Critical Reflections on the Scottish Independence Referendum: Questions of Class, Nation and Political Geography

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Presentation Outline: Themes and Questions

- Brief Contextualisation/Background
- The Demand for Scottish Independence: Myths and Realities
- Key arguments for Independence/of the YES Campaign
- September 2014 Referendum Result: Key Points
- Classed Geography of the Referendum
- What issues won it for the NO Camp?
- Where now for the YES/Pro-Independence movement?
- Where now for Scotland and the UK?
- Finally – entanglements of Class and Nation: Towards a Politics of Hope and the Inevitability of Scottish Independence?
Reflecting on the Independence Referendum: An Historic Political Moment

- The turnout of around 85% was hugely impressive and the highest in any major UK voting event since 1918 but around 650,000 voters didn't vote.
- Turnout was highest (at over 90%) in three very affluent areas – which all returned a NO vote.
- Glasgow recorded a 75% turnout, but this means that a quarter of all voters in the city did not take part in the Independence Referendum.
- That some 1.6m people voted for Scottish Independence is astonishing.
- Few would have predicted a 45% vote in favour of YES to Independence a year ago or even 6 months ago!
- Many voters aged 40 and over grew up in an era when the SNP were widely considered to be a group of 'nationalist nutters' on the margins.
- The YES campaign could be regarded as being highly successful and it was only stopped by the intervention of the UK state, media and the three main UK Party leaders hastily making a ‘vow’ in the days before the Referendum itself to give more powers to Scotland.
Contextualisation/Background

- History matters immensely – UK long a pluri-national/multi-national union of different nations (economically, socially, politically…)
- Popular conceptions of a Democratic/Political Deficit impacting on Scotland
- Widespread unpopularity of the UK Coalition – not least in relation to ‘austerity’ and welfare ‘reform’
- Growing unhappiness with the Labour Opposition
- Demands for more devolution – ‘devo-max’!
- Growth of the SNP and a stronger sense of ‘Scottishness’ and Scottish National Identity in recent decades
- Growing separation between Scotland and other parts of the UK – not least England – politically, socially, culturally?
- Already visible across a wide range of social and public policy areas
- The political landscape of contemporary Scotland is already – and increasingly – different from England/rest of the UK.
Polarised Political Landscapes:
How the UK voted: 2010 General Election

- Blue = Conservatives
- Red = Labour
- Yellow = Liberal Democrats/Aber in Scotland
- Yellow in Scotland = SNP
- North/South Divide in Voting
- Labour Scotland/North England/English Cities
- Conservative South and Rural Areas in England
The Demand for Scottish Independence: Myths and Realities

• ‘If Britain can’t find a way of sticking together, it is the death of the liberal enlightenment before the atavistic forces of nationalism and ethnicity – a dark omen for the 21st century. Britain will cease as an idea. We will all be diminished’. (Will Hutton, The Observer, 7/9/14)

• The SNP has ‘re-awakened the allegiance of the tribe.’ (Financial Times, 12/9/14)

• ‘Populism is sweeping Europe, and the UK is not immune. The SNP surge is part of this phenomenon. The characteristics are putting the nation and its needs and aspirations above other calls on solidarity’. (John McTernan, Former Labour Special Advisor, Daily Mail, 19/9/14)

• SNP and the demands for Scottish Independence represented as an essentially ethnic movement!
‘Just look at the two surging movements in UK politics, the Scottish National and UK Independence parties, the latter now buoyed by winning its second MP in Rochester. The SNP insists that it represents a kinder, gentler, more civic nationalism than Ukip. But both mine national solidarity and the rising sense that a hated and distant capital – Westminster in one case, Brussels in the other – is thwarting the people’s true destiny’.

(Image Copyright The Guardian)
SNP/Scottish Independence and UKIP Equated

Riddell in *The Observer* November 2, 2014 (Image copyright *The Observer*):

- Why do English papers often resort to portraying Scots wearing kilts? (and there is nothing funny about UKIP!)
- Alex Salmond portrayed as a Scottish Nigel Farage!
- But there is some truth in this cartoon – Labour and the Tories are in big trouble – for different reasons – following the Independence Referendum
- UKIP want out of EU, an end to immigration, privatisation and more public spending cuts
- SNP want Scotland in EU, an end to austerity and open borders/more immigration!
September 18 2014: An Historic Day!

BALLOT PAPER
VOTE (X) ONLY ONCE

Should Scotland be an independent country?

YES

NO
The Main Issues for YES

YES Campaign Leaflet – Commons Image
Yes Campaign Flyers: A Democratic Deficit?

Who do you want to decide the government of Scotland?

These 5 million people here?

Or these 14 million people here?

58 MPs

139 MPs

Scotland has more Pandas than Tory MPs, but got a Tory-led government anyway.

Voting Yes means we’ll get the government we vote for. Every time.

It’s that simple.

Yes to Independence
A better, fairer Scotland starts with Yes
Currency and Defence Issues

- SNP Preferred Position – An Indy Scotland would retain the £Sterling – a currency union with the rest of the UK
- Strongly rejected by main UK Parties
- What about the Euro?
- What about a separate Scottish currency?
- Major issue of weakness in the YES side?
- Pensions and economic future/prosperity etc.

- Royal Navy Nuclear Submarine Fleet on the Clyde – Where to if Scotland votes YES?
- What armed forces would Scotland need?
- What proportion of British Armed Forces, RN, RAF and Army would come to Scotland?
- How could Scotland’s security be ensured?
- SNP – A Non-Nuclear Scotland within Nato – but NATO membership opposed by other YES groups/supporters.
Shock Poll Shows YES Ahead

- This poll (7/9/14) caused a huge panic in the UK Establishment and in the Labour Party too.
- Up until this point it was widely assumed that the NO vote was well ahead – that the Union was safe.
- Massive Onslaught by the NO side against the claims being made by the Pro-Indy side.

(Image copyright The Sunday Herald)
The UK State & Establishment
Fight Back – or the Establishment Panics?

• Only one newspaper in Scotland/entire UK – supported Scottish Independence – the Glasgow-based *Herald/Sunday Herald* – all others were mobilised against it

• Accusations too of anti-independence bias from the BBC

• Conservative PM David Cameron – garnered support from the banks and financial institutions (Scottish and UK), major supermarkets, oil companies and other large businesses

• Huge publicity given by media to a financial exodus etc. if Scotland voted YES

• Last minute intervention by leading Labour Party figures in Scotland – especially former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown

• Central role of the Labour Party in Scotland/UK in defending the Union/keeping Scotland in the UK – *for now?*
The ‘Vow’

- Leaders of the 3 main UK/Pro-Union Parties sign a Vow that if Scotland votes NO – extra powers – almost ‘home rule’
- Front Page of the Labour supporting/anti-Independence *Daily Record* on Tuesday September 16 (just two days before the Indy Ref)
- Unprecedented coming together of UK Party leaders in peacetime.

(Image copyright *The Daily Record*)
The ‘Infamous’ ‘Vow’!

- The Post-Independence Referendum view of the now-infamous ‘vow’!
- The vow already being rolled-back by Cameron on the morning of September 19 – within only two hours of the final results coming-in!

(Image: Commons)
The 2014 Referendum Result

Latest result with 32 of 32 councils declared

Yes 44.7%

No 55.3%

Turnout 84.5%
Yes 1,617,989
No 2,001,926

Progress of the count (council blocks sized for number of electors)

32 of 32 councils declared
The Classed Political Geography of the Referendum

- The more affluent and elderly the pop. of an area and the more likely it was to vote NO
- The poorer, more disadvantaged and younger the pop. of an area the more likely it was to vote YES
- All Glasgow Holyrood Constituencies (8) voted YES and all Edinburgh Holyrood Constituencies (5) voted NO
- YES voting areas – traditional Labour heartlands – especially the big council schemes/towns on Clydeside.
Local Share of 15% most Deprived Data Zones in Scotland
Voting By Age and Gender
What Swung the Vote?

- **YES** Campaign appear to have been weak on issues of currency, pensions and the future economic prosperity of an independent Scotland.

- **NO/BETTER TOGETHER** played on the fears of many Scots—especially among the old—around these issues.

- ‘Project Fear’ – The NO Campaign—was almost entirely negative—a positive case for the Union was made only days before Referendum itself.

- For around 20% of the population—a strong sense of attachment to Britishness/UK (and there are 800,000 English born residents in Scotland—majority voted NO—but not **English Scots for YES**!)

- The promise of additional powers for Scotland—Devo-Max had been the favoured position for the majority but ruled out by David Cameron.
The SNP Core Vote!

• 14% of the 2011 SNP core vote did not turnout to vote YES

• Many of the SNP’s heartlands – Perthshire, Angus, Stirling, Western Isles (Lewis and Harris voted NO and South Uist, Barra and Eriksay voted YES!) and Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire voted NO

• Issues: rural conservatism (and distaste for a left-leaning SNP?), fear of job losses in oil and related industries

• Other key NO voting areas also saw a polarisation between rural and town/urban voting patterns

• SNP membership growth now in Glasgow/urban areas…implications for the SNP in the future?
Limitations of the SNP’s Vision

• ‘Conference, we are the party of Scotland. Not just one group, not just one particular part, we are the party of the nation. We will never engage in politics which seeks to create division amongst our people. **We transcend Left-Right Distinctions and Class Politics. We're the party of Scotland, we're the party of its people, and we will always ensure that they are taken care of**’. (Iain Shepherd, SNP Students (Social Justice debate, SNP Conf. 14/11/14)

• The crucial basis of the SNP’s pitch for independence is **civic nationalism**

• A supposedly inclusive doctrine which seeks to benefit and draw support from business and the working class alike. The civic nationalist approach is often very explicit -

• Nicola Sturgeon (November 2014) - independence could benefit ‘all sectors of society’.

• Not a radical vision of what an Independent Scotland could be.
The YES Campaign: A Mass Social Movement

- YES Campaign was a huge success! 45%/1.6m people voted to opt out of the UK – including the majority in Glasgow – once the ‘Second City’ of the British Empire
- The YES campaign extended well beyond the SNP: Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), Hope Over Fear (Tommy Sheridan & Solidarity), Women for Independence, National Collective, Greens, Scottish Socialists, SWP, Socialist Party and others!
- While not completely marginalising national/ist issues, focused almost entirely on social welfare related issues and opposition to neo-liberalism, to wars, nuclear energy, nuclear weapons
- The YES campaign was hugely energetic, dynamic and innovative – a mass movement – which mobilised and politicised large numbers of people – including many young people for the first time
- YES was only stopped by the intervention of the UK state, media and the three main UK Party leaders hastily making a ‘vow’ in the days before the Referendum itself to give more powers to Scotland
The YES Campaign Since Sept 18

• Huge increase in membership for the YES Parties since 18/9/14

• SNP – from 25,500 to 92,000+ (22/11/14) (UK proportionate equivalent – 1m approx) (now the third largest UK political party)

• Scottish Green Party and Scottish Socialist Party (and other Socialist groups) – large increase in membership post Referendum

• Suggestions of a campaign around the ’45 (that is the 45% who votes YES!)

• The YES movement is not going away soon!
Looking Forward to May 2015 UK General Election (1)

• Plans for a Pan-YES – SNP/Greens/Scottish Socialist Alliance to fight the 2015 General Election

• Massive problems for Labour in Scotland: Around 37% of Labour voters deserted it and ignored the calls of Party Leaders to vote NO – and the YES campaign were hugely successful in traditional Labour heartlands around Glasgow and West Central Scotland and in the large council housing estates

• Labour in disarray in Scotland – Leader and Deputy Leader Resigned in October 2014 amidst claims that Scotland was treated as ‘branch office’ by London! (and it is often forgotten that Labour was a pro-Scottish Home Rule Party before 1945!)

• As Labour appeared to win the Referendum and thereby keep its key Scottish electoral base (essential for its prospects of forming a UK government) – it has also – perhaps irreparably – seen that base desert it thereby also undermining its chances of winning in May 2015 UK General Election

• Labour: won the battle – but lost the war?
Looking Forward to May 2015
UK General Election (2)

• Labour/Tories/Lib Dems have promised Scotland more devolution, more powers but disagree over what powers (some taxation, welfare benefits etc)
• Labour, Tories and Lib Dems now at odds over which further powers should be devolved to Scotland and over what timescale
• Plays into the hands of the SNP – if extra powers are not given then this shows that Scots should have voted YES
• SNP – pushing for maximum devolution of powers – all bar foreign affairs and defence
• SNP – extra powers – *Devo Max* – is a further step along the road to Independence – September 18 2014 was only stage one in what will be a longer-drawn out historical process.
A Deepening Constitutional Crisis?

‘To complicate matters, Labour seems certain to face a savaging in Scotland. One poll has forecast it might hold just five of its current 41 seats because of the relentless march of the Scottish National Party. It is therefore quite possible the SNP could hold the balance of power in Westminster. And since it has ruled out any deal with the Tories but indicated that it would help Labour, this would land us with a Miliband government that only a small minority in England would have voted for.

The idea of a party that wants Scotland to leave the United Kingdom shoring up the government of the UK is an insult to democracy. It would be even more outrageous if a Labour-run government relied on SNP votes to push through measures that affected only England. Yet if, in turn, the SNP refused to support a Miliband government on measures that only affected English voters, the result would be constitutional and governmental paralysis — with Parliament unable to pass laws on health, education, transport, local government, the legal system and so on. In sum, we would have an administration that was unable properly to govern 85 per cent of the population’.

(Simon Heffer, Daily Mail, 22/11/14) – An English Democratic Deficit?
Goodbye to the UK?

- One huge irony of a Referendum on Scottish Independence is that it has led to the further re-energising of demands in England for ‘fairness’ – that Scotland has been bought off to stay in the UK – at English expense – ‘English votes for English Laws’ (meaning that non-English MPs cannot vote on English matters in the House of Commons in Westminster – massive problems for Labour)

- Main UK parties at odds also over English devolution
- England now likely to behave as ‘more English’? – Rise of UKIP – English Nationalism? (To the delight of the SNP!)

- This will serve to further loosen ties between England and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Some calls for federalism – but is it feasible given that England is 86% of the UK population?

- **A future of constitutional unravelling and the end of the UK - the final episode in the dissolution of the largest Empire in world history?**
Scottish Voting Intentions in May 2015 UK General Election (Ipsos Mori/YouGov, 4/11/14)
A Never-endum Story?

- Distinct possibility of large SNP vote in May 2015 (4/11/14 IpsosMori opinion poll in Scotland puts the **SNP on 57% - Labour – 24%, Tories – 9%, Lib Dems – 7%**)
- **Support for another Scottish Indy Ref – 66% for one another 10 years and 53% for another in 5 years** if Tories win in 2015 and have no/very few Scottish MPs
- All the old certainties of Scottish (and UK) politics are breaking down
- ‘Minority’ parties might hold the balance of power in 2015 UK Parliament (Labour potentially reduced to a rump in Scotland)
- If the UK votes to leave the EU – and Scotland (more pro-EU support in Scotland) - **55% of Scots now support another Independence Referendum if UK votes in 2017 to leave the EU** (Nicola Sturgeon, new First Minister/SNP Leader already calling for this)

- **Independence for Scotland is now inevitable – but this is increasingly as much due to reasons outwith Scotland as within it!**
The Yes campaign was/is a social movement - an anti-austerity/anti-neoliberal social movement and there are no signs of it going away!

It was not a movement for national liberation or rooted in any form of identity politics as such (but national-ist sentiment not totally absent)

Radical Independence Campaign was instrumental in mobilising votes in the large working class housing estates in particular

A YES vote would have been a serious defeat for the British State/Ruling Class – hence why most socialists called for a YES vote

SNP strategy – present a limited vision of an Independent Scotland – almost something approximating Devo-Max – things wouldn’t change too much with Independence!

Growing demands for something more than this?

Scottish nationalists pretend that those with a vested interest in the present state of things exist only at Westminster, and therefore ‘all of us’ within Scotland can benefit from leaving the union

SNP membership growth – pull it to the left (but at further risk to its traditional heartlands?) – and RIC as a left movement exerting pressure on the SNP too

Should socialists be calling for an SNP vote in May 2015?
The Struggle for Scottish Independence is Over?

Glasgow 22/11/14

Monday 24/11/14