

# **A REPORT OF THE ANOTHER EUROPE IS POSSIBLE MEETING, 30.8.18**

Allan Armstrong attended the meeting entitled organised by Another Europe Is Possible in Glasgow on 30th August. He was asked to write up his proposal for a Scottish-initiated Ratification Referendum. This had been agreed at the RIC AGM on June 30th. (see <http://radicalindyedinburgh.blogspot.com/2018/08/the-case-for-eu-ratification-referendum.html>)

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## **THE CASE FOR HOLYROOD TAKING THE LEAD ON A BREXIT DEAL REFERENDUM**

On Wednesday 30th August, The Left Against Brexit organised its first meeting in Scotland. Kirsty Haigh (Another Europe Is Possible) chaired the meeting in Strathclyde University Union. Tommy Sheppard (SNP), Maggie Chapman (Scottish Greens), Liam McCabe (NUS-Scotland President) and Michael Chessum (Labour Party and Momentum) addressed the meeting.

The platform speakers were largely agreed upon the need for a Left campaign against any likely Brexit deal, or the prospect of no deal. The negotiations remain in the hands of the May's Tory government, with the main pressure coming from the further Right, led by Jacob Rees-Mogg and Boris Johnson, and from Arlene Foster's DUP, dependent on the support of the Orange Order and the Loyalists. Thus, we all have an immediate interest in defending workers' pay and conditions, women's and minority rights, and environmental and consumer protection.

A number of contributors from the floor thought that the discrediting of Westminster politics meant priority should be given to winning independence for Scotland. Michael Chessum said that he appreciated that there were keen supporters of independence at the meeting, but he was not asking them to abandon or downplay this, anymore than he would his own support for a future Corbyn Labour government. However, opposition to a Tory Brexit deal or even No deal could still unite us.

Some supporters of Scottish independence did not see difference between the political situation during IndyRef1 and that during any possible future IndyRef2. But both sides in Indy Ref1 wanted Scotland to remain in the EU. This also meant that, if Scotland had won its political independence, there would be much less economic disruption. The EU would ensure the continuation of the free movement of people and of free trade. If the UK leaves the EU, then any new Scottish independence campaign would have to deal with the arguments about the economic disruption resulting from Brexit and leaving the UK. Project Fear would move into overdrive.

However, one thing should be clear. May's government is not going to allow any referendum, whether over Brexit, any Brexit deal, Scottish independence, or a Border Poll in Northern Ireland. At the moment there appears to be only one way to break this logjam. Holyrood can

hold a Brexit deal referendum. A potential parliamentary majority already exists in the SNP and Green MSPs, and if Momentum in Scotland could win over some Labour MSPs this would add to the political impact. It would also provide an immediate political focus for Another Europe Is Possible in Scotland. Furthermore, this would allow opponents of the Tories to take the initiative, instead of passively waiting for the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. This just leaves politics focussed upon Theresa May and her untenable Chequers Agreement, and Rees-Mogg and Boris Johnston putting forward their delusionary Empire 2, hard Brexit schemes.

It is important that such any referendum should be over a Brexit deal or no deal - a Ratification Referendum. Scotland has already voted to Remain. There was a 62% majority, far larger than for any No vote elsewhere in the UK. Furthermore, this was achieved despite the rigged franchise. Whatever, the limitations of the *White Paper*, which accompanied the Scottish government's official Yes campaign in 2014, it outlined the manner in which it saw independence being implemented. Neither of the two Brexit campaigns made any attempt to do this, and issued contradictory statements. Thus a Ratification Referendum would also allow us to win over those, who voted for Brexit, but not for the versions of Brexit now being pushed by various figures in the Tory government.

But, even more importantly, a Holyrood Ratification Referendum can base itself on the civic national precedent set by IndyRef1. EU residents and all those between 16-18 would get the vote. The racist exclusion of migrants in the Brexit referendum was a disgrace. Prominent Brexiteers avoid taxation and salt away their incomes in overseas tax havens, whilst EU migrant workers pay UK taxes. A big majority of young people are hostile to Brexit, and the chauvinism and racism it has promoted.

Holding a Holyrood Ratification Referendum would place Scotland once more to the forefront of democratic change in these islands. Providing a civic national and Scottish internationalist example of how to conduct a referendum would put pressure on Westminster. This could follow the collapse of the May's Tory government, because of her inability to get her Chequers deal through parliament. A general election would be a quite likely result. This would give renewed opportunity both for independence supporters and for Corbyn supporters to campaign.

This would be the situation in which Michael Chessum's acknowledgement of the different politics of those involved in the Left Against Brexit would come to the fore. However, there could still be some political basis for further political cooperation. It seems very unlikely that Corbyn-led Labour could win an absolute majority of UK seats at Westminster. Therefore he would need to approach other parties to be able to form a government. The SNP actually has better record of voting with Corbyn for progressive legislation in Westminster, than the right wing of his own party! It would be a strong indication that Labour had at last broken with Right unionism, if it could seek support from SNP MPs to implement its manifesto commitments, in return for agreeing to Holyrood conducting IndyRef2. Indeed, for the foreseeable future, this is the only likely way that such a referendum could gain legal backing.

There is a principled political basis for future cooperation in the Left Against Brexit campaign. This would mean opposing the strengthening of the UK's anti-democratic powers by upholding the right of self-determination. The Tories are even tearing up the limited Devolution deal brought forward under New Labour. Furthermore, continued cooperation

would mean championing workers, women's and minority rights; and defending the free movement of people.

Or as a celebrated Scottish internationalist, Hamish Henderson, once declared - 'Freedom Come All Ye!'

**Allan Armstrong, Radical Independence Campaign, 31.8.18**

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This was first posted at:- <https://www.anothereurope.org/holyrood-must-take-the-lead/>