle class, oriented and tied to the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy. They are experts in political deception, directed against the political independence of the working class.

The past decade has witnessed a pronounced shift by masses of workers and youth to the left, including mass protests against the Gaza genocide, the 2022–23 strike wave and the movement behind Corbyn. But the Achilles heel each time has been the political subordination of the working class to the Labour Party, blocking the fight for socialism. Herein lies the source of the far-right's strength.

Those workers and young people who understand these dangers and are seeking a political way forward must turn to the SEP. We and our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International stand for the development of an international anti-war movement, uniting all sections of the working class against war, austerity and fascism, against capitalism and for socialism.



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