

REPUBLIC DAY, 24.4.13

Allan Armstrong (RCN) was invited by the James Connolly Society to speak on behalf of the Edinburgh branch of the Radical Independence Campaign at the Republic Day commemoration on April 24th, 2013, at the Connolly plaque in the Cowgate, Edinburgh.

I would like to thank the James Connolly Society and the 1916 Societies for inviting the Radical Independence Campaign to provide a speaker today at this commemoration of Republic Day.

It is fully 20 years since the first James Connolly Society march in Edinburgh. The JCS raised the banner of republicanism in this city. It is a banner, which not only has relevance in Ireland, but in Scotland, Wales, and yes, even England too.

It took 30 years for the British state to tame, first the Civil Rights Movement and then the Republican Movement in the Six Counties. By 1998, the British ruling class had come up with the Good Friday Agreement, as its central pillar in asserting its political and economic control over these islands. This was supplemented by Devolution-all-round. This strategy was designed to sideline the challenges they had faced from national democratic movements in these islands.

One of those challenges began 25 years ago when Thatcher attempted to impose the Poll Tax a year earlier in Scotland. Unwittingly, she opened up a second front in the challenge to the UK state. Those of us in Scotland, who joined that first Connolly March in 1993, came from that Anti-Poll Tax Movement. We are and remain socialist republicans.

The British ruling class has for now derailed that republican challenge in Ireland. Mainstream republicans have become constitutional nationalists, more concerned with advancing the interests of middle class Nationalists within the existing 'Six Counties', than uniting all workers living in Ireland on a republican basis – Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter, and to which today we can add Polish, Spanish, Chinese and Nigerian.

Republicanism, however, always arises anew. Your campaign to champion a widely celebrated Republic Day, and the campaign for a 32 Counties people's referendum, marks the return of republicanism to the 'People of No Property'.

20 years after that first Connolly March, you have new political allies. The UK is once more threatened with the possibility of break-up, with the issue of Scottish self-determination moving to the fore.

However, there are two very different visions of Scotland involved in this. There is the nationalism of the SNP. This nationalism wants to create a Scotland for a new Scottish wannabe ruling class, and strike a new deal with the UK and with US imperialism. This is why they want hold on to so much of the British state machine, fronted by 'Elizabrit', and to remain in NATO.

And continuing that long-standing British legacy, the SNP government is still targeting the Irish community in Scotland. Under the pretence of dealing with ‘anti-sectarianism’, their Offensive Behaviour Act, enforced by a new centralised Scottish police force – a ‘Scottish Met’ – is an example of anti-Irish racism.

Meanwhile, the Orange Order announced yesterday that it would be throwing its weight behind saving the Union. I don’t know whether they will be getting a seat in the ‘Better Together’ campaign. However, there can be few objections, when this campaign is being bankrolled by Ian Taylor, who provided funds for a leader of the Serbian death squads.

Connolly warned us of the dangers of a Unionist/Nationalist ‘Carnival of Reaction’ in the Home Rule campaign of 1912. We need to be alert to such dangers today.

In opposition to the nationalists in the SNP leadership, the Radical Independence Campaign forms the republican wing of the campaign for Scottish self-determination – not ‘Independence-Lite’, but meaningful self-determination. We do not see a ‘Yes’ vote on September 18th, 2014, as the end of the struggle. 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.”

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.”

Republicans in these islands need to unite on an ‘internationalism from below’ basis to achieve our ends. I very much hope that this Republican Day comes to be celebrated by republicans, not only in and from Ireland, but in Scotland, Wales and England too.