

London demonstration against Iran war deflected into futile appeals to Starmer

Robert Stevens
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Thousands of people marched through central London on Saturday to demand an end to the bombing of Iran.

Assembling near Parliament in Westminster, the demonstration moved south, crossed the Thames via Vauxhall Bridge, and ended with a rally at the US Embassy.

The march was organised by the main groups within the “Palestine Coalition,” which have led the mass demonstrations in the capital against Israel’s slaughter in Gaza for the last two-and-a-half years. These include the Stop The War Coalition (STWC), the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

The Palestine Coalition—primarily STWC and PSC—led that movement into a dead end, channelling energy into futile demands that Starmer, the warmonger and genocide apologist in chief, adopt a peace policy. The same bankrupt perspective—demanding pressure be put on the political leader of one NATO power (Britain and Starmer) to alter foreign policy and put pressure on another (the US and Trump)—was again the main demand coming from the platform.

Via a message read out from the stage, former Labour leader and now head of Your Party, Jeremy Corbyn declared that “we are here today to say loudly and clearly, do not drag Britain into another illegal war. Let’s follow in the footsteps of Spain, whose Prime Minister [Pedro Sanchez] has said very clearly that we are not getting involved in this illegal war in any way whatsoever. For too long, the UK has blindly followed the US as it indulges in catastrophic interventions around the world. We are here to defend something different: a foreign policy based on cooperation, equality, and sovereignty...”

Corbyn, a deputy president of the STWC was unable to attend the rally, saying he was “in Amsterdam with The Hague Group, a historic meeting of 40 states which seek to hold Israel accountable for its genocide in Gaza.” The

coalition was convened in January last year by the Progressive International, which is led by, among others, former Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, most known for his betrayal of the Greek working class.

The Hague Group consisted initially of nine member states: Belize [which withdrew], Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Malaysia, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa. Corbyn and Your Party’s other most prominent leader, Zarah Sultana, are both members of the Progressive International Council. The advancing of the leaders of a coalition of capitalist states is a perspective solely based on pressuring the political establishment and a dangerous trap which must be rejected by the working class.

Speaking at the demonstration, Sultana invoked the catastrophe of the Iraq war while insisting, as others did from the stage, that Starmer had to recover the backbone he supposedly had prior to the US and Israel bombing Iran. She said of the prime minister: “Despite having apparently learned the lessons from Iraq, Keir Starmer is repeating the same mistake. At first, he said Britain would not be involved, and within days came the familiar U-turns. And now American B-1 bombers are landing on British soil before flying out to kill Iranians.”

Despite Sultana’s propensity for rhetoric generally to the left of Corbyn, she expounds bankrupt bourgeois politics just as surely as he. The task wasn’t the mobilisation of the working class in Britain and internationally to stop war on Iran and end the capitalist system—the root cause of the wars in the Middle East and Africa over the past 25 years. Rather, concluded Sultana, “today we raise our voices for peace, for justice, and for a world where governments learn the lessons of the past.”

For the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Sophie Bolt suggested that pressure exerted by the mass demonstration over Gaza had already worked to influence

Starmer's policy: "Now, initially, looking at Britain, Starmer did, didn't he? He stood up to Trump. He pushed back and he said, 'No, we're not going to let UK military engage in an illegal war.' That was good. Why did he do that? Because of us. Because of the pressure that we've been putting on this government. The pressure of the Palestine movement. The huge opposition to Trump and Trump's wars. But now, of course, he has buckled. Shame on Starmer!"

As usual, the same call was made, with Bolt declaring, "We have to keep the pressure on this government."

Another who required pressure was Foreign Secretary David Lammy—key in backing Starmer in supporting Israel's genocidal war crimes. Bolt declared, "Trump is even saying now he's going to choose the next Iranian leader. Now it's good, isn't it, that David Lammy has pushed back on this, saying it's up to the Iranian people. Yes, it is up to the Iranian people. But why hasn't he [Lammy] condemned the brutal murders of the Iranian school children? Why hasn't he condemned the assassination of Iran's supreme leader?"

Kevin Courtney, formerly the co-leader of the National Education Union, spoke as a representative of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. He insisted, "We are right to demand that our government acts... Tell your MP, tell your councillor... And tell them you won't vote for them if they don't support you."

Speaking for the Stop the War Coalition, Lindsey German—a leader of the pseudo-left Counterfire tendency—declared the rally's "message to Keir Starmer today should be very, very clear: Stop appeasing Donald Trump all the way to World War III."

German said of the targeting of Iran, "This war crime follows from a war crime also of epic proportions, the two and a half years genocide against the people of Gaza. And if they had stopped the genocide, we wouldn't now be seeing this attack on Iran."

The main reason the genocide continued unabated was because mass opposition to it was demobilised by a perspective of pressuring warmongering governments fully backing the slaughter, as advocated by the Stop the War Coalition and their pseudo-left counterparts internationally. In 2003, in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, STWC representatives embraced the slogan "Vive La France!"—with Paris declaring at that stage that it would veto a Security Council resolution authorising force—urging Tony Blair's Labour government to abandon its orientation to Washington.

German's final message for "Starmer and for Trump"

was that "Regime change should start at home." This meant that "Keir Starmer should be out of Downing Street" but only if "he keeps taking us into these wars."

The rewriting of Starmer's Iran policy is breathtaking. Starmer's policy was never not to back Trump in his bombing and regime change operation. It was only how best to ensure Britain could fully join in behind a cloak of "legality." This was made clear by the leaks published last week in *The Spectator*—and reported by the WSWS—confirming that British officials had been informed of the planned offensive 17 days in advance and were engaged in intense discussions with Washington over how the Labour government could assist.

At the London demonstration, the Socialist Equality Party distributed thousands of copies of the statement: "Stop the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran!" This explained that a successful "fight against the criminal war on Iran", "cannot be achieved through appeals to any section of the political establishment." This requires "the independent political mobilization of the working class.

"The International Committee of the Fourth International has established that a genuine anti-war movement must be based on four essential principles:

- First, the struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

- Second, the new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- Third, the new anti-war movement must be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

- Fourth, the new anti-war movement must be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism."



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