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Britain

Together against the far right march breaks records

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The Together Alliance march against the far right on Saturday, 28 March, was probably the biggest anti-fascist protest in British history. It was comparable to some of the early Palestine solidarity demonstrations.

Organisers claim it was half a million people – it's difficult to be certain with such a mammoth crowd, but it was over two and a half hours after the front banners left Park Lane before the back did so. Just getting anywhere through the crowd was like swimming in treacle!

This was a crucial demonstration after 100,000 people turned out for far-right activist Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom protest last September, with a small and demoralising counter-demo.

While Anti Capitalist Resistance (ACR) has criticisms of the Together Alliance organisers for their emphasis on soft slogans against the far right, as well as the inclusion of prominent transphobes amongst its key spokespersons, this historic display of solidarity on London's streets is a moment to celebrate and seize as an opportunity to build resistance in our communities.

Migrants and asylum seekers are on the front lines in this struggle, and our support must be unwavering. They are joined by disabled, trans, Black, and other racialised people, as well as women in general, as targets of the new far right, who only augment the institutional and structural violence of the state.

Diverse

The mobilisation was enormously diverse. There was great publicity outreach – leafleting for weeks in many communities and workplaces, as well as coverage in the few days before in the Mirror, the Guardian, and the London Evening Standard. People heard about it and came with their mates. The music was an attraction. Others came through contact with Greenpeace, War on Want, and other NGOs, and charities.

There was a Palestine feeder march of several thousand, as well as many Palestine flags throughout the gathering. Democrats abroad brought No Kings papiermache masks marking the massive protests taking place in the United States against Trump, the same day. Again, anti-Trump messaging was common. A substantial Eastern European contingent made an impact on the demonstration. Their message was simple: you have to fight the far right not just in the West but also in the East of Europe. Many on the contingent were Ukrainian whose friends and families are on the front line resisting annexation by Putin or living under a regular bombardement. One of the slogans chanted was “from Ukraine to Palestine, Occupation is a crime”. The Ukraine Solidarity campaign was a very visible part of this with their flags.

Many unions had worked to bring members and banners onto London's streets, with NEU and UNISON having the strongest showing. Quite why the turnout for this section of the demonstration was so much more significant – looking like a respectably sized march of its own – than they have mobilised against the genocide of Palestinians is a question that many activists will undoubtedly be raising over the weeks ahead.

Parties

As for political parties, the situation was more complicated.

Rob Marsden reports on the Green Party presence:

I found small groups of Green Party members or individuals walking with friends and family, often with home-made signs referencing Zack Polanski, Hannah The Plumber, or riffing on the 'Green Menace' tag.

Many of these people were not only new to the Green Party and to organised politics; in many cases, they had never been on a demonstration before. Hopefully, the breathtaking size and spectacle of the Together March will be a lasting inspiration and a spur to ongoing activity.

Those of us who did make it to the 'official' Green Party bloc, way at the back of the march, behind a battalion of Extinction Rebellion samba drummers, still found that it numbered maybe a thousand people and was identifiable by a large number of local Green Party banners, including many of the upright teardrop or feather type. Green Parties from across Britain were represented, but many, maybe most, do not currently have their own banners.

And here lies a bit of a problem for the Greens. There were no centrally produced GP placards or leaflets of any type. This seems not to be a resource issue. Compared to a couple of years ago, the Green Party and its local branches are awash with cash.

Rather, it is a question of GP culture and an over-focus on local electoral campaigning rather than a more general approach to winning wide layers of people to the politics of the GP and building a solid base within social movements.

Your Party also had its own block, on which Dave Kellaway reports:

It was estimated at around 500 participants. Those organising the block have counted more than 50 groups of supporters from across Britain – from Glasgow to Devon, many with their own banners, some never making it to the block, which again was way back in the crowd. Your Party centrally did nothing to argue that members should be visible and organised at the event, sending a mere mention of the march in passing in an email from the chair on 23 March.

The fantastic lead banners and placards – 'Hate yachts not dingies', 'Capitalism divides, Socialism unites', and 'Our solution = socialism' – were organised by comrades from the All London delegate assembly rather than the elected leadership, which abrogated responsibility. New connections were made with activists from different places, and solidarity was built. A positive experience in the face of leadership abstention.

Meanwhile, Labour had no official role in mobilising for the day. The leadership could have easily pivoted to the demo and sent somebody from the front bench, Starmer could have made some bland anti-Reform message, but nada, nothing.

Even the left, the Mainstream/Momentum alliance, was not prominent. Three or four Labour Party banners did make it – the bureaucracy could not easily repeat the blocking of activists who wanted to take them on Palestine solidarity marches. Labour should be worried – many who turned out are people who used to vote for you, who are no longer

doing so, and who are getting more organised.

ACR was present in force, with members from all over England and Cymru/Wales attending on the day, and many of us went on to Croydon afterwards to protest Nigel Farage's appearance there, making it clear that he is unwelcome on our streets. We handed out our new anti-fascist broadsheet, talked to other protesters, and celebrated solidarity.

As with our popular Palestine broadsheets, many took the broadsheet to carry with them as a placard – some repurposing those they were previously carrying to do so. Our contingent had written its own chants, many of which were taken up by others around us,

What next? We need lots of lively local events, particularly targeted around the local elections in areas where Reform is strong. This requires some organised outreach, as often the left itself is weak in those areas.

One problem for the left is that Reform is often strong where the left is weak, so this would require organised outreach. We need to build on the great vibes on this demonstration – a real boost to people's confidence and morale – and for another mammoth turn-out by the left against Tommy Robinson on 16 May.

The interlocking crises of capitalism, termed the polycrisis, encompassing social reproduction, economy, and ecology, demand an ecosocialist future. Fascism represents a direct challenge to that future that we must defeat. That means more than demonstrations; it means resistance in our communities and, in the medium term, building a mass party that can take political power from the hands of fascists and their enablers.

With thanks to Dave Kellaway and Rob Marsden for their input.

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