



COR, RTW, NSSN: fight for anti-cuts unity!

Today we have the "Coalition of Resistance" conference, initiated by Counterfire, a group of people who recently left the SWP.

"Right to Work", a campaign initiated and run by the SWP, has called a "unity conference" for anti-cuts activists on 5 December.

And the National Shop Stewards' Network, mostly run by the Socialist Party, has set an anti-cuts conference for 22 January.

RTW has also announced a conference of its own for 12 February.

The anti-cuts movement is already too vast and too varied for any one "front" to control it. Many of the important battles against cuts will be waged by unions, which of course will take their decisions through their own procedures and not on the say-so of this or that campaign centre.

Initiatives to draw together activists, create links, allow discussions, and facilitate protests, have a part to play.

But we must not have the movement diverted and distracted by frantic competition between different "fronts" to swing the issue of which of the various (politically more or less similar) conferences each anti-cuts group will support.

None of the "fronts" must try to substitute for the broad movement. The task of active socialists is to mobilise to transform the real labour movement and make it fight, rather than to try to use anti-cuts feeling to construct a series of miniature proprietary "new labour movements" of our own, alongside the sometimes slow-moving "big" movement.

Solidarity and Workers' Liberty support all the conferences and protests. We would add three points:

1. COR, RTW, and NSSN should get together and find ways to cooperate in a single event, run by a joint organising committee which should also be open to delegates from other anti-cuts groups.

2. All these groups — COR, RTW, NSSN, and others — should pledge to unite their efforts to build, in every area, broad, representative, democratic anti-cuts committees, based on delegates from trade union branches, stewards' committees, Labour Party organisations, and community groups.

3. Trades Councils can play a central role in initiating these committees, but the committees must be broader than existing Trades Councils. Nowhere should COR, RTW, NSSN, or other

specialist groups attempt to substitute for the broad campaigns, nor should COR, RTW or NSSN people allow their respective efforts to promote their own particular front to take priority over developing the broad movement.

Make Labour fight!

Across the country, Labour councils are announcing plans for cuts over the next four years, or even making cuts already.

At the same time, many Labour Party activists are joining or even initiating anti-cuts campaigns. Many of the 35,000 or so people who have joined the Labour Party since May have done so because they are seeking a political alternative to the Tory/ Lib-Dem cuts coalition as well as industrial and community campaigning against it.

In many areas, Labour councillors and MPs have been anxious to volunteer for the platforms of anti-cuts rallies and demonstrations. Activists should deal with this contradiction by campaigning for the demands:

- ? That Labour councils, instead of carrying out the cuts, use their positions as a platform to mobilise working-class communities and local unions in struggle to defeat the cuts;

- ? That Labour councillors join, promote, and make themselves accountable to local labour-movement anti-cuts committees;

- ? That unions fight the cuts, instead of just negotiating to minimise their impact;

- ? That Labour-affiliated unions use their channels into local Labour Parties to press for cuts to be defied;

- ? That the whole labour movement, unions and Labour Party, break collaboration with the coalition government and fight the cuts.

Cold-shouldering Labour people who want to fight the cuts - or even, fight some cuts - on the grounds of Labour's general record would be foolish. That approach will keep anti-cuts committees as select bodies, and make it easier for faking leftist-Labour politicians to monopolise the "broad", "realistic", "mainstream" opposition to cuts.

On the other hand, it is wrong for cries for "unity against the Con-Dem cuts" allow Labour councillors and MPs to figure on anti-cuts platforms with no or little challenge to the cuts that Labour councils make.

Labour councillors will say that it is prudent for them to plan and make cuts now in view of

the huge reductions scheduled in central government funding for local authorities. But to say that is to assume defeat in advance; to take it as given that the government's plans cannot be defeated or even dented or deflected; and then positively to help the government carry through its cuts!

Poplar's Labour council, in 1921, and the Labour council of the small town of Clay Cross, in 1972-4, upheld the interests of their working-class communities by defying central government constraints, and won victories.

Poplar extracted extra funds for councils with a poor local tax base; Clay Cross created the pressure which made the incoming Labour government in 1974 repeal Tory legislation to force council rent rises.

During the Thatcher cuts of the 1980s, Liverpool's Labour council went to the brink of defying the government over cuts. It won solid working-class support for defiance.

The Liverpool council leadership, under the influence of Militant (now the Socialist Party), first settled for a compromise to postpone the issues, at the height of the miners' strike in July 1984, and then faltered at the crunch in 1985. It ended up making cuts. But if the councillors had used the potential strength they had mobilised in mid-1984, Thatcher could probably have been beaten back over cuts, and the miners' strike won.

Defiance involves risk for councillors. The Poplar councillors were jailed for a short period; the Clay Cross councillors were surcharged and made bankrupt.

As yet, this time round, we are a long way off any Labour council even starting to talk about defiance. But we should argue for what's needed! Even if the argument does no more than win scattered minorities of Labour councillors, here and there, to opposing cuts (or opposing some cuts), it should be pushed.

There is no excuse for Labour councils making social cuts now! Councils are large organisations with complex finances which give them leeway. They can cut top management pay, councillors' expenses, and payments to consultants. They can sell commercial assets. They can juggle accounts to move spending items from one financial year to the next. Although there are legal limits on councils borrowing, there are loopholes.

Financial gambits are no long-term answer, but they can allow ample time to mobilise.

In the past, defiant Labour councillors have been jailed and surcharged. In the 1980s, there was a standing threat of "commissioners" being sent in to push aside the elected councillors and run the local authority. Today Labour councillors use that history as an excuse for saying that defying the cuts is unworkable.

In fact, under current legislation, the first move against councillors taking a defiant stand is only that unelected council officials - the Chief

Financial Officer and the Monitoring Officer (usually the Deputy Chief Executive) - are legally mandated to issue "warnings" to the councillors.

The councillors can override the Chief Financial Officer and the Monitoring Officer, though only after a "cooling-off period".

If they do override the Officers, anyone can bring a complaint against each individual councillor to a body called the Standards Board, which in turn can refer it to the Adjudication Panel.

The Standards Board and the Adjudication Panel can fine, temporarily suspend, or disqualify councillors, but not surcharge or jail them, or send in "commissioners" to take over the council.

Disqualifications or suspensions could and would be met by mass protest.

Help the student movement grow!

Activists from the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, the group that initiated the 24 November student protests, will be attending the Coalition of Resistance conference.

They will be calling for support for NCAFC and other student anti-cuts campaigns; for the COR's support in advocating unity of those campaigns; and for COR support for actions and campaigns being launched by NCAFC.
<http://anticuts.com>

The cuts are a feminist issue!

We understand that the Coalition of Resistance conference agenda will be changed to add a workshop session on women and the cuts, with speakers from Feminist Fightback.

This is a good move. AWL people will be appealing in the workshop for support for initiating an activist anti-cuts coalition oriented to working-class women.

Follow-up meeting: 7pm, Monday 6 December, Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8QZ.

Class struggle, revolution, socialism

A Workers' Liberty event for students and young people: 5.30pm-8pm - after the COR conference - at the Lucas Arms, 245A Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8QZ. More: Ed, 07775 763 750.

27 November 2010 AWL, P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Phone 020 7207 3997, email awl@workersliberty.org or visit our website at www.workersliberty.org
