

Communist Party of Britain

2011 Scottish Congress

Discussion statement

Each branch is permitted to make three amendments which must reach the Scottish Committee meeting for Friday 14 October at 72 Waterloo Street, Glasgow

10 *Working people across Britain face an unprecedented attack. Health, education and social care are being opened to the private sector. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are threatened. So also is the major remaining public sector base of the trade union movement. The economic crisis caused by the banks is being used politically to effect a decisive change in the balance of class forces.*

Challenges set by the 2011 Scottish election

In this struggle Scotland's own parliament has a potentially important role in mobilising resistance. But achieving this outcome will be difficult. The results of the 2011 election have placed a complicated set of challenges before Communists and
20 working people in Scotland.

The increased electoral support for the SNP indicates that significant numbers of working people believe that the SNP can, through the Scottish Parliament, better defend them against the Tories than Labour. Greater powers are now being demanded for Holyrood. Over the next four years the SNP will actively seek to convert these demands into full support for independence.

Yet this 'nationalist' political reorientation matches neither the class realities of present-day Scotland nor the immediate urgency of the tasks facing the organised
30 working class movement.

The ConDems at Westminster are enforcing a one quarter cut in real terms expenditure on the Scottish government by 2015. But it has been the SNP government which has been imposing these cuts across Scotland and doing so with particular severity on local government and allied services. It has further worsened their impact by choosing, for electoral purposes, to freeze council tax. And while it has undertaken not to impose HE fees and scrapped prescription charges, cuts will be made elsewhere to compensate. SNP controlled councils are currently, along with those controlled by other parties, enforcing savage reductions in services and jobs. In
40 the election SNP evaded the issue of the cuts and the need to resist them. The resulting SNP administration has now offered a two year wage freeze, effectively a 10 per cent wage cut, in return for limiting compulsory redundancies.

Hence, no less than elsewhere in Britain, working people in Scotland face a massive assault which will also, if successful, undermine the whole future of public sector trade unionism.

As Communists we need to expose this reality. We also need to demonstrate the dangers posed by the nationalist remedies offered by the SNP.

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Economic policies aligned to big business

The SNP is a cross-class party that has over the past two decades adopted a social democratic orientation. Its Left positioning has been made more convincing by the Labour Party's move to the right. Yet the SNP's economic policies are aligned to big business. Its immediate demand is for control over Corporation Tax with the intention of *reducing* taxes on business to attract 'new investment' to Scotland. Who will invest? It will inevitably be the same monopoly firms and banks that have over the past fifteen years been buying up existing Scottish firms and their markets – shifting the proportion of major plants under external ownership from 35 per cent to

60 70 per cent while at the same time cutting manufacturing employment by almost half. These firms would now have the additional bonus of paying less tax on their profits. SNP policies will therefore *accelerate* the process of externally-controlled monopoly concentration.

The same criticisms apply to the economic consequences of the SNP's longer-term call for independence - 'independence in Europe'.

This conceals a similar subordination to neo-liberal economics. The terms of the EU Treaty will require the Scottish government to give full freedom to capital movement and prohibit any government intervention to subsidise the redevelopment of

70 Scotland's industrial base, to directly create employment in manufacturing or to take back utilities into public ownership. In addition, EU regulations would require particularly stringent limits on public spending for a fiscally independent Scotland because of the country's disproportionately large banking sector. 'Independence in Europe' would therefore simply maintain the subordination of the Scottish economy to external big business and directly block the type of intervention required if Scotland is to survive economically.

Our ideological tasks

80 The challenge at this level is principally ideological. A campaign of explanation needs to be taken into the Labour movement. We need to win an understanding that there is no simple 'Scottish' solution. Cuts have to be fought now. So does the neo-liberal ideology that is used to justify them.

At the same time, in making these arguments, we need to remember that SNP supporters include many consistent trade unionists and instinctive left-wingers. They have to be won to see the threat posed to the interests of working people by the SNP's own accommodation with capital: the big businessmen who fund it and the bankers and right-wing economists who constitute its Council of Economic Advisers.

90 On these terms, and with policies as currently set, 'independence' would simply see Scotland remaining a satellite of British finance capital. And it would be at a heavy cost: the weakening of the combined ability of the British working class movement to attack monopoly capital where its state power is concentrated, at British level.

100 The urgency of these ideological tasks puts a priority on broadening the base of the People's Charter in Scotland and developing organisations such as the Scottish Campaign against Euro-Federalism. These have a vital contribution to make in mobilising for a progressive alternative and demonstrating how British finance capital, jointly with finance capital in France and Germany, are using the institutions of the EU to preclude any attempt to shift the balance of class forces in favour of working people. In undertaking this work we will also be challenging the neo-liberal ideas that are central to the dominance of right-wing Labour.

Our organisational tasks

Communists have another essential task which is *organisational*: that of strengthening the base structures of the working class in the broadest sense.

110 The current battle against the cuts cannot be won simply through setting up 'top level' anti-cuts organisations – all too often fronts for particular Leftist groups. Resistance has to be grounded in the existing, very largely defensive organisations of working people in particular work places, in tenants associations, community councils and in local trades union councils. We have to recognise that organisation at this level is weak, much weaker than it was twenty or thirty years ago. We also have to recognise that the dimensions of resistance and struggle have changed. Those who will suffer first and most directly are those in our society who are already the most economically disadvantaged and oppressed: those who receive benefits, those who need public sector housing, those who depend on publicly provided care services, particularly older people and those with disabilities, young people leaving school with no chance of employment and those whose educational careers are blocked – all groups that usually lack any organisation at all.

120 Building such organisation has always been the traditional role of Communists. No mass struggle can take place without it. It is by its nature *local*. It requires the careful building of confidence and organisation, patient case work and specific agitational targets – not by the party as such but through broad organisations in which Communists take part and which have their own organisational integrity that people trust. It also requires the careful construction of alliances, linking with other organisations locally. Here trade union councils have a key role because they are uniquely able to project unity and solidarity and win an understanding of the different contingents that make up the working class.

130 Each party branch needs to examine what can be done in its own areas, even if it is as yet small scale and tentative. It needs to conduct a strategic assessment of forces, of allies on the Left in the trade unions and in Labour Party and of key issues. Party branches and, more particularly, local Morning Star readers and supporters groups have a key role to play, culturally and ideologically, in refocusing and taking forward the local heritage of class politics and class culture. This potential has been demonstrated by the local Morning Star meetings over the last couple of years.

140 It is in this context that the party needs to develop its electoral work – not as an end in itself but as a way of reaching people politically with our arguments in those areas where we are already establishing a base. Attention should be given, where appropriate, to preparing for council elections in 2012 and the EU elections in 2014.

Trade unions and the Labour Party

150 Communists argue that despite the attacks on its internal democracy, the Labour Party can be influenced by the trade union movement due to its mass union affiliation. Communists need to encourage their trade union branch to affiliate and send delegates to their local LP constituency, arguing for the adoption of union policy in the Party.

Communists are against those in our movement who campaign for trade union disaffiliation from the LP, seeing this as the politics of frustration of those seeking a short cut to building a new workers party. It should be noted that none of the plethora of 'left of Labour' projects, which Scotland especially has been subject to, has borne fruit. The potential of winning the LP for class politics is very real if the trade unions locally can be won to engage.

160 Opposition to the cuts in public spending and the attack on the pay and conditions of workers in the public and private sectors can reconnect Labour with its core vote. But more, much more, needs to be done by the trade union movement locally. Trades councils especially can play a key role in winning the wider community for the politics of the labour movement. We should seek to transform the local trade union movement into champions of the community.

170 This can be done by taking up the broader concerns of women, the unemployed, the sick and disabled, pensioners, and students. By campaigning at the local level against the attempt to dismantle the Welfare State the trade union movement can win allies amongst the community. Taking up issues such as the ruthless implementation of the Employment Support Allowance, the proposed abolition of Disability Living Allowance, and the attack on the Housing Benefit system, raises the possibility of building a "local mass movement", one which links up with carers' and single parents' organisations that involve and represent large numbers of women.

Such consistent work carried out in a non sectarian manner could shift local politics to the left and have a profound effect on both the Labour Party and the SNP.

180 While the economic and political alternative of the Peoples Charter is BTUC and STUC policy, it is at local level that the politics of the Charter need to be argued for, winning an understanding amongst trade unionists and the wider community that it does not need to be like this. 'Those who will suffer first and most directly are those in our society who are already the most economically disadvantaged and oppressed - those who depend on benefits and public services'.

Scotland's place within the struggle for an alternative economic and political strategy

In Scotland a key objective over the coming period must be to create and promote a programme for Scotland's development which forms a coherent part of our party's Alternative Economic and Political Strategy.

190 In the 1970s and 80s the Left and the trade union movement advanced a perspective for the creation of a Scottish Parliament that would enhance the democracy of working people by securing powers to create employment and develop public sector investment in the Scottish economy. This must remain our aim. Currently it is not just working people who suffer from policies dictated by finance capital via Westminster and Brussels and imposed by Holyrood. Small and medium business are also at risk. Scope exists for the creation of a democratic anti-monopoly alliance led by the trade union and labour movement which rejects neo-liberalism and which understands the importance of securing powers for the Scottish parliament to itself redevelop the productive base of the Scottish economy. A first step in the creation of
200 that alliance would indeed be for it help mobilise a fight-back against cuts that are today destroying that productive base – cuts that directly or indirectly effect all sections within local communities, shopkeepers and small businesses as well as working people.

Anti-racist work including the rebuilding of working class communities and solidarity in new circumstances

The Scottish Parliamentary elections saw the BNP fail to make any further gains from having almost kept their deposit in the Glasgow North East by-election, with their nationwide vote falling from 24,616 to 15,580. Although the reduction in votes is to
210 be welcomed, it is no cause for complacency. The fascists have held street stalls in a number of Scottish cities, and the National Front, who have picked up some disgruntled ex-BNP members, stood candidates in the Scottish elections for the first time ever.

Rising unemployment and reduced services will provide a breeding ground for fascism, as the BNP and others seek to blame these problems on migrant workers, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups. It is therefore all the more crucial that Communists are there in community councils and tenants' associations, to bring a class based analysis to the real issues facing the working class, and combat the
220 arguments of the fascists.

The participation of minority groups in struggle against the cuts, through involving faith and community organisations, will also be important in overcoming any divisions in the working class, and preventing any attempts to foment division.

An anti-fascist advisory should be set up and priority given to establishing and supporting Searchlight/Hope not Hate as an organisation in Scotland.

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Peace and Solidarity

The outcome of the May 2011 Scottish Parliament election has provided new opportunities to build the campaign against Trident in Scotland and across Britain. There is now a clear majority in the Scottish Parliament opposed, not only to Trident replacement, but to the existing nuclear weapons system. This complements the anti-Trident majority outside parliament in the trade union movement, the churches and among Scottish members of parliament.

240 The task facing the peace movement is to make this majority count. Clearly a new and unequivocal resolution could now be passed by the Scottish Parliament to demand that a UK government removes these weapons from Scottish soil and waters and to call on the UK government to initiate negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention - a global ban on nuclear weapons as demanded by over 130 countries. This could have a huge impact internationally as well as putting more pressure on the ConDem government. In addition the Scottish government could be pressed to take a range of other actions within its existing powers to help build the campaign against Trident in Scotland. But the ultimate decision on Trident will be taken by the government at Westminster and that, therefore, must remain the central focus of our campaign.

250 In the light of the recent nuclear disaster at Fukushima, the weapons and submarines based on the Clyde pose, even in peacetime, considerable dangers to the people of Scotland - the very people they are supposed to protect. We must publicise these dangers and do more work to win over the communities and trade unions who see nuclear weapons as a source of long term, well paid employment. The opposite is true. Instead of creating jobs, Trident is destroying jobs in Scotland by taking funds away from other vital areas of public spending. In a period of rising struggle and co-ordinated industrial action against cuts in jobs, services and pensions, we must ensure that the billions spent every year on Trident and the war in Afghanistan are put at the heart of the anti-cuts campaign. In this way we can deepen the opposition to Trident in the trade union movement and begin to exert real pressure on the Labour party at all levels to re-think its position on Trident replacement.

Women

270 The main goal of the ConDem's is to reverse the gains won by and for working people during the course of the last century. While this affects the whole working class, its impact is most severe for women. While there remains massive inequality between women and men in our society, the economic and social position of women improved qualitatively during the late 20th century with the development of the welfare state. Girls and women benefitted in particular from the expansion of higher education, including the Open University, and the introduction of the comprehensive system. As women entered the workforce in greater numbers the public services became a key focus for employment opportunities. Most of the public sector workforce is female – 67% of local government and 89% of NHS workers. The previous New Labour government actually extended some areas of the welfare state; pre-school education, for example, became a statutory service for the first time and provision in Scotland expanded everywhere.

280 The other side of this is that women have a very great deal more to lose from the
Tory led class offensive and from the cuts being administered by the SNP in Scotland.
The impact on equality and on human rights must be central for it is another key
contradiction in the position adopted by the SNP as a party. Currently women
workers are suffering disproportionately from cuts to pay and conditions. In our
gender segregated economy, job losses in the public sector, whether through
voluntary or compulsory redundancy, mean a disproportionate loss of employment
opportunities for women, especially young women hoping to enter the labour market
in administration, teaching, nursing etc. Together with the attack on lone parent
benefits this has already produced a sharp rise in female unemployment claimant
290 rates in Scotland. Women disproportionately live in poverty in Scotland; they are a
majority of those in low paid work, of the elderly population living on pensions, of
lone parents, and of carers for children and adults with disabilities.

Despite most councils having 'equality proofed' budgets, the impact of cuts is falling
unequally. Across Scotland local councils are already cutting support from lifeline
services for people with disabilities, and, for example, women affected by sexual
violence and domestic abuse. Many of these services are likely to close over the next
period. Meanwhile at UK level, some in the ConDem government would like to
remove the obligations of small businesses to provide maternity leave and pay and
we can expect an imminent attack on the abortion law.

300 An immediate issue here is that many of those organisations that represent women's
interests such as the Scottish Women's Convention, the Close the Gap campaign, and
Engender, are voluntary organisations in receipt of government funding - which itself
is insecure and uncertain - and which in any case compromises their independence.
This reinforces the importance of the role of trade unions, the STUC Women's
Committee, and local TUCs in making equality central to the overall struggle. As a
party we need to ensure that our class perspective on gender inequality is taken into
the movement. We must make sure that the specific impact on women and the
demands of the Charter for Women are made central to campaigning around the
310 People's Charter and as part of the Better Way Campaign.

Youth and Students

With sustained attacks on our education, our job prospects, and an increasingly
hopeless future, the youth of Scotland, not only in the YCL, but in all regions and
from all backgrounds are realising that the status quo cannot and must not hold; the
wealth and greed of the few, must not be paid for by the many. The youth of
Scotland are a generation betrayed not only by the wreckless policies of a Neo
Thatcherite government in power in London, but by the failures of the consumerist
generation which has gone before, who under Thatcher decided to forget politics and
320 go shopping. The consequences of spending what you do not have in the belief that
as long as we are spending the economy is healthy, was utterly shattered in 2008,
with the near total collapse of the international banking system. This is nothing new,
though, but rather a repeating aspect of capitalist economics. It has happened
before, and unless capitalism is defeated, will happen again. The next decade has

been squandered; yet it will be the responsibility of the youth of today to build beyond the next decade, a better society, with prosperity, equality and stability.

The Funding Gap in Further and Higher Education

330 Universities Scotland believes the size of the teaching funding gap is likely to be at least £202 million annually by 2014/15 based on English universities charging £7,500 a year in fees. The Scottish Government has vowed to keep entry to higher education free for Scottish and EU students, and tuition fees capped at £1820 for English and Welsh students. Rather than any commitment to egalitarianism the money to finance this will come from another part of the budget for public services and universities will seek to attract increasing numbers of international students who will pay substantially higher fees. This will also result in the cutting of subjects such as nursing and languages. This will be to the detriment of further education in Scotland for decades to come. NUS Scotland has officially come out in opposition to the Scottish
340 Government's proposals to raise fees for students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland studying in Scotland to a maximum of £9000 per year.

Abolition of EMA

The Westminster Government abolished the Educational Monthly Allowance scheme in England which had cost £560m. It is under review in Northern Ireland, and for the meantime is to be kept in Scotland and Wales. The conservatives have argued that the £180m bursary scheme which is to replace the far more comprehensive EMA will allow more targeted financial aid to the very poorest students but it is quite clear that this is shamefaced cost cutting. The UCU lecturers' union said the reduction in overall support raised "the prospect of thousands of poorer students being priced out of
350 studying".

Anti-cuts groups at universities

In response to the ruling class offensive there has been notable mobilisation amongst the student population in the UK and Scotland specifically. The National Union of Students Scotland has not been as active in anti-cuts activity as NUS south of the border, in part because many of the immediate cuts being implemented do not target Scotland's separate education system specifically. They have however expressed opposition to many of the ConDem attacks on the education system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Many grassroots students' anti-cuts groups
360 have emerged during this period, most notably the 'Free Hetherington Occupation' which occupied a disused social club on Glasgow University's campus for some seven months and has been credited with withdrawal of some cuts to certain parts of the University's budget. A similar but less successful and short lived occupation was attempted at Strathclyde University. It may be noted that ultra-left elements were predominant in the 'Free Hetherington Occupation'. Over the coming period it is planned to increase YCL influence in the student movement locally, going in conjunction with the establishing of a Communist Society at Glasgow University and plans to do the same at Strathclyde.

370 *Increase in young people in trade unions*

Of late there has been a notable rise in interest in trade union activity amongst young

people, in part due to their role in the anti-cuts struggle. In some unions this has led to a definite increase in young members joining the union. In Glasgow, during the PCS strike on June the 30th YCL members there in solidarity noted large numbers of young workers alongside more seasoned union members on the picket lines. Two YCL members have also been co-opted onto the Regional Youth Council for Unite the union.

Youth in precarious employment/unemployment

380 As a result of the government's austerity measures many more young people are being left on the trash heap leaving school, and advancing neither into employment or further education. A concerted effort must be made to reach out to such people, who are most afflicted by the cuts and most isolated from the labour movement. As for the precarious employment into which many young people are forced, such as bar work and in the hospitality industry generally, members of the YCL have been key in setting up the 'Glasgow Bar and Hospitality Workers Branch' of Unite the Union.

Publicity

390 CPB Scotland is making increasing use of IT and Internet technologies to further the communication of our aims and understanding. The Party website www.scottishcommunists.org.uk gets an average of 1,000 people visiting the site each month. A new venture for the Scottish Party is the use of the increasingly popular Twitter, on which we have 1,500 (and growing daily) following our messages. Common messages sent on our Twitter account include notifications of new stories and updates on the website, notifications of upcoming meetings and general comments on general news stories of the day (often pointing people to Morning Star material). Recording of meetings organised by the Party or the Morning Star continue to prove to be popular, and are an important repository of educational material. Videos also enable comrades out with easy reach of meeting venues to benefit from the topics discussed. This is perhaps more crucial in Scotland due to the dispersed nature of our population.

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The Party has been most publicly visible during the recent Elections, with an excellent candidate and energetically run campaign. Most notable publicity was a large colour photo in the Metro newspaper from the manifesto launch, a free paper which has a huge readership. Our candidate also appeared on the BBC to give a brief summary of his campaign message which was communicated clearly: 'fight against the cuts'. There was also coverage in the Herald newspaper. On our own website, the traffic surged to 1,600 visitors both in April and May of the Scottish Election, suggesting that people were accessing the website for election related information. For the coming period local branches of the party should also seek to make more active use of the local press media as well as the Scottish broadsheets.

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Strengthening the collective work of Communists

Our last Scottish Congress recognised the weakness of our collective communist work, especially inactive branches and comrades with no or little contact with the party.

420 Some progress albeit limited has been made over the last two years with cadre numbers increasing. Young people are slowly but surely joining our ranks. Our strongest area Glasgow continues to progress but the areas showing the most rapid growth in sustained collective work is the Edinburgh area and Ayrshire. Lanarkshire continues to show promise and Dundee is the latest area to organise collective work.

Most activity is however at the propaganda level. Useful and necessary as that is, communists need to be involved in the broad movement. We need to be rooted in the working class injecting Marxist ideas into the struggle, mobilising, providing leadership, and building alliances wherever possible.

430 A number of comrades play a leading role in the movement but too many of them operate as individuals, not as part of a communist collective.

Functioning Advisories have a key role to play in developing our collective work in the movement, building conviction and developing the next generation of communist activists through discussion, education, and activity. Working in such a way can sustain lifelong activity in the party and the movement.

Advisories can assist where there is no functioning branch allowing collective work in a given area be it industrial, students etc.

440 Scotland needs a bigger, stronger Communist Party and it is through this collective work that the Party can begin again to exert influence far beyond its numbers not only in the day to day struggles, but also creating the conditions for socialist revolution.