

Scotland: RISE “had a brutal election” - We may have lost, but there are better days ahead. Hasta la victoria siempre!

Thursday 12 May 2016, by [BOYD Cat](#), [LECKIE Carolyn](#), [MAXWELL Jamie](#) (Date first published: 10 May 2016).

RISE, the new socialist alliance in Scotland [1], had a very active and strong campaign in the recent UK [local in Britain, parliamentary in Scotland] elections, but obtained disappointing results. It got 10.911 votes. This is not really surprising giving that RISE held it founding conference in December 2015.

RISE (Respect, Internationalism, Socialism, Environmentalism) emerged out of the Radical Independence Campaign for the 2014 independence referendum and the Scottish Left Project. RISE involves activists from the Scottish Socialist Party, International Socialists Scotland, ex-International Socialist Group (dissolved after the founding of RISE) and independent radical socialists.

Below, Cat Boyd, co-founder of RIC and RISE and its election candidate for Glasgow, Jamie Maxwell, RISE member and its press officer during the election campaign and Carolyn Beckie, RISE voter and columnist for the *National* give their views on the campaign and the results.

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The battle to represent working-class interests goes on

AFTER the referendum I could have walked away from radical politics. I could have joined the political mainstream, or continued in a job that paid well. I might’ve, in retrospect, preferred to have hidden from the harsh realities that come from life in the public eye. However, that would have meant breaking the promise I made to working-class people in meetings across Scotland, my promise that we would never abandon them whatever the result. That’s why, along with many others, I began the allegedly impossible – and still unfulfilled – task of bringing about left unity.

Despite a hugely disappointing election result for socialism in Scotland, I’ll continue to honour my pledge. Don’t get me wrong, the result made me pause for reflection and humility. I’ve learned a lot; particularly the lesson that moral certainty, youthful energy and media coverage can only take you

so far without real money behind you. Given our finances, we punched above our weight; but the money Rise spent on this election wouldn't cover a Bullingdon Club member's bar bill. That's not a complaint or a moan. We just have to do better on fundraising.

And don't get me wrong, I'm emotionally drained and disappointed, not just because of my own performance, but because some of the best radical left campaigners from the referendum, including the Greens' Sarah Beattie Smith and Maggie Chapman, failed to gain election. That's a tragedy for our political culture. We've achieved so much in transforming the image of a tribally macho, stale, conformist Scottish politics, but we haven't driven that into the parliament, and we'll have to confront that failing.

Despite feeling chastened, though, the result reinforces the view I had before. Only the right and the radical left are offering straight answers to straight questions on Scotland's future. The political centre cannot hold. Yes, we need the SNP to get independence; but the SNP hasn't begun to answer the thornier questions about its economic model, and, faced with a resurgent Toryism, we need straight answers fast.

We drifted through the election campaign expecting an SNP majority. Instead, the headline result of this campaign, as the Daily Mail puts it, is "the revenge of middle Scotland". Revenge was in the air throughout this election. And we need to understand this backlash to confront it.

Two years ago, the headline story was Scotland's working-class communities, who, in voting terms, are very much the polar opposite of "middle Scotland". 2014 was the revenge of the most written-off, patronised, and feared sections of our country. I enjoyed that process, seeing our working-class communities come alive again.

It's what made the referendum exciting for me. Others, to say the least, didn't enjoy it so much.

Many middle-class voters looked on aghast as people they regarded as criminals and scroungers came out behind a campaign the establishment regarded as economically irrational.

And, for right-wing middle Scotland, it got worse. The Yes campaign wasn't just working-class. It also brought a motley crew of scrappy young Marxists, roll-up-smoking socialists, long-haired ecologists, feminists, immigrants and all the "rabble" under its umbrella. To Scotland's scared middle class, it must have seemed like a zombie apocalypse.

Then, it got worse again for them. Labour, the party of social conservatism in Scotland, elected a "Trotskyist" leader in Westminster, that once proud pillar of middle-class wisdom; worse, this Trotskyist leader wore rumpled suits and pastel-coloured shirts. Democracy, "middle Scotland" must have decided, was including all the wrong sorts of people.

The fearful middle classes mobilised around this election. It helped that Scotland's centre-right had a leader who didn't fulfil the nasty stereotypes we generally associate with the Conservative Party. But what mattered more was their fear. Terrified of nationalism, driven out of Labour, contemptuous of the LibDems, they only had one option. Only one party fulfilled their desire to take revenge against the messy, democratic horde. That's why we have a Tory opposition.

For socialists, the most disappointing feature of the election is the low turnout in many of the working-class communities who mobilised behind independence. Scottish Tories, of course, will be happy to see ordinary people back in their box. But I would argue that everyone who really believes in democracy should be humbled by this fact. A true democracy should judge itself by how it performs for the most marginalised in society. In that sense, we've all failed.

Those of us who support independence – whether for radical, centrist or conservative purposes – should take a warning from this result. Working-class areas of Scotland cannot be taken for granted. That’s what Labour did for decades.

Electurally, the SNP has won these communities from Labour; that fact continued to hold true through this election campaign. Nonetheless, when it comes to a referendum, we can’t have 30 percent turnouts in these areas, or we are truly, monumentally screwed. Regardless of our vision of a future Scotland, I think the radical left has a big role to play in keeping our communities mobilised and energised with political debate.

When it comes to winning a referendum, we’ll have to confront the economics of a divided Scottish society. The idea that Scotland “can’t afford independence” is ludicrous. But some section of Scotland will have to make sacrifices, or there will be fiscal problems. That’s what I mean when I say that only the radical left and the radical right have got straight answers. The working class can’t pay more. So the choice is that we either accept that taxes must rise for those who can afford it, or we watch the Tories argue that the public sector must shrink.

To an extent, this election, and even the EU referendum, are simply window-dressing to a much broader international debate. The Panama Papers has highlighted the criminality and inefficiency of the ruling elites who control our businesses and our economies. British overseas territories are hubs of money-laundering and tax-dodging, as is the City of London itself.

Beneath this corrupted capitalism lies our democratic recession and our already-skeletal public sector. We can’t ignore this and hope it will go away. Responsible politicians need to confront this at a global level. I’m convinced Scotland can play a strong role in this by moving faster towards independence.

So, over the coming months and years, I’ll continue to be a part of radical, left-wing politics and hopefully build upon the new roots of socialist organisation in the places that are still so often shut out by both Holyrood and Westminster. And I’ll keep to my promise that no poor, struggling or lonely person in Scotland will be left to face their troubles alone. My pledge is still to Scotland’s working-class communities, who mobilised during the referendum for a better society: our chance will come again, and I’ll continue to do everything I can to help make that happen.

Cat Boyd

* “Cat Boyd: We may have lost on Thursday but the battle to represent working-class interests goes on”. THE NATIONAL. MAY 10TH, 2016 - 12:01 AM:

<http://www.thenational.scot/comment/cat-boyd-we-may-have-lost-on-thursday-but-the-battle-to-represent-working-class-interests-goes-on.17317>

RISE: an election post-mortem

RISE had a brutal election. There’s no disguising that. Fewer than 1000 votes in the Highlands and Islands. Barely 600 in the North East. Losing to Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow. There aren’t many silver linings in that gloomy vista.

I was with the RISE team at the Emirates Arena on Friday morning as the Glasgow votes were being tallied. It was not a pleasant experience. We weren't expecting to storm the Winter Palace, exactly, but to lose so resoundingly, after such a lively campaign, was painful.

So, why did RISE fall short? Here's my assessment, as both a journalist and the organisation's former press officer.

Referendum fault-lines. The SNP soaked-up the vast majority of pro-independence votes and the Greens occupied what little space there was to the left of the SNP. This meant that RISE was competing for a specific constituency against two much bigger and more efficient party machines. The odds, in retrospect, were always heavily stacked against us. Moreover, RISE was a direct product of the referendum. Radical Independence cuts its teeth boosting turnout in working class areas. But turnout in 2014 was 85 per cent. Last week, it was 55 per cent. That massive 30 per cent drop-off probably shrank our potential base.

Crowded field. In 2003, when the SSP won six MSPs, there was one unified socialist party in Scotland. In 2016, the field was suffocatingly crowded. The SNP, a leftwing Labour party, the Greens, RISE and Solidarity were all jostling for the territory. In addition, for all the talk of RISE as a 'Scottish Syriza', Scotland had already had its Syriza moment - in 2015, when the SNP stormed Westminster. The SNP has a near monopoly on anti-Tory, anti-austerity sentiment just now. That's not going to change any time soon.

Ground campaign. RISE's wasn't as extensive as it needed to be. Our success in securing consistent and widespread media coverage made us look more formidable than we were. In Glasgow, which should have been our stronghold, the activist team was exceptionally dedicated and hard-working but relatively small. We simply didn't have enough people on the ground to get someone elected.

Resources. RISE had a grand total of two (modestly) paid employees. I was one, Jonathon Shafi, the national organiser, was the other. We lacked paid researchers, local organisers and campaign managers - the basic infrastructure, in other words, of a successful election drive.

Messaging. If you want to win the list votes of people who intend to vote SNP on the constituency ballot, don't spend your time attacking the SNP. For some reason, SNP voters don't like that. We were right to target certain Scottish government policies, national standardised testing, for instance. But bluntly accusing the SNP of being rightwing wasn't smart. The Greens struck a more constructive tone and were rewarded for it.

Substance. The left needs to shake its addiction to empty gesture politics. Moral outrage only gets you so far. Our most pressing task was to build a strong, credible public profile. We should have focused our efforts on pushing a handful of properly researched arguments and ideas. We didn't, and that cost us.

RISE now has to work-out what kind of future it has. The election delivered a sobering jolt, but also - perhaps - a galvanising one. At 6am on Friday morning, Cat Boyd led a rendition of 'Bella Ciao' from the back of the RISE van outside the Emirates. 'This was our first election,' she said, 'The first of many. For others it was their last.' Since then, RISE activists have remained remarkably disciplined and upbeat. Let's hope it stays that way.

The SSP holds its national conference in June and party members will vote then on whether to remain affiliated to RISE. They should. There are lots of excellent people in the SSP, but it's not clear how the party would have fared on its own. I doubt it would have performed any better had it

stood independently. (In fact, RISE polled nearly 3000 votes more than the SSP did in 2011.)

Despite the results and the mistakes, RISE ran a strong campaign based around a talented, spirited – but fatally under-resourced – group of people. We made an impression on Scottish politics massively disproportionate to our size. That, at the very least, is a decent start.

I'm now heading back into the far less gruelling and stressful world of freelance journalism.

All the best, comrades. Keep your heads up. There are better days ahead. Hasta la victoria siempre.

Jamie Maxwell

* Bellacaledonia. 10TH MAY 2016:

<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/05/10/rise-an-election-post-mortem/>

Putting the results of the election into perspective

TO SEE some commentary, you'd think that the SNP had lost Thursday's election and the wheels are now coming loose on the independence bandwagon.

So let's put the result in perspective. The percentage constituency vote for the SNP on Thursday was the highest ever recorded in a Holyrood election. And it was larger than Labour has ever achieved in any parliamentary election Scotland since 1966, half a century ago, in the days when politics was effectively a two-party system.

So let's not be downbeat. And let's raise three cheers for the election of high-calibre SNP MSPs such as Jeanne Freeman, whose formidable talents should guarantee her ministerial office...

I also congratulate the new Scottish Green Party MSPs. I know some Green activists hoped to do better, but I think they had a great result given the power of the SNP juggernaut.

Some SNP bloggers seem upset that the party no longer has an overall majority. But the pro-independence majority in Holyrood is as strong as it was, and Thursday's outcome has underlined the fact that the movement is diverse and does not belong to a single party.

The referendum could never have reached 45 per cent without that broad coalition of forces which included the Scottish Green Party, Women for Independence, the Radical Independence Campaign and others.

Pardon me for straight talking – and I know some of this may upset some good friends of mine.

Since September 2014, we've forgotten the importance of diversity and unity, the two complementary pillars upon which the movement that brought us to the brink of independence was based.

There are various reasons for that: the winding up of Yes Scotland; the incredible growth of the SNP membership; the seismic shift in the 2015 general election.

All of that created a sense that the SNP were the only legitimate standard bearers of the cause, and that Scotland's future was 100 per cent tied up with the success or failure of the SNP.

That was always a mathematical illusion. The SNP's remarkable 50 per cent of the vote in 2015 was not so much an unconditional endorsement of the party as an uprising against Jim Murphy's Labour party.

Even the spectacular 46.5 per cent constituency vote for the SNP on Thursday is, realistically, unlikely to be sustained through the term of this parliament in the teeth of Westminster cuts.

Our electoral system is designed to balance up the number of seats in Parliament to broadly reflect the proportions that people vote in. Its underlying intention was to prevent any party (and more specifically the SNP) winning an overall majority.

The 2011 outcome was an aberration, and a hard task to achieve.

Making an overall majority for one party the litmus test of success for the independence movement was, in my opinion, a gift to the unionists. It also led to the untargeted, blunderbuss, Scotland-wide, campaign of Both Votes SNP. It's entirely understandable that SNP partisans wanted to maximise the number of votes for their party on both ballot papers. The Greens too campaigned in Kelvin and Edinburgh Central for both votes. The SSP did the same at its height when I was elected to Holyrood back in 2003.

I suppose political parties could never be expected to develop a coherent strategy beyond maximising their own vote. That's what political parties do.

But had there still existed a wider Yes Alliance, with the kind of authority that Yes Scotland commanded during the referendum campaign, we could have been in an even stronger position today.

Outside of the Highlands and South Scotland, every single list vote for the SNP was effectively wasted. A quarter of a million votes were thrown in the bin.

In Glasgow, for example, if just over one in five of these SNP list votes had gone to the Greens and just over one in ten to Rise, the political balance of forces would have been entirely different. Both the Tories and one Labour MSP would have been replaced by three strong pro-independence campaigners, including The National columnist Cat Boyd and Women for Independence activist Zara Kitson. It would probably have helped had Patrick Harvie not put his energy into trying to unseat Sandra White in Glasgow Kelvin.

I hope the results on Thursday will be the catalyst for a discussion about renewing the broad Yes alliance. We need somewhere above party politics to talk strategy towards our common goal of independence. I recognise that without the SNP's cooperation, it won't happen. But I hope they have enough confidence in their own power to countenance letting some of it go.

To deliver independence, it's necessary to reassure people that independence offers policy choice, rather than SNP government in perpetuity.

We also need to build trust again across the whole spectrum of independence supporting individuals and forces. Some of the rhetoric in this campaign was unhelpful.

I voted Rise in my region and believe that despite its low vote, it has an important role to play in the future. But it really does need to tone down some of the over-the-top rhetoric that some of its

activists directed towards the SNP.

I'VE made no secret of my disagreement with some SNP policies on issues like taxation, the Offensive Behaviour at Football Act, and the Named Person legislation. But on the grand scale of things, none of this compares to some of the diabolical actions of New Labour in recent history, such as bombing Iraq to smithereens, backing nuclear weapons of mass destruction, locking out desperate refugees, slashing benefits or dismantling public services.

The fact that the SNP has swept the board right across Red Clydeside shows that most people don't see the party as wicked tartan Tories. It's right to stand firm on policy and principles, but tone and balance are equally important. Rise will do better in the future if they concentrate on delivering radical ideas in contemporary, positive language (and a logo on their ballot paper might have helped too☺).

So we are where we are - with a majority of independence supporting MSPs in the parliament. It's enough to deliver a referendum - and it may come sooner than any of us expect, depending on external events.

If we are to carry forward the independence movement towards the 55 to 60 per cent we need to guarantee victory, I'm convinced we need to revive the pluralist yes movement, to discuss now, and prepare now, for when we need to unleash the creativity and dynamism of 2014 once again.

Carolyn Leckie

* THE NATIONAL. MAY 9TH, 2016 - 12:28 AM:

<http://www.thenational.scot/comment/carolyn-leckie-putting-the-results-of-the-election-into-perspective.17266>

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 36903), [A new socialist alliance launched in Scotland: The view from a RISE:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article36903)
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article36903>