

Don't Mourn. Organise.

Edinburgh anarchist statement on the referendum result

Anarchist Federation

September 19, 2014

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Yesterday Scotland voted against independence. Today half the country are mourning, their hopes of a new state and its social democratic promise dashed. The other half are relieved, if perhaps not enthusiastically celebrating, the potential uncertainty removed; things will persist as before.

We neither mourn nor celebrate. The scaremongering of the No campaign would likely have proved largely unfounded. So too would the promises of the Yes campaign. In reality our lives would have continued mostly as they did before in either event. We will trudge to the same jobs we hate along the same roads, through the same congestion on the same expensive transport. We'll do so so we can pay our wages back to the capitalist class in the same shops, to pay rent to the same landlords and mortgages to the same banks. We'll take our kids to the same schools with the same education system, when we're ill we'll wait to use the same hospitals. We'll escape our jobs to the same parks, beaches, museums and pubs.

An independent Scotland would in most respects have resembled the Scotland of the UK, a patriarchal, capitalist, environmentally destructive society. A country with the most unequal land ownership in the developed world – where 50% of the land is owned by just 432 individuals. A country dependent on North Sea oil for much of its exports – oil that must be left in the ground to prevent climate catastrophe. A country with huge poverty and huge wealth and little in the way of organised working class action to change that dynamic.

And in so continuing to uphold the same institutions, the same structures of power, the same business interests, and the same political configuration, our fight against the state, capital and oppression continues.

Social movements

It has become popular amongst some on the pro-independence to claim that even in defeat politics has been radically altered. People are engaged with politics for the first time, turnout was 85%. A new broad popular social movement is born, the referendum was never about a vote for the Nationalists (capital N¹). The campaign they built to push for independence will now re-orient itself against the Scottish and British governments and push for material concessions, emboldened by how close they came and bringing newly radicalised people with them. But a high turnout in itself tells us very little of what will come next, the complacency that we have already changed politics is dangerous.

Leaving aside the tactical mistake of offering the SNP the support they wanted to pass the referendum and *then* hoping to win concessions rather than making those concessions a precondition of support, this seems at best an optimistic prediction, which is far from certain to be realised. It is highly probable that the movement built to advance a radical case for independence will fail to maintain the unity it has shown pre-referendum in a post-referendum situation. A new left unity party (perhaps Left Unity itself) seems likely to form out of the Radical Independence Campaign and will have to compete for votes with the Scottish Green Party. The disintegration of the SSP last decade bodes ill for the lasting chances of that configuration. If the parliamentary left can

¹ We've discussed previously the obfuscation of "good" and "bad" nationalism and the left's claim that independence has nothing to do with nationalism. In our opinion both yes and no campaigns de facto represent competing nationalisms, whatever their intentions to the contrary.

regain even the position it held from 2003–2007 it will have done exceedingly well (in its own terms).

Undoubtedly many from the radical independence movement will want to maintain extra-parliamentary organisation, though how much of it is truly independent of the parliamentary parties will be an open question. But as with the referendum itself elections have a tendency to draw activists away from direct struggle and towards themselves however good peoples' intentions are. Perhaps the most debilitating effect of the referendum campaign was its draw away from other, more meaningful, sites of struggle – the boycott workfare campaign, anti-deportations and pro migrant work, environmental organising and so on. Of course, that is not to say that no independence campaigners continued their engagement with these causes, but no one has unlimited time and energy to contribute, and that expended on the referendum could have been better placed elsewhere.

Ecology

As the independence referendum moves into the past, other issues may start to regain their prominence. Foremost must be the commitment of politicians in Westminster and Holyrood to continuing extraction of Scotland's share of North Sea oil.

The independence debate was consistently shaped by the prospects for oil production and how the proceeds will be distributed. Even where criticism did exist and a call for a "green new deal" was made, the focus was to argue for renewables. Whilst greater use of renewable energy is to be welcomed, it is far from sufficient. As Jason Moore has highlighted energy revolutions of the past have always been additive and substitutive. Market logic plus intervention for renewables will only give us both renewables and fossil fuels. As alternative grow fossil fuels prices will fall and maintain their use alongside. Real decarbonisation of society requires the fuels be left in the ground and their value written off.

You cannot build a "green" capitalism. You certainly cannot create it in time. There is too much money invested in fossil fuels– in drilling, in mining, in fracking. The ruling class will never voluntarily give up this wealth, or allow it to be simply voted away. "To survive we must act now" and "couple bleak reality with the utopian impulse" to demand a complete transformation of our society².

An independent Scotland would have relied heavily on fossil fuels – not least to maintain currency reserves and a positive balance of trade. The extraction of North Sea oil will instead continue to prop up the UK's trade deficit. As part of a larger economy that dependence may now not be brought as clearly to the fore. But that reliance must be exposed, and it must be broken. That will be an expensive and difficult task, but one which we have no choice but to take up – there will be no future for Scotland or the UK if we do nothing. We must create the movement which makes that possible. Too much time has been spent on bourgeois constitutional questions while the rich consolidate their wealth and power, impose austerity and hardship and leave the planet to burn safe that adaptation will be good enough for them.

So tonight, drown your sorrows. Take time to regain your energy and when you're ready come back to join us. The better society that had been pinned on independence doesn't need a

² Goodbye to the Future – Out of the Woods.

new state. Keep talking to your neighbours and your workmates. We have a world to win and only our own working class self-activity and organisation will secure it.

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