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Referendum rant from an immigrant

Edinburgh Anarchist Federation

September 18, 2014

This is going to be a bit of a rant rather than a carefully crafted piece because I desperately need to get it off my chest. I haven't written anything about the referendum yet and I haven't weighed in much on lots of the discussions that friends and people around me are having (although I have been listening), because my frame of reference is different since I became an anarchist. I'm also not eligible to vote, because I'm not a UK citizen yet and am from the US, which isn't a Commonwealth or EU country. If I were still a progressive Democrat like I was when I grew up, I would be excited about setting up a new capitalist representative democracy, which is of course what the actual question of the referendum asks if we want to do. It wasn't until I started reading more and more about anarchist communism some years ago now that I decided that I thought they were right about representative capitalist democracy – that we can't use this system to change this system. Growing up and participating in election campaigns was like banging my head against a wall – even if we won, the damn politicians we elected never seemed to be able to eliminate poverty or

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stop environmental exploitation. Now I think that's because Lucy Parsons was right; we should "never be deceived that the rich will permit you to vote away their wealth." Poverty and white supremacy and patriarchy and environmental exploitation are about power. The people who control power are not going to relinquish it because we asked them politely. They never have previously and they aren't suddenly going to start tomorrow. If we want change, we have to use methods that aren't built into the system, methods that are directly democratic and collective and that threaten power.

A friend of mine involved in the Radical Independence Campaign last night was giddily excited about the referendum today. She talked about how amazing it is that all these people in Scotland are engaging in this discussion about what kind of society we want to live in, about a more equal society, a different system – and I didn't speak, because she's so happy and I feel so frustrated. Because she's very right about that in a way – it is impressive that so many people in Scotland are having political discussions with their friends, are getting to know new people and talking to them about politics. It's very frustrating that very little of that discussion is actually about what kind of society people want to live in – it is mostly about what kind of *state* people want to live in. To me, as an anarchist communist, that's a pretty big difference, a pretty serious boundary to the conversation. The discussion about independence has been about what kind of *state* people want to create. I don't want to create a state and I'm not sure what to say when people ask me what kind of state I want to create. I see the possibilities of state-creation as limited, not unlimited. I'm not just anti-capitalist – I'm also anti-representative-democracy and anti-state-socialism. I'm for direct democracy and libertarian socialism, and I don't believe that we're going to get either of those things by setting up capitalist states.

I think it's pretty cool that 97% of Scotland is now registered to vote and that most eligible voters will be voting today.

I think it demonstrates that people like to be asked questions directly. Lots of people get that representative democracy sucks and that it doesn't make a difference who they vote for in elections, so they don't vote. But when they're asked directly what they think should happen, they show up. People occasionally claim that a more democratic society wouldn't work because people don't like constantly having to make decisions, but I think that's rubbish. Decision-making is hard, but not having control of your own life is harder. A referendum isn't direct democracy – it's a question framed by those in power offering a choice they are willing to give, which of course is why it's a question I don't even particularly want to answer, because what they're willing to offer is another capitalist state. But I think it illustrates something about our potential for political engagement anyway.

What would be even better than 88% voter turnout is if all of the people who vote today because they want a better society, all of the people who voted yes for change, all of the people who spent hours campaigning for independence, were all out again on Friday, and Saturday, and Sunday, and all of the days after that, fighting for change. Because no change is actually going to happen unless we fight for it. Imagine if all of the people involved in the Yes campaign sat down with their colleagues and workmates and agreed a list of demands to present to the boss of things they want changed where they work. In fact, imagine if they confronted all the bosses who are part of the Yes campaign right now! Imagine if all of the people involved in the Yes campaign picketed every business and charity in Scotland still using workfare. Imagine if all of the people involved in the Yes campaign blockaded the UKBA/Home Office in Glasgow every time they wanted to take their van out to arrest and detain an asylum seeker during the next two years in which we'll still be in the UK even if the Yes campaign wins. Tomorrow I hope everyone who has so far been happy to campaign alongside the viciously cissexist Wings over Scotland because

independence was more important than trans people will publicly demand that WOS publicly apologize for its previous cis-sexist comments. I hope that all of the people with Green Yes in their profile picture on facebook posting about how Scotland can make millions of pounds from oil in the North Sea will stop being selfish idiots. If all of those people stepped outside of the system, outside of charity and letters to your MSP and being politely consulted and then ignored, not to drop out but to fight, then an independent Scottish government would be quaking in its boots. Change happens because we make them change, because they're worried about what will happen if they don't change. I would be happy to see some of the reforms that people are talking about happen in an independent Scotland. But I know that they won't happen unless we make society ungovernable without them.

Lots of people voting today in Scotland want a more equal society. How much more equal? How much inequality is okay? How many children in poverty is okay? How many adults? How many people sleeping rough? How many people on poverty wages? How many people working stupid, pointless, soul-crushing jobs, selling disposable crap? How many racist comments? How many hotels refusing black people beds for the night? How many catcalls on the street are okay? Do we want a society like Sweden or Norway? People are still poor and miserable there. Not as many people, maybe. But some people still are. Are we okay with that? Do we think that's as good as it can get? I don't. And today I won't be voting for change, but I will still be organizing for it. And I hope that tomorrow, everyone who voted will be joining me, will be pouring their hopeful words into direct action, because *that* would be something to get excited about.