



An unholy alliance

Douglas Murray

The London demonstration organised by the Stop the War Coalition and the Muslim Association of Britain on 28 September was ostensibly against an attack on Iraq. But do the events of the day, and the mixed messages of the two organisations, reveal a more sinister agenda?

On 28 September a motley crew gathered in central London – a bizarre and unholy alliance of people. The public were told that this was an ‘anti-war’ march. It was not. What occurred in London that day was a pro-war march and, more sinisterly in the present climate, a pro-terrorism march. It was a march that should never have taken place and which sullies the reputations of all who participated in it.

I should, first, admit that I avoided London on the day. In some ways I am now sorry that I did not see it for myself. A good number of friends did go, and from them and the press reports I have a more than fair idea of what went on. What we should do is start at the beginning.

Upwards of 250,000 people are said to have attended the march and this makes it, by any calculations, something of a success. Those who attended were largely attracted by the publicity – on posters and in the press – informing them that

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the event was a protest against military action in Iraq under the slogan *Not In My Name*. This is what a lot of people attending the march thought they were there to march about, yet what they attended was no peace rally. Rather, what every marcher on those streets was (knowingly or unknowingly) supporting was war. Not war against Iraq – that really *would* be wrong. What they were supporting was incitement to war and the blessing of terrorism against the Jewish State. If you marched and didn’t know this, then you should have found out what you were doing before you left home.

Two groups, two stories

Two groups organised the event. One was a sprawling organisation calling itself the ‘Stop the War Coalition’, which includes many pacifists. They claim that they planned a march for the 28th that would attempt to make the case for ‘peace’. This group is spearheaded by the



Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), an organisation which, though 'not a stated pacifist organisation', has never, as far as I can see, supported any war. I suppose that given their recorded stance it is theoretically possible that CND might one day support a war, but going on its track record it hardly seems likely.

If CND had had their way on these matters, then Kosovar Albanians would be history, and the Taliban would still rule in Afghanistan. That is their stance and you can agree with it or disagree with it as your conscience takes you. But what, I wonder, did this organisation think they had in common with the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB)? This is where the matter really gets murky.

I have spoken to both organisations about how the march ended up coming together and one of the few things they agree on is that since they had both planned marches for 28 September they conferred and agreed that they should combine in their common cause. Which was? Protesting against war against Iraq – well, that's what CND told me. The MAB had a rather different story.

Their spokesman, a spirited and talkative young man called Anas Altikriti, stated perfectly clearly, that his organisation's plan to march on the 28th, a plan settled for some months, was 'to mark the second anniversary of the *Intifada*'. Just in case you don't know what this means, the *Intifada* is the name of the process in which young Palestinian men and (now) women, pack explosives around their waists, walk into busy shopping areas and restaurants and kill Jews. Quite a long way from the Reverend Dick Sheppard and the 'Peace Pledge Union', I think you'll agree.

Now some people may think that 'that's all very well, but the *march* didn't end up being about that'. Some friends of mine told me that, on

coming out of the station to join, they immediately realised the error they had made – not finding out more about the intentions of the march before going to it.

They immediately came face to face with a group of young chanting Muslims 'whose whole demeanour was violent.' An isolated case? Well then, take the three Jews who wrote to the *Guardian* (1 October) recording that they had gone on the march in order to express their concern for human rights issues only to find themselves feeling 'confus[ed] and uncomfortable' by being surrounded by 'hate-filled chanting...[and] anti-Israel and anti-Jewish imagery'.

In her article on the march Rosemary Bechler talks of the 'peaceful message of the march as a whole' after acknowledging the presence of swastikas and anti-semitic sloganising. She tells us that 'Hitler references were mainly directed at Sharon,' as if this were whimsical or even uninteresting. During the march, people were encouraged by the general message to carry banners equating the Israeli government with the Nazis and to carry posters placing the star of David alongside the swastika. 'But not everybody did that.' Maybe not, but a sizeable number of people did and a quarter of a million Brits marched 'shoulder to shoulder' with them on the streets of London in broad daylight.

Words and deeds

I asked CND about this little matter. Their spokesman told me that they would 'utterly condemn' such sloganising, and told me that his organisation was behind only a 'negotiated peace' across the Middle East. Mr Altikriti had a rather different message. I asked if he too would condemn those carrying banners equating the Israeli state with the Nazis and Ariel Sharon with Adolf Hitler. He said he could not, adding

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that these similarities were 'absolutely' there and, indeed, that this message 'didn't come out as strongly as we'd have liked it to.' I asked him whether, like their co-organisers the 'Stop the War Coalition', the Muslim Association of Britain was largely pacifist. He conceded that they were 'anti-war in terms of waging war against innocent people'. Well isn't that good of him. The only problem is that the MAB spokesperson turns out to have an odd view of innocence. It was an ominous conversation from the moment he told me that the election of the 'abhorrent' Sharon 'says a lot about Israel'.

I asked the MAB spokesperson if he could find himself able to condemn suicide bombers – the scourge of Israel and, now, the world. He told me that he would 'find it wrong' to do so. Again, he said 'I cannot bring myself to condemn suicide bombing.' Later in our conversation he let slip and referred to 'so-called suicide bombing' and further in still he told me that what people seem to forget in this matter is the 'tragedy' of young Muslims who 'give up their promising young lives' in these attacks.

As I listened to Mr Altikriti, the thought kept occurring to me that if I were the head of CND or the 'Stop the War Coalition' I would have phoned this man up and spoken either to him, or anyone else in the MAB, in order to distinguish their aims. Perhaps CND and the 'Stop the War Coalition' hadn't got their number. Oh but they had, because they told me they'd spoken. Well, maybe they had just had a casual chat about street routes and platform speakers.

There is all the difference in the world between a stance which says you disapprove of war on principle and a stance which says you disapprove of war in case X but want more of it in case Y. I wonder how many of the crowd knew what they'd been brought out for. It would be impossible to say. But this event

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demonstrates a lot about the condition of Britain.

Muslim lion, British liberal

For years now terrorism has been a problem for the Israelis. Now the problem belongs to everyone. Suicide bombings, whether in New York or Tel Aviv, are the world's problem, and they could strike anywhere. I wonder whether the hundreds of thousands who marched on the streets on 28 September will do so again once the first attack takes place on mainland Britain? Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot – they were marching against a war in Iraq, not for organised terrorism. Did they think so? Well they should have spoken to their leaders.

What happened in London was another demonstration by British Muslims and their curious left-wing bedfellows. It was a march in favour of the Palestinian people and a march against the Israeli people. If

we wanted to state it plainly, we could say that this was a march against Jews. That would be controversial, and I don't think particularly helpful. But when people like the MAB spokesperson tells me there is no anti-semitism in his plans, then forgive me if it rings a bit hollow. Some of us have never understood why you can say what you like about Israel and it's not about Jews, while the Muslim lobby thinks any attack on an Islamic country is automatically a war on Islam. Perhaps they ought to think this one out.

The London march was a demonstration of the ignorant British liberal lying down with the unknown Muslim lion. It was a display of ignorance and hatred, intemperance and intolerance – one which should turn the stomachs of all those who believe that the rule of British law prevails over that of the North London mullah. Call it what you like – but don't call it a demonstration for peace.

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