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Scottish Independence, Round Two: Let It Come!

By John Wight
March 15, 2017



The die is cast. Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the SNP and First Minister of Scotland, has announced that she is to seek approval from the Scottish Parliament to proceed with a second referendum on Scottish Independence between the autumn of 2018 and spring of 2019.

That Nicola Sturgeon had no choice but to take this course has been self evident for some time. With 62% of people in Scotland voting to remain in the EU last year, which translates to every one of Scotland's 32 local councils, and with Theresa May refusing to countenance any special arrangement by which Scotland could retain its membership of the EU single market while remaining part of Brexit Britain, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that in the rarefied environs of Toryshire Scotland is viewed as just another region within the UK rather than a partner nation of the UK.

The indisputable future impact of Brexit on the Scottish economy – on investment, jobs, and on Scottish society – cannot simply be wished away in obeisance to an EU referendum result that has only succeeded in kicking over a constitutional hornet's nest. I write these words as someone who was opposed to Scottish independence in 2014, penning numerous articles and appearing at debates putting the arguments against breaking up a union that has been extant since 1707. Those arguments were based on the progressive character of class as the determinant of political opposition to a status quo of inequality and social and economic injustice in Britain, as opposed to the regressive character of nationalism.

But between the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 and today we have experienced south of the border Brexit, driven by xenophobia and anti migrant hostility, both of which have been elevated to the political mainstream for the first time since the 1930s – and in similar economic and social conditions brought about by a global recession/depression.

In the wake of the vote to exit the EU hate crimes in parts of the UK have spiked, three million EU citizens currently living and working in the UK have been reduced to bargaining chips in a game of political horse-trading, while the ugly politics of British nationalism with its atavistic attachment to the verities of 19th Century nativism have predominated. Meanwhile, the depiction and treatment of refugees, people whose only crime has been to flee the chaos and carnage created in large part by Britain's own foreign policy over the past decade and more, stands as a withering indictment of a country that increasingly resembles a poor Xerox of a civilised society.

The enemy of working class people, the impediment to their ability to prosper and see their children prosper, is not and never has been migrants. It is and will always be those for whom poverty is not a consequence of economic factors inherent within deregulated capitalism, but instead is a product of individual character deficiency and thus should be punished accordingly. Tory austerity not migrants is the root cause of the growing pressure on public services, the NHS, jobs, and housing. It has less to do with economics – unless, that is, we are talking voodoo economics – and more to do with ideology. More simply put, austerity is the unleashing of an assault on working class communities across the country, punishing them for the reckless actions of a deregulated banking and financial sector, in the process turning what was a crisis of private greed into a crisis of public spending.

It is a dynamic that has proved manna from heaven for those for whom the scapegoating of 'the other' is coterminous with patriotism and love of country.

As for Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader's capitulation to Brexit reached its nadir with the decision to impose of a three line whip on Labour MPs in support of Theresa May and her triggering of Article 50 without any amendments – a so-called hard Brexit. It is a decision that will forever mark his legacy as a leader who rather than resist this rising tide of ugly British nationalism opted to roll with it in the hope of winning back the support of working class voters in the North of England, the Midlands, and South Wales.

This has been his mistake, one that will not only mark his legacy but has ensured that Labour in Scotland is fated to continue down the path towards political extinction.

Of course there are no guarantees when it comes to the outcome of a second referendum on Scottish independence. But what is certain is that the stakes involved are higher than they were in 2014. They involve the question of whether we should be offering the hand of friendship to migrants and refugees or the fist of fury; defending multiculturalism and diversity or abandoning them; and ultimately the choice between outward-looking Scottish internationalism or backward-looking British nationalism.

Indyref 2. Let it come.