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Scotland

Radical Independence Conference 2014

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A few weeks after the defeat of those campaigning for Scottish independence you might expect heads to have gone down and morale to be at a low ebb. There was very little sign of this at the Radical Independence Conference which was held on 22nd November 2014.

Three thousand attendees packed in to the SECC in Glasgow. The venue was the largest that was available. The independence movement has continued to engage thousands. Post-referendum discussions and conferences have packed in activists. The first conference of Women for Independence saw all 1000 tickets sell out in record time, despite being held in Perth, outside of the highly populated 'central belt'.

At a neighbouring venue a Scottish National Party 'new members' rally starring new SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon drew 12,000.

The SNP saw an influx of recruits following the referendum. Their membership now stands at 92, 000, and the Scottish Socialists and Scottish Greens also saw thousands joining. By comparison the Labour Party in Scotland who dominated Scottish politics for decades, may have fewer than 10, 000 members.

RIC Conference

The conference itself was the most professional I have attended in Scotland, with video projection and an excellent sound system. It was smoothly run by the team of volunteers from local RIC groups. This is a tribute to the elan and enthusiasm of those who have sustained and led RIC locally and nationally for two years. RIC has no office, no full-timers and no membership subs.

The day was taken up by a series of plenary sessions with 'big name' speakers and open mic discussions which sought to formulate an alternative political platform for the post-referendum era.

Yes Alliance

There was however no escaping the political questions thrown up in the wake of the referendum. One such was the prospect of a 'Yes Alliance' for the forthcoming UK elections to the Westminster parliament. This proposal mooted a non-aggression pact between pro-independence parties such as the SNP, Greens and Scottish Socialists and had enjoyed popularity amongst grassroots Yes activists and had been backed by the SSP conference.

Shortly before the RIC conference the SNP put the brakes on this idea, announcing instead that they would allow a few selected individuals who were not SNP members to stand on an SNP ticket. In his speech at the opening event SSP co-convenor Colin Fox challenged the SNP to heed the wishes of the grassroots. Green leader Patrick Harvie had nothing to say on the subject. Aamar Anwar, an anti-racist lawyer and a well-known figure in Scottish left circles was similarly quiet having recently joined the SNP and been mentioned as a likely candidate for the party. He restricted his speech to attack after attack on the Labour Party.

Scottish Left Project

Elsewhere a lively sessions discussed the future for the left with a focus on the ‘Scottish Left Project’ which has come together to discuss strategy for socialists in Scotland. The session was addressed by Cat Boyd a young trade-unionist and RIC leader, Frances Curran former MSP for the SSP and John Wilson who recently left the SNP over their commitment to NATO.

Frances talked about her time in the parliament and the need for strong organisation and commitment to face up against the pressures of parliament. She confirmed that the SSP executive had agreed to participate in the Left Project – saying “Let’s talk.”

The conference ended with speeches including Tariq Ali, who indicated that the RIC conference was one of the best events he had ever attended. Playwright Alan Bisset read out the ‘People’s Vow’.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZrtOM7CicM>

The Vow called for a people’s budget against austerity, opposition to fracking and for a green alternative, for radical land reform, for equality and for opposition to NATO and nuclear weapons.

The Yes campaign has seen a renewal of radical politics in Scotland. The show is not over for the movement birthed by the referendum.