

FEATURES

OPINION

Will the activist stand up and be counted

Unity is strength but what realistic chance has the British left of achieving this lofty goal, ponders GREGOR GALL

IT'S commonly acknowledged that the radical and socialist left in Britain is at its lowest ebb for a generation.

It's smaller and less influential. This is in spite of the biggest economic, political and ideological crisis for capitalism in 30 years making this a supreme irony.

Instead, this should be a time of growth and influence for the radical and socialist left.

Attempts at realignment and growth in the form of Respect and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) have long since run their course. And amid the acrimony and downturn in fortunes this left has split further and further.

We must then turn to the critical questions — how can the left reunite and rebuild itself? And how can the left shape the present to determine the future?

Unity of the existing left is not sufficient but it probably is nonetheless necessary for a revived left.

Experience tells us that the groundwork and foundations for significant refusal and working unity do not come about merely from conference decisions and friendly overtures but from practical action and debate which lead to shared visions, close working relationships and trust.

Most on the left believe that the

Humpty Dumpty of the left cannot simply be put back together again.

Instead, what is proffered is that the coming struggles against the age of austerity will either see a new left emerge, casting aside the existing left, or force some of the different parts of the left together but see them remoulded into something new by the new activists that emerge.

This all sounds well and good. But how realistic is it?

The examples of the SSP and Respect help give us some clues as to the answer.

Both were anti- and left-of-Labour projects and both built themselves through social movements — anti-poll tax and anti-war, respectively. These were new areas not populated or participated in by the Labour Party.

From this we can conclude that officially the struggles leading to a new left are unlikely to either come from within Labour or lead to the reflowering of a radical Labour.

This is because Labour is not willing to put itself at the centre of these struggles nor are activists willing to join Labour and take these struggles into Labour. That doesn't mean to say that those on the left in Labour are inactive or not influential — just that Labour is not necessarily the focal point of what they do.



The other side to the coin is that the SSP and Respect — and their forerunners — had a clean run at creating and building themselves in their respective social movements. Again, Labour groups within it were not to the fore here.

If this insight is applied to the different present campaigns, can the same be said of the struggle against pension cuts or the slashing of public services?

Again neither Labour nor any of its internal groupings like the Labour Representation Committee are prominent in these struggles.

Instead, it is the unions which are. While unions are not political parties, they do exert political influence in these campaigns and are its mainstays.

So, unlike the anti-poll tax and anti-war movements, it is harder for the kind of left groups that led these movements to do so this time around when

the unions are in the driving seat. Any existing left groups can play only a supporting role here.

Recalling the SSP and Respect should make us remember that they emerged from existing lefts. The SSP was founded as a result of Scottish Militant Labour taking the initiative to establish the Scottish Socialist Alliance.

Respect was founded essentially by the SWP and George Galloway. Only then were other parts of the left able to cohere around these initiatives.

This suggested that it is rather naive to expect a new left to emerge from outside the existing left.

Similarly, the foundation of the Communist Party in 1920, or the emergence of the new left in the 1960s came as a result of initiatives of the existing left and reached a point of lift-off as a result of bringing new activists into their fold.

The rise and fall of struggle in the student movement potentially offers the prospect of refreshing some parts of the left — especially as the National Union of Students is no longer the key central organising vehicle that it once was.

So what can we conclude from this? The existing radical and socialist left is part of the problem. Hopefully, it can also become part of the solution.

But this is only likely to happen when it is allied to fresh activists.

On the STUC demonstration on October 1 in Glasgow the Coalition of Resistance showed it had the capacity to group around it significant numbers of young people. The big question is, will they evolve into socialist activists of the future?

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The death of Chomsky and the murder of a president — how the British left can save the US media

JONATHAN DAVID FARLEY offers some invaluable free advice on influencing the US political scene

PRESIDENT Barack Obama, I told the US congressman on BBC World Television, should be arrested and sent to The Hague.

Wouldn't it be great if there were a US citizen who could say that and the next day the New York Times would print headlines saying, "Debate Rages over Whether President Committed Murder?"

The British left has the power to create such a person. Not from nothing. First, you need someone willing to speak out. Second, someone with the ability to reach the general public and third, someone with a respected position in society.

Take the first point. None of the US liberal media's darlings will do. Even the most aggressive, mainstream liberal programme on television Countdown with Keith Olbermann, called Anwar Al-Awlaki a "terrorist" despite the lack of evidence and merely questioned the "constitutional-ity" of murdering him. When the US pressed Portugal into arresting a former alleged Black Liberation Army member who had been on the run for 40 years the most celebrated liberal media

commentator in the US, Rachel Maddow, cheered.

If you bring up Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn or Edward Said then you see a further issue — two of these men are dead and one soon will be.

Who will replace them? Moreover, to the best of my knowledge Chomsky has never written an op-ed for the New York Times.

The left needs someone who doesn't just preach to the choir but can reach the people outside of church.

I've written for the New York Times not once but twice.

Of course, Chomsky is not famous for being left-wing but because he is a professor at a prestigious university.

I have taught at MIT and Caltech and I have done research at Harvard, Stanford, and Oxford. If there is any US citizen who shares the views of



PERSONA NON-GRATA: Julian Assange

the Morning Star's readership, who is willing to speak out against the US government, who has the ability to do so and the qualifications to get a position at a prestigious university, I'd love to hear about her.

So how can the British left create the next Noam Chomsky? Simply by publishing and forwarding my essays. In the US universities value you if other people do so a concerted effort by the British left could succeed in installing me at MIT.

I lived in England long enough to know how horribly self-serving this must sound to British ears but it is anything but self-serving.

There are severe penalties for criticising the US government from the left. Once, a head of a division of the US National Academies scheduled a meeting to speak with me but cancelled it when

he saw an essay I had written for The Guardian.

When I spoke at a rally in defence of WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange a woman who had arranged for me to meet a US congressman said she would no longer help me.

Almost 10 years ago I suggested to a leader of the Stop the War Coalition that they invite me to speak at rallies. She replied that when I am a more famous scholar they might.

The mistake of her position is that if you wait till the Establishment anoints someone then you are allowing the conservative forces you are fighting to determine who your spokespeople will be.

If you openly support the Black Panthers, as I do, you don't get to be US Attorney General.

If you know anyone else who could be the next Noam Chomsky then support that person. Otherwise, forward.

■ Professor Jonathan David Farley is a mathematician and an adviser for the Democratic Party's 2010 US Senate nominee in South Carolina.