

September 18 referendum in Scotland: Shock and awe against a yes vote - Westminster establishment into a state of blind panic

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It was as if an earthquake had hit the debate on Scotland. Shock polling last weekend put the yes campaign in front while others indicated that the two campaigns were neck and neck. This threw the Westminster establishment into a state of blind panic.

They had not remotely predicted it. Less than year ago the Unionist Better Together campaign had been 20% ahead and they were completely complacent. Now the roof had fallen in and they were staring at the possibility of the unthinkable - a vote for independence in Scotland.

The reaction has been remarkable. Cameron, Miliband and Clegg dropped everything and headed for Scotland to say that there is no problem with devo-max after all. Gordon Brown was dragged out to make the announcement on behalf of them all. Plenty of additional powers, he said, could be devolved to the Scottish Government if independence on the 18th.

Meanwhile Downing Street went into overdrive to organised what has been described as a shock and awe campaign to intimidate Scots into voting no - the normal method of politics of the Westminster elites. Banks and businesses were mobilised to make bullying statements to the effect that independence would lead either to them reducing their activities in Scotland or putting up their prices.

RBS, Lloyds, TSB, Clydesdale and Tesco Bank all made such statements within the course of a few hours. The Bank of England backed it all up. At the same time ASDA, John Lewis and Kingfisher announced that they would be forced to put their prices up if there was a vote for independence - a move no doubt in response to the news that a majority of women were now proposing to vote yes. The BBC is under pressure to announce that it is under pressure to announce that it will double its licence fee in Scotland.

The media outlets, including the BBC, backed this with relish as everything including the kitchen sink has been thrown at the yes campaign. And it might well have an impact on the yes vote, it is hard to tell. Fear and intimidation can be effective. On the other hand some of the tactics of the Unionists are likely to backfire as they are based on the assumption that people aren't able to think through the consequences of their decisions.

Most of the media in any case back the no campaign. Even in Scotland only the Sunday Herald has backed the yes campaign. The Scotsman is backing the no campaign as are the Scottish editions of the Express the Star and the Daily Mail. The Sun at the present time is sitting on the fence with the option to switch to the yes campaign if Murdoch judges this to be important for future sales.

The biggest problem the Unionists have is that the yes campaign is a dynamic grass roots campaign that is not easy to beat down (butterflies against a clunking fist as Paul Mason put it). The political

level of the campaign, and therefore the political level in Scotland (already higher than in England) has advanced in leaps and bounds particularly in the latter stages of the campaign.

Nor has the debate been based on nationalism. It has been a debate about democracy and democratic rights. It has been about the neoliberal agenda and the role of Westminster (Tories and Labour) in it. It has been about a future from Scotland free from its English dependency.

The yes campaign has got to where it is against the weight of the whole Westminster political establishment and a remarkable political line-up. The no campaign includes Labour and everything to its right: the Tories, the Lib Dems, and UKIP along with the DUP (and the Orange Order) and the BNP. Apart from the SNP the only voice in Parliament is the Green Party, which strongly supports a yes vote.

It also includes George Galloway. He appeared at the remarkable youth debate in Glasgow last night, hosted by the BBC, with 7,500 16 and 17 year olds present, the biggest such event ever in Scotland, as a part of a unionist panel of two – the other panel member being a Tory. The yes campaign team was Patrick Harvie of the Greens and Nichola Sturgeon of the SNP. It was a huge vindication of the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds in the election.

George Galloway was four-square behind the fear and intimidation campaign and enthusiastically retailed the threats from the banks and big business. He argued that there is no need to worry about cuts and neoliberalism since we will have a Labour Government next year that will change all that. He quotes oil magnates to the effect that North Sea oil is running out and was countered by Patrick Harvie to the effect that Scotland's future is in renewable energy.

The poll now hangs in the balance. The political genie, however, cannot be put back into the bottle however the vote goes: either independence or a close vote. The turnout for the referendum is set to break all records, and young people have responded strongly to their inclusion in the ballot.

The political development that has taken place is at its strongest in the working class areas and amongst Labour voters. The latest TNS poll shows a 12-point increase for independence among poorer voters. The biggest shift towards independence comes from those who didn't vote at all at the last Scottish elections in 2011.

Whatever the result the grotesquely undemocratic UK set-up is thrown into chaos – particularly if the vote is yes. Demands for more devolution and democratic reform are inevitable. Westminster has not represented either Wales or the big Northern English cities any more than it has represented Scotland. Things can never go back to where they were. Business as usual is not an option. We are approaching the party conference but the agenda has already moved on.

In Scotland those sections of the left that have been a part of the Radical Independence Campaign have a major opportunity to grow and increase their social weight. There is the opportunity to relate to an unprecedented and positive political conversation that is not going to stop. If the no vote wins the discussion will continue. If the yes campaign wins then the debate on a Scottish constitution immediately opens up.

Meanwhile there is everything to play for and a real opportunity for Scotland to gain its independence in the vote next week. Shock and awe, and the threats from the banks and big business, and the representatives of the Westminster establishment, team Westminster, from David Cameron to George Galloway, should be treated with the contempt they deserve. An independent and different Scotland is possible, with a much stronger left within it.

Alan Thornett, 12.9.14

P.S.

* From International Viewpoint. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>