

THE RESISTIBLE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT - HOW DO WE BUILD THE RESISTANCE? 25.7.18

Willie Black - Trade unionist, community activist and campaigner against the Far Right

Facilitator - Eileen

Willie's introduction can be seen at:-

<https://youtu.be/SX6IHQ75EEk>

There was followed a discussion to which everyone contributed

The following issues were raised:-

1. How much success can be claimed by the Left for the failure of the SDL again to mobilise significant forces in Glasgow on July 15th? Their poor showing was to be welcomed compared to the Football Lads Alliance's (FLA) 15,000 strong march in London in support of Tommy Robinson. However, the police had put a strict 100 maximum on the SDL, a half hour maximum presence and had then completely kettled them in. Although the Left again considerably outnumbered them SDL, the numbers were not enough considering the growing opportunities for the Right since the Brexit vote, and the support Trump has given to the Far Right, including Tommy Robinson.

Steve Hedley, the assistant general secretary of the RMT, had been physically attacked after the Far Right demo in England. There were RMT members at the Glasgow anti-Far Right demo, but certainly no large-scale mobilisation.

2. The world we now face is different from the past. Many young workers, who are on temporary or zero hours contracts, working in several jobs, are not members of unions. Not only has trade union membership declined, but where it can still be found, most members have relatively little contact with official union structures. Many young people are very suspicious of parties, seeing them only as a means to advance careers.

A lot of the Far Right activity took place on-line, with widely read Alt-Right websites. For young people the motivating factor in opposing the Far Right is opposition to their sexism, homophobia and anti-trans activities. Most young people also have friends from abroad whom they work with, and they want to oppose the anti-migrant actions of the Far Right, following the stepped up physical attacks on migrants since the Brexit vote.

The strength of UKIP's support, particularly in the North and Midlands of England, was due to its appeal to a fragmented, atomised and alienated working class, devastated by Thatcher's de-industrialisation offensive. Atomised people look to saviours (Farage and Trump) and scapegoats (migrants and asylum seekers). However, the current teacher strikes in the Trump heartlands of West Virginia, Kentucky and Arizona showed the possibilities for a new type of organisation that extended beyond the traditional unions and involved their local communities.

There had also been significant Left and related currents since 2008, including Syriza, Podemos, Corbyn in England, and Sanders in the USA. IndyRef1 had a very high mobilisation amongst the working class. The Catalan Republic independence vote also was a blow against the Spanish state, the Rajoy government and the Right

3. The continued deep cuts in local services in England has further broken up working class communities. However, the cuts have also provided an opportunity for community campaigning. This could sometimes bring the Left into contact with people who blamed migrants for particular problems, as Willie had found out with housing campaigners in north Edinburgh. However, drawing people into action, and showing the connections between those suffering the consequences of the cuts, and pointing to those really responsible, was a good method of overcoming racist attitudes.

It was also pointed out that although still not so advanced in Scotland as in England, Scottish local councils were also imposing punitive cuts now, as in the case of East Dunbartonshire local council.

4. The difficulties of creating a wider anti-Far Right alliance were raised. Many SNP and Labour supporters were not prepared to undertake joint activities, which involved the presence of the other party. In addition, the Left was still suffering from the aftermath of Tommygate, with people boycotting events, which gave a platform to either side in the original dispute.

5. There had been a move to the Right in the SNP leadership, marked by their pushing of the Growth Commission report. Even, in the non-party Yes groups, there are people who oppose any public opposition to this neo-liberal, pro-austerity report, because they say it feeds into Labour's agenda, since the rise of Corbyn and Leonard. Robin MacAlpine of Commonweal has come under attack from the hard Scottish nationalists. Meanwhile, beyond the ranks of the SNP and independent Yes campaign organisers, an ethnic Scottish nationalism has resurfaced in the form of Soil nan Gaidheal. They have been trying to push anti-English feeling, under the cover of opposing "Tory scum"

(the Tories in England control the government, therefore the English in Scotland are Tory agents).

6. Those in the independent Yes groups who were opposed to the raising of other issues, like the Growth Commission, anti-austerity, the monarchy, etc, often shared an opposition to these with the Left. However they argued that all these issues should be set aside for now, and can be addressed after independence was gained. The Left can argue that if the current Scottish business owners and senior state managers are left in control, then possession is nine-tenths of the law, and their 'independent' Scotland would continue to be run in their interests. However, there was another argument, which could be taken into the Yes groups. The SNP leadership no longer has a viable strategy to bring about the independence they want. The defeat of IndyRef1 and the move to the Right, following the Brexit vote, means that the Tory/DUP coalition is not going to concede an IndyRef2. It is also unlikely the SNP leadership will take up the Catalan option. The organisers of the unofficial Catalan referendum, included republicans (Republican Left-EL) and socialists (Popular Unity Candidacy - CUP), are far more acutely aware of the Spanish monarchist semi-fascist legacy than the SNP or many independence supporters in Scotland are of the Crown Powers possessed by the UK state. So far these people have gone little beyond opposition to two aspects of the UK state - Westminster and the BBC.

One of the things RIC should be doing in the independent Yes movement is to patiently explain the wider activities of the UK state. In one sense the present government is doing our job for us, highlighted by its rolling back of the Devolution-all-round settlement. This makes RIC's republican arguments more relevant. Republicanism doesn't just consist of ending of the monarchy, after Scottish independence has been won, but opposing the state's Crown Powers now.

One possibility for RIC to counter Scottish ethnic nationalists anti-English racism would be to focus people's attention on the main political cause of the damage: the UK state; e.g. have a banner with 'The UK out of Scotland; Scotland out of the UK'.

7. As well as the Far Right beginning to attack trade unionists in England, in Scotland they see independence supporters as a major enemy. Corbyn and left leaning trade union leaders and the SNP are all within the sights of the Far Right. This could be seen in the Loyalist and triumphalism in Glasgow on the day IndyRef1 was defeated. The SNP is the subject of strong Loyalist antipathy, and this has extended to the Orange Order inviting the DUP's Arlene Foster to Scotland, in order to oppose Sturgeon, the SNP and IndyRef2, and to cement hard core unionism.

The Left needs to work hard to ensure that both Labour and SNP supporters can come together to build a wider anti-Far Right movement. In contributing to the building of this movement RIC can show the possibility of uniting Labour and SNP supporters. RIC had already shown the possibility of bringing such forces together in the successful conference held in Edinburgh in March:-

<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/15/ric-spring-conference/>

The shared basis for cooperation should include the recognition of the right of self-determination. This did not divide people between pro- and anti-independence. If the right to hold IndyRef 2 was conceded, under a government of a different complexion (e.g. Corbyn Labour needing SNP support to get a majority), then pro- and anti-Scottish independence could be fought out in IndyRef2.

8. Willie added a cautionary note, saying that the Orange Order and the fascists were not identical. He saw the need to open up a divide between these two forces, drawing on a precedent from an earlier demonstration in Edinburgh where the Orange Order and the National Front were kept separate. He also said that work was afoot to try and create an anti-Far Right football alliance in Scotland, but he hoped it would be lads and lasses!

9. There was general agreement at the meeting that the current anti-Far Right forces, including Unite Against Fascism, would need to bring new forces together, with specific appeals to Labour and SNP, to give their public support. RIC has never seen itself as an organisation, which attempts to set up new front organisations, but has always offered its support to bona fide campaigns, which advance the interests of the working class and oppressed groups. RIC would support such an initiative.