

AFTER THE UK: THE FUTURE FOR 4 NATIONS

The Edinburgh branch of RIC sponsored the well-attended session 'After the UK: the future for 4 nations' at the RIC conference in the Marriott Hotel, Glasgow on November 23rd.

The speakers were Bernadette McAliskey for Ireland, Steve Freeman of the Republican Socialist Alliance in England, and Mary McGregor (Dundee RIC and RCN) Leanne Wood, from Wales, the socialist republican leader of Plaid Cymru gave her apologies. Allan Armstrong (RCN and Edinburgh RIC Minutes Secretary) was proposed by the Edinburgh branch to chair the session. However, to ensure no more than one person from any political group was on the platform, Tony Kenny, a republican and former SNP member and council candidate was asked by the organisers to chair instead.

Bernadette's contribution can be seen at:-

<http://youtu.be/biwdlxREII4>

Steve's contribution can be seen at:-

<http://youtu.be/CRyeL6rk2Y>

Mary's contributions can be seen at:-

<http://youtu.be/biwdlxREII4>

Mary and Steve were asked to submit their talks by the organisers before the RIC Conference. These are posted below. Bernadette said she never wrote prepared talks, but spoke spontaneously, a skill learned on the streets and barricades in the midst of the Civil Rights struggles, which many of us wish we could emulate! Although Mary's written submission and talk are virtually identical, Steve adjusted his contribution in the light of his experience of being at the conference.

David Torrance, right wing journalist for *The Herald* attacked the Radical Independence Conference in an article on Monday, November 25th, also specifically criticising speakers in this session. Allan Armstrong wrote a reply which was first posted on the national RIC website at:-

<http://radicalindependence.org/index.php/2013/12/07/a-response-to-david-torrance-in-the-herald/>

1. THE SCOTTISH REPUBLIC AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF ENGLAND – Steve Freeman (Republican Socialist Alliance) Unionism, Nationalism and Republicanism – a Three Cornered Fight

In January 1649 the Commonwealth of England was established. In March parliament abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords, as 'useless' and 'dangerous'. But the Commonwealth did not become a democratic and social republic. It was strangled at birth. The origins of the Commonwealth can be traced back to 1638 and the rebellion of the Covenanters in Scotland. What began in Scotland as the 'Bishops War' soon spread to England. In 1644 a united front of Covenanters and Cromwell's holy squadrons, the Ironsides, defeated the Royalists at the battle of Marston Moor near York. It proved to be the turning point in the revolution. In 1645 the New Model Army was established. By 1648 it had become England's

republican army which took power in 1649 as the Commonwealth. Shortly afterwards, Cromwell's counter-revolution gathered pace. The Levellers and the Diggers were suppressed. Today we are living with the results of Cromwell's counter-revolution. The entire history of the next three hundred years, including the creation of Britain (1688-1707), the industrial revolution, the rise and fall of the British Empire, the creation and destruction of the welfare state has completed the historic cycle and returned us to 1638. Today it is not the governance of the Church in Scotland which is at stake but the governance of the state itself.

The Commonwealth of England

In England the destruction of the welfare state and the failure of the parliamentary system are preparing the ground for new politics. Political developments in Scotland are awakening interest in change in England. The social destruction imposed by neo-liberal capitalism will bring many reactions. One of these will be the rebirth of the Commonwealth of England – a social republic in which the citizens of England, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, disability or sexuality, become the supreme or sovereign authority.

The social republic is more than simply government of the people, by the people for the people. The democratic rights and freedoms of all citizens are guaranteed by the constitution of the republic, including the full freedom for workers to join trade unions and rights to take industrial and solidarity action. A social republic puts public service and the welfare of the people before the profits of the City and the major corporations.

The first priority of a social republic is to ensure that the social and environmental needs of the people for jobs, housing, health, education, living standards and social welfare are met. None of this can be secured without a significant expansion of the public sector and its democratic transformation. The old 1945 model of a bureaucratic social monarchy and state nationalisation has been tried and destroyed by monopoly capital. This is highlighted most recently by the knock down sale of Royal Mail. Now real democracy is the key to the future.

Referendum

Next year the referendum will be the biggest political event in Scotland and a major issue in England as well. In England many people will be sitting in their armchairs watching the battle as it unfolds on our TV screens. How will people in England interpret the battle over the referendum? What political conclusions will be drawn?

At present the British ruling class, whose interests are expressed in Unionism and British nationalism, are fairly confident of victory. But if the majority starts to narrow then expect more surprises from Perfidious Albion. The ruling class understand that this battle is not confined to Scotland. Economic power and the largest section of the working class are in England and ruling class politicians will make sure the people of England are on their side. England is seething with resentments. This can easily take the form of a growth of English chauvinism. UKIP, although formally unionist, is in effect an English Party. Nigel Farage looks and sounds like a classic Englishman with a public school and City background, but also with the populist appeal of man-with-pint-and-fag in the pub. Foreigners are in line for the blame whether in Europe, or immigrants or 'greedy' Scots who want the cake and everything. The ruling class are more than willing to turn on the tap of tough talking chauvinism and fan its flames whenever necessary. We must not be too complacent to think that reaction rather than progress might not be the outcome.

The most likely scenario in 2014 is a direct confrontation between Unionists and Nationalists. People in England may look at the debate and feel repelled from 'nationalism' presented as a smash and grab raid and a cover for anti-English sentiments. But Unionism is hardly less appealing associated as it is with the neo-liberal and imperialist politics of the Tories, Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. In England people do not trust their politicians but don't like or can't identify with Scottish nationalism.

The Third Camp

People in England need to be able to look at Scotland during the referendum and see a three sided contest. If we see Unionists, Nationalist and clearly defined Republican-Internationalists then the left in England and the working class movement can gain strength from this. Only the Scottish left can deliver a third position in its strategy and tactics. If it can do this it will greatly assist the emergence of the Commonwealth of England. This in turn would help to strengthen the Scottish left in its struggle for a Scottish republic. It would be a virtuous circle.

The referendum is an opportunity to shift public opinion in England in a democratic direction. Even if the referendum is lost, there could still be a real gain that would outlast any temporary set back. The referendum will not give genuine self determination to the Scottish people. But it may bring a stronger and more united republican-internationalism. If workers in England can see that the progressive forces in Scotland are fighting for real democracy and are not anti-English but working class internationalists, this would have a big impact on political consciousness in England. In England we will be watching the Scottish referendum and beginning to think perhaps we should take a more political and constitutional road in England.

The English left

The English left currently has two attitudes to the 'Scottish Question'. First is 'anarcho-indifference' in which people say they don't care if Scotland becomes independent – that is up to you. If Scotland wants to leave the Union we are not bothered. Carried to its logical extreme it can embrace not just the breakup of Britain, but the breakup of Scotland into rival regions. It is a superficial 'internationalism'.

The second attitude is that independence is siding with nationalism. Hence the Scottish left doesn't know what they are doing by dabbling in nationalism. The SNP is identified rightly as bourgeois nationalist, but this is seen as the sum total of all we need to know. In either case there is no dialogue between the English and Scottish left because indifference or moral censure ends the argument.

The English left must concentrate on the English question rather than feigning indifference or engaging in a moral panic about Scottish nationalism. Then the left in England would do far better. Then, and only then, a real dialogue could begin with the Scottish left. The left in England is like someone looking over the garden fence into a neighbour's garden and pointing out the thistles growing there and giving advice about how to get rid of them. Meanwhile they have failed to notice their own garden is covered in weeds. Better for the left in England to sort out our own garden, grow some nice English roses, and invite our neighbours round for tea and cakes!!

(Steve Freeman then went on to make a speech outlining similar arguments, at the founding conference of the Left Unity Party in London on November 29th. He was wearing the RIC T-shirt 'Another Scotland is Possible' whilst he was addressing the conference!)

2. SCOTLAND – REPUBLICAN INTERNATIONALISM IN THE STRUGGLE FOR GENUINE SELF-DETERMINATION – Mary McGregor (RCN)

It is a great privilege to be here today and be part of this platform. I am particularly glad to be sharing it with comrades from Ireland and England. It is a pity we have no one from Wales to. I say this because the question of self determination for the people of Scotland is important for socialists and republicans where ever they live.

As it says in the programme blurb, I have been active politically for around forty years. I have been a member of 3 political parties: The Labour Party, The Communist party of Great Britain and The Scottish Socialist Party and I am very pleased to say that during that time, my ideas have changed considerably. You come across people on the left who will stick with the same old shibboleths and mantras decade in and decade out never changing their thinking even in the light of objective reality. For me this is a distinctly un-Marxist approach. For me, there must be two battles fought simultaneously: the battle against our ruling class and capitalism and the battle for ideas amongst ourselves. Part of the reason, I think that the left in Scotland has fallen apart in recent years (and the reasons are many and complex) but part of the reason is that we have failed to find a way to have that struggle for ideas, to seek out the truths and the ways forward as socialists in a democratic non sectarian manner. This is why this event is so important. We have the opportunity in an atmosphere conducive to debate to say what we think, to listen to one another and to come away thinking, having tested our ideas with each other.

I don't want to speak for a long time because it is vital that workshops allow the maximum number of people to contribute and I really want to hear what other people think, but I will take a wee bit of time to outline why the Republican Communist Network believes that Internationalism from Below is the way to create a Scotland that is steeped in the progressive traditions of our past but is also a beacon for the future as a Socialist Republic. As neither a believer in Scottish Nationalism or British nationalism, the context of my contribution is from the perspective of self-determination, republicanism and internationalism. My independent Scotland is a secular, democratic, socialist republic or it is nothing. The importance of RIC is that it moves the debate away from Salmond's nationalism to democracy, socialism and internationalism.

Clearly comrades this is a million miles away from what Salmond has on offer. The politics of the SNP government is just as wedded to capitalism and imperialism as the parties of Westminster. The SNP leadership have given their commitment to the continued role of the monarchy (and hence the Crown Powers), the Bank of England, the British High Command and NATO. We see no sign that the SNP government is prepared to stand up to big business as the debacle with Donald Trump showed and even more recently the climbdown before Ratcliffe over Grangemouth. Salmond argued for further deregulation of the Scottish banks prior to 2008. While we all have to acknowledge the SNP government has delivered on a number of its social democratic reforms, we also have to see that it has failed to deliver on

others and its commitment to business does not bode well for its ability to sustain any progressive reforms post-independence

The SNP Holyrood government's current strategy is designed to develop a wannabe Scottish ruling class, in order to seek a Scottish junior managerial buy-out within the UK and the current global corporate and US/British imperial order. This is why the SNP's proposals are not based on genuine political self-determination for Scotland, but on winning the minimal powers, which would permit this would be Scottish ruling class to enhance its bargaining position.

I work for an SNP council who are consulting me on what cuts should be made! Talk about divide and rule? These councils accept the financial restrictions imposed by Westminster, which prioritise the paying off the bankers, funding a new Trident, mounting further imperial wars, and the promotion of continuous state-backed circuses – the Royal Jubilee, the Olympic Games, and on to the First World War centenary celebrations! The SNP government say they want Scotland to remain in NATO, and to provide military support for US/British imperial ventures, but ditch Trident. It has moved from opposition to the war in Iraq, to acceptance of NATO wars in Afghanistan and Libya – indeed to lauding the role of Scottish regiments in these imperial ventures. This does not fill me with any kind of hope that an SNP Scotland as envisaged by Salmond and his leadership team, would be anti imperialist.

However, it has to be said that the UK government has predictably embarked on a project fear, which counters the campaign for Yes in the harshest of terms. They will not give up without a fight regardless of how many lies and scare stories it has to put out.

For socialists, any political response both to the SNP leadership's proposals and to this formidable unionist and imperial opposition to a Yes vote must be based firmly on the principle of Scottish self-determination. This rules out in advance, not just Westminster parliamentary control, but any continued role for the UK's Crown Powers, the Bank of England and City of London, the British Armed Forces, as well as NATO and the EU bureaucracy. Every one of these forces is hostile to genuine self-determination. The class, which has the greatest interest in genuine self-determination, is our class: the working class.

As we have seen by the limited fight back against austerity cuts, after decades of this capitalist offensive, most working class organisations have been broken or undermined. Many of their leaders have come to accept the new neo-liberal order. This is the major reason why recognition of the need for genuine self-determination is not rooted in greater class confidence today. And this is reflected in the dominant politics of the 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns in Scotland.

Today I think we do have to look at the yes campaign and question why it lacks such vision and it is because it lacks class content. It is about making nicer cuts. It still hangs on to the idea of benign capitalism. If all that it achieved by independence is more of the same then what is the point?

Both James Connolly in Ireland and later John Maclean in Scotland developed 'a break-up of the UK state and British Empire' strategy. This emerged as the most revolutionary challenge in these islands in the context of the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave. This is the socialist republican tradition that the Republican Communist Network is raising in today's struggle for Scottish self-determination.

So from a republican perspective, why is it essential to break up the UK state? Well of course there is its monarchist nature, and the formidable anti-democratic nature of the Crown Powers. These powers cloak the operations of the British ruling class's 'hidden state' and the activities of the City of London. For republicans, opposition to these Crown Powers is of greater significance than just opposition to the monarchy, which merely fronts them.

There are two other significant features of the UK state. It retains an established church, the Church of England, with its 26 bishops in the House of Lords. Although this is a specifically English 'privilege' along with its insistence of a protestant monarch, it is still significant in maintaining British rule over Northern Ireland. A socialist response to this must be based on upholding a consistent secularism, which breaks the link between the state and religion.

However, republicans must also recognise the third feature of the UK, and that is its unionist nature. The UK consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (and the whole of Ireland before 1922). The UK came about as a result of the English conquest of Wales, the joint English and Scottish conquest of Ireland, and an English and Scottish ruling class deal to create a British state in which they could benefit from imperial exploitation.

Thus, if republicanism and secularism are the socialist responses to the UK's Crown Powers and state-backed Protestantism, then upholding the right of self-determination for Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and yes, for England too, is the socialist response to the unionism of the UK state.

We take heed of the words of James Connolly.

"If you hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individual institutions she has planted in this country."

As Allan Armstrong of the RCN said at a recent James Connolly rally: Today, "If you hoist the saltire over Edinburgh Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic, your efforts will be in vain. British capitalism will rule you through Westminster's Crown Powers, through bankers' control of the economy under the City of London, through the British High Command and NATO's control over the armed forces, and through those corporate executives to be given a privileged place in the SNP's proposed low tax economy for the rich and powerful."

Genuine independence for the working class of Scotland requires a vision. It is the job of the RIC in the coming months to take on those in the official Yes campaign who are not socialists and those socialist within it who will go for a softly softly don't mention the S word never mind the R word when part of the campaign. Submerging into the official Yes is a recipe for failure.

Genuine Self Determination for the people of this country is what we need to put on the political agenda.