

HOW COMMUNITIES ARE FIGHTING BACK AGAINST THE CUTS. 6.1.14

Willie Black from North Edinburgh Fights Back

Willie said that it had always been their intention to broaden out the campaign to oppose all cuts and they were still looking for ways to do this. Latest news of more cuts tonight show the coalition is only half way through the whole cuts programme. The questions are how to mobilise and fight back – lessons for RIC? The pressures are on the poorest communities who are trying to get by. Lessons from the housing stock transfer campaign which had hardly any resources- pitted against £12.5 million budget utilised by the government and councils. The campaign was done on a shoestring and was won because people mobilised.

Strathclyde was successful in imposing the transfer of housing stock because it had already shifted most of its social housing to private organisations and housing associations. It was therefore harder to mobilise tenants. With the bedroom tax, it has been possible to target the councils and gain some concessions. When the anti-cuts alliance started in Edinburgh there were 80 people at the first meeting and a lot of excitement. Seduced by the idea of drawing in the STUC, went to the conference in Glasgow rather than hold a local meeting and were put in a dismal room and had dismal discussions. The lesson was, we need the trade unions but the relationship has to be negotiated carefully to ensure it strengthens what you are doing.

The Tory Conference in March – plans to wear panda hats

Through mobilisation and lobbying of council meetings, the Bedroom tax is now a dead tax in Edinburgh. Plan to have a rally at the full Council meeting in February when the budget cuts of £36 million will be decided.

Important for people to see the figures regarding the future economy of an independent Scotland – too much scare mongering. Need to target those people who are getting on with their lives and still not made up their minds.

George L from Disability History Scotland

Questioned who is involved with these community campaigns? A whole swathe not involved, dealing with their everyday concerns. Cuts and stigmatising labels are impinging everyday on those with physical or mental disabilities. RIC needs to talk to them and encourage their involvement, as they have the most to lose. Many feel that they have any power to influence the course of events. But individuals can influence major changes eg the individual woman (Mary Barbour) who started the rent strikes in Glasgow.

Les concerned about state pensions being wiped out almost entirely and this frightens older people thinking about independence. No campaigners have indicated Scotland wouldn't be able to afford them.

Irene said she had gone to the Glasgow conference and been inspired to come tonight. Concerned that in her work and involvement with pensioners and local community groups, she was shouted down when she raised independence – felt RIC really needs to make contact with people who would not come to these meetings or be politically involved. There are a lot of myths people have absorbed - the fear factor.

Pat reminded the meeting that communities are where you live, your street, your pals, your workplace – all locations we can raise discussion and encourage people to vote yes. We have a great resource in RIC – various experiences and expertise. We have to engage with those who are thinking of voting 'no'. RIC is the place to get advice/help with any information and to put forward your ideas

Kevin spoke about how people start defending something – like the Meadowbank campus and then they get involved in other issues – like Edinburgh at Risk (EAR) and Portobello and the common goods.

Donny –Thought the Tory party conference an important event to publicise their £12 bill cuts programme and make a link to the ‘yes’ vote.

Terry thought we have to be careful of the arguments we put forward. Why have we got to have cuts in the first place when wealth is soaring for some? Edinburgh is a divided city – we can afford to run our own lives in an independent Scotland.

Many different visions of independence – the SSP/Greens/SNP – RIC stalls give us an opportunity to talk to a wide range of people and learn what their concerns are. .

Iain wondered if we are defeating the Bedroom tax – we have some concessions but it will continue.

Ayesha said that in Craigmillar we have had stalls and gained lots of signatures for petitions on fuel poverty, bedroom tax – many from those in Unison. Good support in the community.

Willie suggested, in relation to Matt’s point- we have another discussion about TU’s for independence. We also need to think imaginatively – he was encouraged hearing people talking about a different world that might be possible at the Carlton Hill rally.

Tony said Arts/ road show needed – Iain responded that National Collective was doing this. Also national RIC initiative: Winning Scotland coming up.

Willie said that it had always been their intention to broaden out the campaign to oppose all cuts and they were still looking for ways to do this. Latest news of more cuts tonight show the coalition is only half way through the whole cuts programme. The questions are how to mobilise and fight back – lessons for RIC? The pressures are on the poorest communities who are trying to get by. Lessons from the housing stock transfer campaign which had hardly any resources- pitted against £12.5 million budget utilised by the government and councils. The campaign was done on a shoestring and was won because people mobilised.

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