

REPORT OF RIC NATIONAL CONFERENCE - A WELSH PERSPECTIVE, 22.11.14

Angharad Tomos, Cymdeithas yr Iath

Edinburgh RIC has taken responsibility for organising the 'Internationalism from Below' sessions at the last two RIC national conferences. Angharad Tomos, from Wales spoke at this year's conference Angharad is a Welsh republican and language activist. She wrote the following article for her weekly column in the *Daily Post* on December 3rd.

“Welcome, to the People's Republic of Glasgow!”

The audience applauded, all 3,000 of them. The speaker looked amazed at the crowd.

“If this is how it looks when we've lost” he said, expressing everyone's thoughts, “can you imagine what it will be like when we've won?”

Cheers all round one again.

It was the end of November, and two months had gone by since Scotland had lost the 'YES' vote. The occasion was the Radical Independence Conference, a gathering of activists on the Left who came together two years ago to discuss what kind of independent Scotland they would like to see. They would not describe themselves as nationalists, but since the days of Keir Hardie, socialists in Scotland have believed in self-determination.

The nationalists were in the arena across the road, listening to Nicola Sturgeon – 12,000 of them. It's a pity I could not have popped in there. By now the membership of the SNP is 92,000 and there is a British election in 6 months. Yes, something is happening in Scotland.

I went there to talk on behalf of Cymdeithas yr Iaith, the most similar group to Radical Independence in Wales. I shared a platform with Bernadette McAliskety (Devlin).

After I spoke, Bernadette noted that a nation's soul is its language and that everyone should remember that.

The lasting impression I had of the conference was the passion and the anger. Anger towards the Labour Party and Westminster mainly. There are very strong feelings because of the terrible inequality that exists with the 5 richest families in the UK owning more than the 12 million poorest. One that made a strong impact on me was a schoolgirl called Saffron Dickson. She said that Westminster did not care about her. She came from the working class, went to a state school and would probably die seven years sooner because of that. She will not be allowed to vote in the British election although she could in the Scottish Referendum. “They can take away my democratic rights, but they cannot take away our hope” she told us with all the passion of a 17 year old.

Several noted that their ideas were not as radical as all that. They are demanding fair housing, a decent health service, a basic wage, food and warmth and they're calling on people to stop killing each other – what is radical about that?

For two years, they campaigned side by side with one date and one aim in mind. After so much work, I would not have blamed them for resting on their laurels for two months. But they can't stop. With such a response from ordinary people, they have been inspired to carry on. Different to political parties, they do not have to have one personality to please the media, one party line, and votes to be won. These are free (from all that). All they have to do is note the facts, and declare that it's unjust. And do this in the face of opposition from the Establishment, the Media, the BBC and Better Together. Phew!

They are full of confidence, and this public support has given them strength. They have proved that apathy is not the general trend. Knock on people's doors, register them, concern yourself bread and butter issues, and people will come out. It is London that is in a crisis. There is a lack of ideas, a lack of democracy and the financial corruption is rife. Britain's crisis is multi faceted. It is an historic crisis. It is a crisis of democracy, and the present system is not working. One answer is to fill the void with a hatred of immigrants and wave the Union Jack as UKIP does. Another answer is the socialist one.

What has Wales to learn from this? Quite a lot, I'd say. No, we do not have one date, one aim to bring the nation together, but Scotland has shown us what is possible. There's a lot of activity going on as it is in Wales – on the language front, for peace, against drones and nuclear armaments. There are groups supporting Palestine, Central America, there is a lively interest in Scotland, Ireland, the Basque countries and Catalunya. The campaign against fracking is gaining ground. These campaigners are against the Cuts, and strong supporters of public services. There are fierce campaigns against large housing developments.

I'd like to see these groups coming together and start to pose the question, 'What kind of Wales would we like to see?' This would give all this a national dimension and would prepare the ground.

We could even do it on a local level and ask, 'What kind of Gwynedd / county would we like to see?' This question raises a hundred and one possibilities. If we invite as much ideas as possible, it could become a colourful and varied patchwork. But it is so much more democratic than starting with a set of policies and accept whoever who's willing to sign up to them. Open the doors wide open, accept everyone, and see who comes.

And do you know what? I think we'd be surprised with the response. Economy, planning, policies, and power politics – these are all so souless. But once you start asking questions in another way, and people will want to participate.

Do you want to see millions killed by Trident?
What kind of houses are needed in your area?
What chance do young people of having jobs locally?
Is your local library or bus service under threat? If so – why?
What or who prevents you from ensuring this new Gwynedd?

Let's give it a go!