

ORGANISING INDYREF2, 1.3.17

Jonathon Shafi (RISE Glasgow West and national coordinator), Sarah Beattie-Smith (RIC-Edinburgh)

Pat Smith facilitated.



Jonathon gave a brief introduction on the political situation. He made the following points:-

1. The EU was very much a background issue in IndyRef 2, with the majority of the Yes camp assuming that Scotland would remain a member after independence.
2. Although, the Euro-referendum result showed a very clear majority to remain, about 30% of Yes supporters voted to leave the EU, with even bigger percentages in some Glasgow constituencies. Therefore, it could not be assumed that all Yes supporters would still give their support in any IndyRef2, if the SNP government tied the issue of Scottish independence to remaining in the EU. Nor could it be assumed that the majority of No voting Remain supporters would now transfer their support to independence,
3. Thus, although the 62% Remain vote did indeed provide the opportunity for the SNP and Greens to argue the political circumstances had changed, justifying IndyRef2, it would still be necessary to detach the two issues in any IndyRef. (RIC's agreed statement, written in response to May's denial of IndyRef 2, reflected this - see <http://radical.scot/radical-yes/>)
4. The SNP and the neo-liberals offer their own version of internationalism, an internationalism from above, e.g. involving the EU and NATO. It was important that the Left could counter this with a practical internationalism from below, as RIC did during IndyRef1.
5. If we look at the leading groups on both sides, and compare them with IndyRef1, May's Tories now enjoy an absolute Westminster majority, whereas Cameron was in coalition with the Lib-Dems from 2010-15. The SNP, whilst despite falling back slightly in terms of MSPs at Holyrood in 2016, emerged very much strengthened, particularly in relation to

Westminster in 2025 (56 out of 59 MPs), and also throughout civil society. This position could be further strengthened after the May Local Council elections, although the Tories could also well make gains.

6. The SNP leadership were playing things very cautiously, exhausting each parliamentary and legal alternative option in turn, and taking their time before declaring any date for IndyRef2. In the immediate future much SNP campaigning would be focussed on the forthcoming Local Council elections, which would not be over until May. We would have a clearer idea of the balance of political forces.

7. In the absence of the prospect of an immediate referendum, this meant that RIC had some time to develop a coherent strategy. It was premature in thinking we could recreate a mass movement in the absence of an actual referendum campaign, We should look to get the local groups re-established, initially to take part in a debate over strategy. This would mean taking today's discussion out to the local groups, with the idea of reconvening in August with concrete proposals.

Notes from discussions

Three main topics predominated: the interaction of Brexit with the issue of Scottish independence and other issues; the role of RIC in the 2014 independence campaign and any future campaign; and misogyny in the left and the independence movement. They were discussed roughly in that order, but with some overlap.

Brexit:

Would an independent Scotland necessarily join the EU, and will the SNP be pushing the identification of independence with membership of the EU in any indyref2 campaign? There was some disagreement on both these points, but agreement that the RIC campaign should prioritise listening, and providing a space for discussion, on this issue (as on others).

There was agreement that RIC cannot put urgent issues (climate, war, poverty, austerity) in the freezer while we focus on either independence, Brexit, or both.

Role of RIC

It was agreed that in the last campaign, RIC campaigners learned as much as they taught from the people we talked to; and that we can only develop our political and strategic ideas for indyref2 in practice. RIC did have an important ideological role in the last campaign, raising political ideas that the SNP and the SNP-dominated Yes campaign ignored or preferred to avoid.

It was noted that since September 2014, a lot of people who were active in RIC have joined a political party (SNP, Greens, RISE), but the consensus was that there is still an important role for RIC, which can bring people from all these parties and none (and possibly other parties, taking into account Labour for Independence), getting out into the schemes, and connecting with young people, particularly young women, who came out in numbers for the anti-Trump demos. There was some discussion of whether we should engage with the SNP, or go our own way entirely. The Scottish Government are failing to make use even of the limited legal powers they have, let alone challenging the limits of these powers by “breaking bad laws”: taking action outwith those limits and daring Westminster to stop them. This was linked back

to the agreement that we cannot put other issues on ice: RIC should try to exert pressure on the Scottish Government and SNP in that direction.

Misogyny in the left and the independence movement

Discussion here took up the points made by Sarah Beattie-Smith (“no more white men in suits”), and by Sally in the “brief questions” session: many women of all ages become convinced there is no place for them in the left or the independence movement because of the predominance of male voices and male egos. This is a problem within RIC as well as outside it.

That young women are ready to get involved in politics was clear in the anti-Trump demos, where they were prominent both organisationally, and in producing creative and funny slogans and placards. It was also noted that polls show that women over 55 have moved strongly against independence since 2014, in contrast to other demographic groups: we need to be talking to these women, and more especially, listening to their concerns.

Independence, and RIC, are or should be) about empowerment.

Nick Gotts and Pat Smith