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For most people outside Scotland, myself included, the debate over Scottish independence has been largely peripheral. I've come across it occasionally, but bigger things have always taken my attention and I've only found myself discussing it in depth when with comrades from Scotland. This is perhaps a mistake, since the vote in 2014 will have ramifications for both Scotland and the rest of the UK, and there is a marked lack of libertarian communist analysis on the issue.

Referendums aren't great, liberating acts of direct democracy. They offer us no revolutionary change and the debate around the question is framed by various sections of the ruling class. This is as true for the independence referendum as for any other — the options on the table being four variations between the status quo and full independence for Scotland.

In no case is the Scottish electorate offered a say on the *form* that this variation takes. Not that this is a surprise, since whether the UK remains as it is, or we have an independent Scotland, or we get "devolution plus" as an in-between option, the socio-economic status quo prevails. Extended social democ-

racy or some form of state socialism are not up for the vote. Let alone libertarian communism.

You'd think this a fairly obvious point. Yet some sections of the left are looking at this referendum as though it is a revolutionary moment. I have been told by one comrade that Scottish independence is important for "smashing the British state and British imperialism." A motion at PCS conference (which I think was guillotined) offered support for "an independent, socialist, nuclear free Scotland."

Away from such hysterical rhetoric, the Scottish Socialist Party argue that whilst "swapping the Union Jack for the Saltire would not rid Scotland of inequality, low pay, pensioner poverty and the other problems inherent in any capitalist economic system, … it would allow normal class politics to develop more naturally than ever before." Since nationalism "has acted to deflect attention away from the real source of Scotland's problems," removing the nationalist tension created by being part of the UK would "clear the way for politics to be fought out on the basis of ideology and class rather than on the basis of nation."

The problem with this line of reasoning, however, is that it seeks to move past nationalism essentially by rolling with it. But if there are marginal gains from independence it will only help to intensify nationalist sentiment. As a member of the Glasgow Anarchist Federation said on this site, "having the political class closer to home doesn't necessarily make replacing them any more difficult. If anything, the intensification of the nationalist project championed by all apparently 'progressive' opinion could have a significant effect in mystifying power and class relations and undermining the self-organisation of the working class in favour of its passivity and support for new forms of failed ideas."

The Scottish National Party's own pronouncements bear out this fact. Whilst devolution has brought some social democratic benefits, such as free prescriptions and university places,

the SNP have declared that they want to set competitive tax rates. In other words, using lower taxes to draw in business and investment. Hardly conduitive to a social democratic expansion of the welfare state.

Combine that with the Scottish deficit, and the logic of capitalism (which an independent Scottish government will be tasked to manage as the UK government are now) demands austerity. The *Guardian* has compiled some useful data on this, showing that public spending per head is higher in Scotland than any other part of the UK bar Northern Ireland. It also shows that Scotland's share of North Sea Oil revenues is only significant if granted on the basis of geographical share rather than per capita share, which seems unlikely. Even then, there is an £10.7 billion deficit to deal with.

Faced with such, an independent Scotland will have to make cuts. There may be alternatives along the lines of the general PCS argument against UK austerity, but the plain fact is that without the working class exercising its power to force such (which we don't have), that is a moot point. The Scottish government will do what the markets demand and be as staunch defenders of capital as the UK government.

But what of "smashing the British state"? Well, to be frank, I rank that up there with the people who cheered for France over England at football "because of imperialism."[1] It's a shallow internationalism that, rather than analysing situations on the basis of class interests, opts to choose one state over another. As the Glasgow AFed member points out, "British imperialism is a pale shadow of its former self, probably doesn't require Scotland and isn't of intrinsic importance to capitalism anyway." Not to mention that Scotland is not under the yoke of an oppressive military regime, or the victim of external aggression.

[1] Just in case there's anybody reading this who did that, the French had an empire too.

Hence "national liberation" potentially coming from a cross on a ballot paper rather than as a result of armed struggle.

This all being said isn't an argument in favour of the union any more than the problems of the UK government are an argument for independence. Both camps ultimately represent class interests other than our own, no matter how much parliamentary leftists might argue otherwise. Even whether independence will make the lives of working class Scots (and Brits in general!) better or worse is a question of the degrees of capitalism.

In both scenarios, it remains true that what will win positive gains in the present — and a better world in the future — is organised class struggle. Regardless of the referendum, our class remains relatively weak and unable to press its own interests in most areas of life. We need to build up a strong, militant workers' movement from the ground in order to change this. That task remains regardless of whether the union does.

I guess the only conclusion I can come to is that I'm neither really in favour of or against Scottish independence. Either way, it offers little in the way of practical answers to our class's problems. An independent Scotland will *not* be a socialist (let alone communist!) Scotland, nor is it by its own merit the path to such a thing. Those who pretend otherwise are simply hanging trite leftists slogans onto "good" nationalism.