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Glasgow Anarchist Federation

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Recently I was accused of being a unionist. The reason for this was due my refusal to set aside criticisms of the radical independence conference (RIC) and get behind the local campaigns of the Leninist, Trotskyist and state socialist left to push for independence as the primary goal for socialists (including myself as an anarchist). I'll be fair and admit that the other person was mildly inebriated at the time, however as it was another anarchist repeating this hollow "trot dichotomy" between either full support for a yes vote (with no room for nuance or dissent until independence is won) or being a unionist it did enough to irk my anti-state self into writing this post to examine my personal thoughts on the tactics being employed in the name of "radical independence".

I have had it conceded to me during friendly discussion with some of the listed RIC supporters that independence will be hard to gain and that any vote is going to be close as there is only a independence/union option on the ballot. If improvement for the people of Scotland through representative democ-

racy was the goal then the SNP would have fought tooth and nail to have two questions on the referendum – the first a yes/no on independence, the second a yes/no for a set of further devolved powers. That way even if the independence vote didn't go in their favour then Holyrood would almost certainly walk away with powers that could be used for positive social change. *So why didn't they do this?*

The main reason is that, in spite of what many people have bought into, independence isn't a struggle between the working and ruling class but is instead a struggle between competing sections of the ruling class over the long-term control of energy resources (oil, wind & tide) and other profitable industries (education, whiskey & fish). Rather than doing this old school, the bosses are using their sway over the working class as the means to settle their dispute. If the nat's walked away with more powers but not rule they would have to give concessions to the people until next opportunity to take charge rolled around. Rule further down the line would not be on such favourable terms, not to mention years of profiteering being missed for those in charge here and now.

To be clear: This vote isn't about working class power, it is a means for the capitalists to settle an argument amongst themselves.

While people are putting their resources toward a shot at independence in a couple of years time austerity is attacking *now*. People are homeless, starving, dying *now*. Disability reassessments and workfare schemes are increasing in severity *now*. Banking on your ability to hold politicians to promises after the count is in is little more than desperately begging for scraps from the table (though I'm sure that any scrap will be held aloft as a marvellous victory for the working class).

Not only do we need to tackle problems happening now, but we should also use methods that will foster the kind of change that mean that these problems will be unlikely to repeat themselves. Solutions to our current problems have to help cultivate

a truly socialist society further down the line. Independence is just a means of getting two states for the price of one, and once the euphoria of having backed the winning ticket dies down we'll see the RIC message that things can only get better will be exposed as the lie that we have heard many times before and the changes between one set of suits and another will be no change at all.

If those on the left want to call themselves radical with any credibility then they would be agitating for changes to be made *before* the referendum, not after, taking those changes from whoever was willing to implement them. Anarchists often are accused of being unrealistic, however the old adage that a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush seems apt in this situation. If you are going to vote for the politicians then do it *after* they have given you what you want, not before. Both nat's and unionists could be giving concessions at the moment, but without any pressure to do something tangible the nat's have already gone back on their promises before the vote takes place while still securing essential support with nothing more than token lip service.

It may seem counter intuitive, but if those participating in RIC could have put the matter of independence to one side it could have been used to mobilise the socialist left into a massive anti-austerity pressure group focussed on that nats, withholding a sizeable campaigning/voting block from them and kicking up a stink if they didn't start a sizeable fight for the people of Scotland NOW. But, as I said above, this isn't about securing the best for the people or a socialist Scotland; this is a "refined" fight for the control of resources.

My prediction is that one of two outcomes will occur and leave energetic campaigners feeling disillusioned and burnt out:

The first option is that independence will fail to materialize. The lack of a reflexive plan of action coupled with burn-out and disillusionment from many involved in the independence

campaign will cause a dip in the campaigning output of socialist groups at precisely the time it needs to be in full swing for fighting austerity measures that are destroying peoples lives. Lots of time will be spent picking up the pieces while our class enemies consolidate their position after two years of our attention being split. I like to call this outcome “Stop the War II – History Repeats Itself” (Do you remember Stop the War? I know some folks at RIC do because they are still clutching at the straws of that one to Hoover people up).

The second (and less likely) outcome is that the two year of campaigning pay off leaving Scotland is it’s own nation, and while we get a few initial concessions a lot of what is happens is smoke and mirrors and things carry on much as before only this time it is worse because we’ll find that as a smaller nation that we’ll be racing to the bottom in terms of worker’s rights and the regulation of capital interests. The refusal of the RIC campaign to acknowledge that things could have got worse will either lead to campaigners fitting into the new system and justifying to themselves that they haven’t sold out or becoming disillusioned and dropping out of socialist campaigning for good.

So what can we, as socialists and anarchists, do now? I say we back community building, anti-Atos and anti-Workfare campaigns that are organised in a collective, directly democratic manner. The Solidarity Federation, IWW branches and groups within the Anarchist Federation have been doing just that, but they are not alone. Claimants unions and solidarity networks up and down the country encourage people to defend themselves and one another from the cuts. Here in Glasgow Unity fights to ensure asylum seekers are treated fairly and works to stop the UKBA practice of dawn raids against families. Social centre projects look to preserve the sense of community that is being destroyed by capitalism and the state. All told we should just be doing all the things we would have done before the spectacle of independence kicked

off, and all the things we’d otherwise have to pick up from once the furore dies down a few years from now.

Well, that is all I’ve got to say on the subject (at least for now). If you were hoping to find out whether I advocate voting for/against/at all then you are out of luck. That said the topic has been examined by others on this blog, so go check out this post discussing independence struggles & worker freedom and take a listen to the discussion hosted by Glasgow Anarchist Federation on independence and nationalism.