

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

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September 17, 2014

Tomorrow's independence referendum affords the Scottish people the best chance in decades to bloody the nose of the British Establishment. Westminster's suited and booted are out in force to save the 300-year-old Union having been awoken from an aloof stupor of arrogant complacency. Buller Boy's promises of devo-max and Head Boy Ed's moist appeals for a sense of British identity, shared history, patriotism and even, for the TUC audience, class unity, smack of desperation, leaving us feeling Wetter Together.

This vote is not about Alex Salmond. It's about self-determination. It's about securing a guarantee that 5 million people will not face the misfortune of waking up to a Tory government that nobody voted for, extricating themselves from an ultra-centralised, sclerotic system which sees a narrow clique of public schoolboys whooping as they announce that the commoners need to tighten their belts to secure the road to recovery. History is rewritten by an elite that blames the financial meltdown and the credit crunch not on the avarice or mismanagement of City bankers, to whom they are in thrall, but on the profligacy of the poor and vulnerable.

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The SNP is a capitalist party. It does not seek to challenge the basic bourgeois socioeconomic model. However, it won its majority in Holyrood by positioning itself to the left of the Labour Party. It has introduced free prescriptions, free care for the elderly and free university tuition in reforms that offer some palliative care against some of the worst symptoms of the morbid neoliberal disease. Anarcho-purists can scoff at the idea of concessions from reformist parties, won by pressure and struggle from below, but they will know what these ameliorative measures mean if they ever have to take out a loan for medicines or worry about how to scrape together enough money for their meals on wheels. Scots have the chance to consolidate a social-democratic, left-of-centre political culture at a time when the hard-won fruits of years of working class agitation – the NHS, welfare state – are being systematically dismantled in a drive for austerity in the rest of the UK.

A grassroots campaign that has politicized hundreds of thousands for the first time is re-invigorating a sense of widespread engagement and opening new lines of questioning about democracy, power elites and inequality. “Thatcher did more for Scottish nationalism than Salmond ever could.” And her necrophilic disciples in Whitehall have compounded the issue by consistently alienating and disenfranchising huge swathes of the country – the oiks who live north of the Watford gap in particular.

What Scots have is an opportunity to create something new. Independence will outlive Salmond and his cohorts. They propose only independence-lite; currency union, EU membership and Betty Windsor. But there is a chance for Scotland to make radical changes and there is a movement afoot. Its best chances of success lie in breaking the chains which shackle it to the arse-feeders of the British state. In the short-term, independence will, most likely, mean piecemeal changes; changes in the accents of the powerful and the rejection of Westminster only to find a new elite settled in Holyrood. But Scotland’s political

centre ground – along with the North of England’s – is far to the left of the South and we are presented with a chance to irrevocably alter a London-centric power structure. Perhaps not a communist utopia, but in the absence of the omnipotent power of federated workers’ councils I will settle for an arrangement that gets the combined forces of the British Establishment soiling themselves at the prospect of unruly Celts growing restive and challenging a moribund consensus over Hadrian’s Wall.

If only Liverpool could hold a referendum on joining Scotland...