

THE GENERAL ELECTION, INDEPENDENCE, CORBYN AND THE FUTURE, 20.6.17

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Facilitator- Eileen Cook (RIC-Edinburgh and Scottish CND)

George Kerevan

George said it was wonderful to have been let out of the Westminster prison. Your day extended from 7.00 - 23.00, with 8 and a half hours of parliamentary cretinism.

Snap elections are meant to solve temporary crises. However a serious crisis has been created by this election. The British ruling class can not proceed with Brexit. Hammond represents British finance capital; Davis, though, has the backing of *The Economist*. This crisis, which has three aspects, can not be resolved in parliamentary terms. Politics will take to the streets.

The first crisis is British capitalism doesn't know where to go. Its one time global dominance was ended by the colonial revolutions and the rise of US capital. Its response was to turn to the EEC. This failed because German industrial capital was more productive. Despite initially opposing EEC membership, it was the City of London which came out well, maintaining and extending itself as the dominant wing of finance capital in Europe. The collapse of British industry has turned what's left against the EU. The anti-EU forces have also attracted hedge fund holders. May was chosen as Tory leader to balance these two forces.

The second crisis is that of austerity. There has been a massive increase in work exploitation. The 'Yes' campaign drew much of its strength from those opposing austerity. Now that opposition has been channelled into the Corbyn movement and Momentum.

A further feature of the opposition to austerity can be found in the EU, in the aftermath of the EU treatment of southern Europe, particularly Greece. The biggest challenge at present is the forthcoming Catalan referendum. And we need a European perspective to prevent a second Cold War.

The third crisis focuses on the SNP. Although we did well in the May Local Council elections, we suffered a setback in the Westminster elections. It misjudged things in calling for a second referendum. The Conservatives used this. Labour joined them, and in Scotland the Labour leadership is firmly in the Right. Neither did it see the Corbyn movement coming. The SNP leadership has divorced itself from the Yes campaign, and its Holyrood leaders have moved Right.

The time has come for extra-parliamentary protests if we are to regain the initiative.

Rory Scothorne

My research concerns the following areas, and I'm defining the 'radical left' as a broad but distinctive tradition of critical 'practices', encompassing intellectual and practical activities that reject or subvert the legitimacy of existing political, social, cultural and economic systems, and which are bound together by shared historical precedents.

1. The invention of 'radical Scotland': the Scottish counter-public sphere and the idea of a Scottish radical left tradition (periodicals like *Crann-Tàra*, groups like the John MacLean society etc)
2. Radical left attitudes to race, nation and imperialism in Scotland, 1962-2003: from Polaris on Holy Loch to the anti-Iraq war demo in Glasgow.
3. Gender, sexuality and the nation: how did the radical left navigate issues of women's and gay liberation in a distinctly Scottish context?
4. Nationalising class: how the Scottish radical left moved between the identities of nation and class, often blurring the line between the two
5. Ecology and localism: how new ideas about nature, democracy, subsidiarity of power and community shaped the attitudes of some on the radical left towards Scottish nationalism (e.g. why have Scottish environmentalist movements been so comfortable with independence and how have they articulated this?)

Off the top of your head, are there any particular publications, individuals, organisations or events that you think could be relevant to the subject? I'm also constructing a sort of mini-archive of old documents, books and periodicals, so if there's anything relevant in your possession that you'd be happy to part with - or even that I could borrow and scan - I'd be really grateful for your help.

I want to say three things: first, that the left wing of Scottish Labour is gaining in strength and support, and should not be written off as a force for socialist politics.

Second, that it's more important and more possible than ever to think beyond the divisions of the independence campaign and a Yes/No approach to the constitution.

And thirdly that while we may not agree on what electoral or parliamentary strategies socialists should take, we have to find ways of working together in the most important area of politics, which as you all know lies outside of parliament and elections.

First, Scottish Labour.

We should have done much better in the election. Kezia Dugdale ran a campaign designed to shore up Ian Murray's vote in the affluent, deeply unionist People's Republic of Edinburgh South and maybe win a seat for Blair McDougall. This failed by at least half.

Instead we picked up seats all over the central belt, in post-industrial areas where it was Corbyn's message - far more than the unionist vote - that was crucial.

The left wing of the Scottish Labour is growing in strength within the party: we are winning more and more delegates to the party executive, we've got every single seat on the Scottish Young Labour executive, and thanks to our influence on the candidate selection committee we endorsed almost 20 of Labour's 59 candidates in the election, 3 of whom won seats and many of whom came a close second.

If the Scottish Labour left were viewed as a socialist party in our own right, that would have

counted as a major gain for the left in Scotland. And yet this achievement was ignored due to the hostility with which Scottish Labour are viewed. So I think it's time to start thinking seriously about how to work with and assist left-wingers within Scottish Labour, regardless of any differences we might have over independence.

That brings us to my second point: yes, the Scottish Labour left has traditionally been opposed to independence - Corbyn, or someone else from the Labour left, now seems to have a good chance of winning a UK election and we want to contribute as much as we can to fighting for socialism across the UK on those grounds.

It also seems increasingly unfeasible that independence would "end Tory rule", given the continuing Tory advance in Scottish elections.

And if we really want to seize control of the wealth that the ruling class has taken from us, there'll be a whole lot more of it to go around if we get it from London rather than just Edinburgh.

But unlike the Scottish Labour leadership we're happy to have that debate. I voted Yes, as did many of my comrades in Scottish Labour Young Socialists, and we've recently formally agreed to ask RIC and other parts of the pro-independence left if they'll co-operate on public debates in good faith about constitutional change and the national question - if you'll have us.

We're certainly not for the status quo: we support a programme of socialist federalism, bringing real public investment and job-creation powers to parliaments and assemblies across the country.

The Labour left across the UK is thinking very seriously about broader constitutional change, particularly proportional representation, a properly elected second chamber, and perhaps even a written constitution.

If indyref is going to be "parked" for some time, then we should see this as a renewed opportunity to work together on fighting that clear common enemy, the British political and economic establishment.

And of course, while we've lost recent internal battles, we'll continue to fight to get Trident not just out of Scotland but shut down altogether and forever.

Those continuing internal battles should not be dismissed. Corbyn has proven that UK Labour is not some reactionary monolith, as so many people believed. The left has started winning fights within the party that we've been losing for decades, thanks in large part to the new support of the trade unions, who have historically sided with the right against the radical left of the party.

Those are the same trade unions that still hold power in the Scottish party, and the Scottish Labour left can draw on their support to make further gains within the Scottish party.

But it's not just through the party or in parliament that our power exists: we need to build a much broader base than that if we're to get anywhere close to socialism.

As John McDonnell says, we have to be out on the streets, overwhelming the government through sheer weight of protest; and as Corbyn recently implied after the Grenfell fire, we should

be taking matters of socialist policy into our own hands, seizing the properties of the rich and putting them to good, social use.

But we can only do that if we're more clear-sighted, unified and strategically minded than ever before, which requires compromises on both sides and an unprecedented degree of understanding.

So to my final point: where in Scotland can the Labour left and the pro-independence left find common cause?

We're frozen for a moment at what seems at first glance to be a crossroads for the radical left in Scotland.

One road leads us through the Scottish Parliament, focusing on pulling the SNP left and trying to get another referendum; the other leads through Westminster, trying to turn the British state to socialist ends.

Experience shows that neither of these is good enough - both roads are built by and for the ruling class.

So with the finest traditions of Scottish radicalism in mind, I say that the roads might be theirs but the land belongs to us.

Let's stray from parliamentary paths and go find common ground on that wild, radical terrain between them.

Forget Holyrood: Let's occupy Trump's golf course and RBS HQ.

Forget Westminster: Let's picket Charlotte Street Partners, the favoured lobbyists of the Scottish elite.

Forget referendums: Let's set up socialist education camps in the backyard of the British aristocracy, filling their old estates with radical culture and education.

If we can co-operate on anything, it is to make extra-parliamentary action the driving force of political change in Scotland and beyond. If we can make a success of even some of that then it'll prove, once and for all, that we are indeed better together.

Hilary Horrocks

The ETUC is one of several local TUCs in Scotland. It forms a committee of delegates from local trade unions. Hilary is an NUJ delegate.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy expresses even more than the election result the state of politics and class relations in Britain today. We have heard with horror the details of this disaster waiting to happen, because of the wholesale privatisation and deregulation that accompanied neoliberalism, starting from Thatcher but continued enthusiastically by the Blair and Brown governments. Cuts to council spending have meant that projects have been handed to private companies whose sole motive is profit, who don't have to explain themselves to anyone, who can't be unelected, and whose work is not adequately supervised due to the decimation of

government inspectors. But the shoddy social housing that's resulted has been good enough for working-class people and immigrants.

In Glasgow in the late 1970s tenants in the Gorbals tower blocks were made ill by the dampness in their flats. For years, the Labour council blamed the condensation on the tenants' 'lifestyle'. They only admitted much later that the building units had been designed for Algeria and so had no insulation that could cope with the Glasgow climate. And the death of a schoolgirl, crushed by a falling wall at Liberton High in 2014, resulted from the cutting-corners methods of the contractors employed by Edinburgh council under PFI. The company concerned will escape prosecution on the technicality that she was a pupil and not an employee. Although Edinburgh council has never used flammable cladding, there are 4,000 high-rise homes in the city with no sprinkler systems. The TUC will back demands that ALL blocks are fitted with sprinklers and that other lessons from the Grenfell fire are urgently applied.

But the class contempt that led to the Grenfell tragedy is endemic in the political system of capitalism. The fire has demonstrated this to more people than ever before and has given rise to a big and angry social movement - the kind of movement that found expression in the Yes campaign, in the general election with Corbyn, and in hundreds of local campaigns against austerity. I think our stress should be on supporting these movements, rather than focussing on electoral tactics. Edinburgh trade union council tries to do this, linking local unions and resistance in the community, supporting industrial action, campaigns against council cuts and against precarious work, the thousands of EU workers here, and local support for refugees. We want to provide a platform for local resistance to discuss the new political situation, in a conference this autumn.

Pete Cannell

RISE is a new political organisation of socialists, still with relatively few members. RISE didn't stand candidates in the recent general election, but the issues that needed addressed were clear - opposing racism, climate change and austerity. Corbyn's Labour Manifesto only addressed the last of these.

We have to look to the international movements for the real engines of change over the last 15 years. There were the Social Forums in the early 2000s, Stop the War, Occupy and then the Yes campaign. The last night before the referendum vote, RIC organised a vibrant international rally on the Meadows.

The Yes campaign led to widespread democratic debate. The campaign was taken to the working class housing schemes. All his activity had an extra-parliamentary focus. RISE grew out of RIC. It has raised the issue of how political parties relate to social movements.

This means recognising the reality that new movements will involve SNP, Labour, Green, SSP and RISE members. If we were all in one political organisation then we wouldn't need to be here.

Looking to the recent general election, voting levels were quite a bit lower than in Indyref1. Since then most people's conditions have become worse.

We do need the debate Rory suggested. In this we need to look at the real nature of the UK state and a British nationalism which supports imperialism and the big arms companies.

Lynn McCabe

Lynn explained that the young women involved in the campaign to stop families being evicted because of the benefit cap were unable to attend the meeting tonight due to childcare difficulties. Lynn is a community worker in North Edinburgh and has been helping to support the campaign, however, she was speaking tonight in a personal capacity.

The campaign has identified 11 families with 42 children facing eviction from privately rented homes in North Edinburgh due to the Benefits Cap. Some have already been evicted and have been forced to live in appalling B & B's and hostels. The situation has been made worse due to the families being moved outwith their local community where they have support networks. They are also having to travel long distances to get children to and from school. When the families have been evicted from their homes, they must present as homeless and basically can only take what they can carry. Their belongings are collected on the day of their eviction and put into storage until they are allocated permanent accommodation (currently between 12 - 18 months). It costs £60 to access items from the storage containers.

The women have never been involved in a campaign before but felt they had no choice as their backs were against the wall. They have been supported by local activists from North Edinburgh and across the city. Their immediate demand is for Edinburgh Council to pay full DHP to completely cover rent to prevent any more families from losing their homes. They are also demanding an end to families being allocated Bed and Breakfast accommodation and asking for families to be housed in flats which meet acceptable standards in suitable areas as close to their former homes as possible. In the longer term they want the council to build more social housing, which would help to address the current housing crisis.

The campaign is also directed at the Scottish Government and Westminster. They want the Scottish Parliament to allocate sufficient funds to local authorities to cover DHP, as they were forced to do over the Bedroom Tax and they want Westminster to scrap the benefit cap.

To date, the women have lobbied local politicians, occupied their local housing office, held a demonstration in the city chambers, protested outside Ruth Davidson's constituency office and are planning a deputation at the Council Chambers on Thursday 29th June. They are looking for support from activists from across the city as they know that this issue is not confined to North Edinburgh.

<https://www.google.co.uk/amp/www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/politics/video-campaigners-stage-protest-in-ruth-davidson-s-office-1-4469283/amp>

Peter McColl

"The old is dying and the new s struggling to be born". This quote from Antonio Gramsci describes the situation we face today.

The capitalist system is crisis ridden. The very rhetoric of the Right highlights this crisis. Much of this has to do with the promotion of market forces into social provision and the use of Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) to avoid any social responsibility.

Our response to this should be democratic control and self-management. This is especially the case in Housing, Health and Education. The consequences of failing to do this have been highlighted by the Grenfell Flats tragedy .

In the recent Euro-referendum Peter voted to Remain. The Leave victory has contributed to pushing international politics to the Right, and this has been shown by Trump's election victory. However, recent developments in the Labour Party and Portuguese Socialist Party have shown there can be a fight back against the old order. In Portugal the PSP has gone into a coalition with the Greens, the Communists and the Left Bloc.

What we need is an Energy Campaign. Trump got backing from the big oil and gas companies intent on squeezing these fuels from the ground. There is a huge threat to the environment in continued dependence on carbon-based fuels. Escalating climate change is a powerful indicator of the future we face if this isn't challenged successfully before a tipping point is reached. The mass movement of desperate people will greatly increase.

We also face the growing problem of automation. Go to any supermarket today and you can see how till operators have been replaced by machines. The best response to this is a Citizens Income. The current Universal Credit system is in meltdown.

We are living in 'a time of monsters'. We have seen the Tea Party and Trump, Brexit and May. Even the Centre has to reinvent itself as against the establishment as the victory of Macron in France has shown. This though is unlikely to last.

Grenfell Tower could be a signal for wider social unrest. We live in dangerous but exciting times.

Jonathon Shafi

On the night of the election Jonathan was in a taxi being driven by a Tory supporter. It was then that the results of the exit poll were announced. Suddenly everything had changed. The TV switched its focus on to Jeremy Corbyn and his many supporters. In contrast May seemed alone.

There are a lot of similarities between IndyRef1 in 2014 and Corbyn's campaign in General Election. Both faced a weaponised propaganda offensive from the media. In response a movement was created that surged into society, and became wider than the political parties.

You might have thought that the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London would have reinforced May and the Tories. Instead, Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, responsible for the government response. nearly lost her seat. This was because the people in these two cities were united in their own response. Both Corbyn and McDonnell are supporters of extra-parliamentary movements. In contrast, Nicola Sturgeon sees movements as threat to SNP hegemony and tries to rein them in and control them. It was no accident that the SNP

organised its rally in November 2014 next door to the their RIC Conference to try and divert people away from it.

We now have the prospect of Labour forming the Westminster government, whilst the SNP forms the Holyrood government. Our response should be to maximise our voice on the streets.

In Scotland, the recent election was focussed on the constitutional dynamic. Now, after Grenfell, the wider crisis over austerity is acute. The Right wing is frightened of people on the streets. Young people, often written off as apolitical, are becoming politically educated. There is real class anger.

We should be aware of the lengths the British ruling class is prepared to go. Tommy Robinson, ex-leader of the EDL, may appear marginal, but he is being cultivated behind the scenes at present, in case he should be necessary. Racism is the weapon being used to bludgeon class unity.

The SNP is nothing like radical enough. It has reneged on several electoral promises. It didn't even scrap the Council Tax. Occupying the political ground that the Labour Right had abandoned is no longer enough with the rise of Corbyn.

RIC should support the 'Not One More Day More' demo on July 1st in London. This provides an immediate focus of focus of all the contradictions the Tories currently face.

Questions and Contributions

Murdo asked if it had not been a mistake for the SNP government to link IndyRef 2 with continued membership of the EU. He also said that any political organisation must have the aim of forming a government and that movements were not enough.

Willie argued that the immediate focus should not be on another election to Westminster but on getting on to the streets. We also need to bridge the gap between community campaigning and the fight of council workers on wages and conditions. We needed to take an inclusive class view which united workers as service providers and service users. It was not good enough when in return for some monetary compensation or alternative job, trade unions accepted closures which devastated the communities.

Ian argue that the time had come for the LEFT to abandon Scottish nationalism and go for the British road which offered wider working class unity and access to greater resources.

Rory said that socialists should be emphasising the value of everyday expertise and should champion new forms of cooperation. Yes, we would eventually have to confront the state with its police and soldiers, but we hadn't reached this stage yet. Once we had won power, socialist parties should get out of the way.

George said that we needed a unifying political project and that should be the fight against Austerity. Yes, we needed people on the streets both outside Westminster and Holyrood.

He did not demand that Labour support Scottish independence, but that it recognised the democratic right of Scotland to hold an independence referendum.

He said that he did not recognise Jonathon's characterisation of the SNP as hostile to the Left. Many of its leadership had come out of opposition to the Poll Tax and Trident or from the left wing 79 Group.

Donny said that the SDL was mounting a demonstration in Edinburgh this Sunday. With UKIP's collapse, politics was further polarising and fascists were re-emerging. The counter demo meets at 13.00 at Market Street.

Duncan said that the SNP, Labour, Lib-Dems and Tories all vote for cuts on the Edinburgh Council. We need to organise an opposition prepared to challenge all these parties in the run-up to next February's Council budget proposals.

? said that we face the prospect of another 5 years of Tory government. Should we be campaigning for Corbyn or not?

Peter said that we should be democratising everything starting with the political parties. We needed to reverse the pressure coming from Westminster, then Holyrood on to the Local Councils. This means getting the councils to defy the cuts.

George said that many councillors had been suspended from office in Catalunya for defying Madrid.

The meeting finished off with a contribution from Holly Rigby (Momentum) on the new political situation in London.

Back in 2012 Holly was so inspired by the Yes campaign that she moved up to Glasgow, and joined RIC after its first conference. Since the end of IndyRef1 Holly has moved back to London. But now with the Corbyn campaign, England too has experienced its IndyRef1.

On election night it was good to see May crestfallen, Nick Clegg ousted and Chuka Umunna eat humblepie.

After the Grenfell Towers London is currently in the process of grieving. The Council won't release the details of those killed. It is trying to manage anger to prevent it breaking out.

It wasn't the local politicians and officers who came to the aid of the Grenfell residents. Local Muslim women provided sparkly gift bags. Jeremy Corbyn put his arms around the casualties. Theresa May was chased out of the local church.

Labour MP, Clive Lewis has said, "Burn neo-liberalism, not people." This is not a white or a black issue, but a class issue.

However, there is an earlier history to this. There was the Take Back the City movement. The Corbyn movement represents the culmination of years of activity.

In 2011, the police killing of Mark Duggan led to 2 days of riots in Tottenham. Riots are the voice of the voiceless. Today, with the Corbyn movement giving people a voice, there have been no riots but there have been lots of demonstrations.

Holly's own involvement began in Croydon, where she joined Momentum and campaigned for Sarah Jones against the sitting Tory Housing Minister, Gary Barwell. (having lost his seat, he has now become May's Chief of Staff!). The local campaign used the method of mass registration and campaigning that RIC had used in IndyRef1. This was the seat that Jeremy Corbyn launched his campaign in.

The Manifesto was inspirational, particularly the £10 minimum wage and the ending of tuition fees. There have been star-studded rallies around the country, the biggest being the 20,000 who attended the Liverpool rally. No longer can young people be accused of being apathetic.

Momentum is part of the same wave of protest that led to RIC in Scotland and Bernie Sanders in the USA. May is now seen as weak and wobbly and even a potential threat to the state's interests, with her coalition of chaos with terrorists.

Sometimes "there decades when nothing happens, and there are weeks when decades happen". That is what we are now living through.

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