

PERSPECTIVES OF THE RADICAL INDEPENDENCE CAMPAIGN, 20.1.14

Jonathon Shafi, RIC National Organiser,

Jonathon pointed to a statistic revealed in today's Herald. 85 people in the world own as much wealth as the bottom 3 billion people combined.

In the UK the top 200 people have wealth valued at \$218B. Their wealth has increased by 8x since 1989. Yet there has been a rise in the use of food banks. There is a lost generation of youth either unable to find work or working in precarious jobs. Pensioners face rising and increasingly unaffordable fuel costs. In other words, alongside the wealth accruing to a tiny minority there has been the growth of grinding poverty and inequality.

Welfare spending is being reduced to pre-World War 2 levels as a proportion of government spending. The privatisation of the NHS continues. The Tories are using the crisis to impose their own austerity agenda and undermine secure jobs, pay and conditions.

However, one sign of their weakness is their constant attempt to direct attention away from these realities by resort to scapegoating. The recent racist offensive directed against Romanians and Bulgarians is the most blatant current example. Goaded by UKIP, and accepted by Tories and Labour, we were led to expect the population of Romania and Bulgaria would arrive on British shores on January 1st. The BBC was sent to witness the mass exodus. 22 Romanians and Bulgarian arrived on that day, some returning to work from holiday!

We have seen the Tories' attempt to celebrate World War 1, highlighted by the issuing of the Kitchener £2 coin. We are being told that that WW1 was necessary and not as bad as has been portrayed!

The BBC, which has broadcast interesting and critical pieces of work, rallies around the Establishment, whenever there is a crisis and pressure is exerted on them. We have seen this since the Iraq war, and their bowing to the current ruling class chauvinist offensive highlights this.

It is expected that UKIP will emerge as the second, or even the first party, in the UK in the forthcoming Euro-elections. UKIP is pulling British politics to the Right, with Tories and Labour following them.

Labour has indicated that if they take office they will pursue their own welfare cuts beyond those implemented by the Con-Dem government. When they were in office, Dungavel remained open, despite the protests against this inhuman detention centre.

RIC members need to understand what the consequences of a 'No' vote would be, as well as a 'Yes' vote. RIC also needs to get across the consequences of a 'No' vote to the wider public.

If we look at how RIC has progressed we need to understand our strengths and weaknesses. RIC has had two very good national conferences, which have inspired many. Over the last year

vibrant new branches have been created. Following the second conference RIC also has set up a democratic national structure, and the first National Forum met last weekend.

The local branches are beginning to get the message across in their areas and are creating spaces where we can win our ideas, including over republicanism and democracy. Jonathon praised the Edinburgh branch.

However, RIC needs to get out beyond the people we are currently reaching. This means getting other campaigning groups involved. The RIC National Forum has decided that parties, campaigning groups and other interested bodies should contribute a minimum of £50 to affiliate. The Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers has kicked this off by contributing £250.

RIC has a lot of work ahead over the year. We need to expand, involve new people and get out their with our message.

Discussion

Andy said that in response to UKIP's election campaign, RIC should be emphasising that immigration is a good thing.

Pat said that we needed more discussion on how to get the 'Yes' vote out. We have to be able to go where people are, and not just expect them to come to us.

Andy pointed out that after RIC challenged Farage last year, there was big rise in hits on the RIC Facebook site, and RIC received thousands of pounds because people had been sick of Farage purveying his reactionary views virtually unchallenged.

Allan said that we must be careful not to load too much work on to the backs of relatively few activists. One of the things the Edinburgh branch has been doing was seeking to link up with the key campaigns in Edinburgh to provide them with a wider forum In return, RIC hoped to create another layer of pro-independence activists, who would also be campaigning alongside us.

Irene emphasised how important it was to reach out beyond the activist left and involve previously non-active people.

Bob argued that RIC needed to have some sort of immediate programme, including our opposition to NATO and Trident, and our support for a republic. This is our vision. The argument needed to be made, not only why you should vote 'Yes' but why people should be involved in RIC's campaign.

John C said that he had come to an all-Edinburgh meeting a year ago and was now at this one. He was disappointed that there was not more active involvement at the community level and the meeting still mainly focusing its activities too narrowly. John had been involved in organising a local Stockbridge meeting. We needed to go to these people and say why they should become involved in the campaign and why they should vote 'Yes'.

Jonathon summed by saying, in response to John C, that some RIC branches, such as Aberdeen, had been very much involved in canvassing, involving teams of up to 14 people. They integrated this with other activities, such as going out for a meal, after canvassing.

In response to Bob, Jonathon thought that any programme should be empowering. He would add policies on energy and public ownership to such a programme.

Jonathon also said that the National Forum had agreed that each local branch should appoint a contact person with the local official 'Yes' campaign.

In response to David C, Andy thought he was being very negative. By absenting himself from the all-Edinburgh meetings for a year, he had not been aware of the local campaigning on the ground, with stalls in Muirhouse, Leith and Nicolson Street, or the contacts made with campaigning and local organisations.

Tony from East Lothian said he was an independence fanatic from England. He had really enjoyed the second national RIC conference, and had gone round collecting the leaflets prepared by local RIC branches and campaigning organisations. He particularly liked one from Ayr, entitled 'Aye Right'. He thought that RIC should have a store of nationally prepared material and also circulate good leaflets produced by others for the local groups to use.

Tony pointed out that George Galloway was bringing his 'Just Say Naw' meeting to the Queens Hall in Edinburgh on February 3rd. RIC should be making a protest.

Tony also thought that the next RIC roadshow should be different from the last. This time it should go out into the communities. This is what he hoped would happen in East Lothian, and he was keen to get this started in Tranent. He hoped to involve the National Collective, Our campaign needed to be of a joyous celebratory nature.

Tony pointed to the film, ironically called No, which showed how an effective campaign was mounted in Chile, directed against Pinochet's attempt to continue his dictatorial rule.

Ally said he was involved in both the RIC and official 'Yes' campaigns. There was a lot going on. RIC was the more political, and could challenge the Unionists over immigration and 'benefit scroungers'. Scotland can become a more equal society. However, many punters still equate the 'Yes' campaign with the nationalists. RIC must counter this.