

RED PAPER TRADE UNION BRIEFING

BRIEFING 1 ON #INDYREF2

THE STATUS-QUO IS BROKEN

The economic, political, and constitutional status-quo is broken across the UK. The Westminster system is failing the people of Scotland but so is Holyrood.

Both the governments at Westminster and Holyrood have centralised services, used private contractors, imposed heavy cuts on local government and presided over a decade of plant closures and de-industrialisation.

The Tory Government's imposition of the Internal Market Act is designed to stop Scotland making unilateral strategic state aid interventions (for example to promote particular industries or to save jobs). At the other end of that political spectrum, the call for an 'Independent' Scotland to re-join the EU risks shackling Scotland to all the neo-liberal pressure of EU big business, also robbing it of powers to intervene democratically in its own economy.

Our political elites are playing games. We believe that our first thought should always be about what type of Scotland we want to create and what offers the best potential for social progress.

Let's be clear, as the recent election for the Scottish Parliament shows, workers are split on the constitutional question. This makes it even more important that those speaking for trade unions do not get trapped into waving flags for the simplistic solutions of either the 'nationalist' or 'unionist' camps.

STUC POSITION ON CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The position adopted by Scotland's largest civic society group is important. At its Congress in April this year¹, the STUC:

- Recognised the right of the Scottish Parliament to call a referendum;
- Called for a Convention to be established and to examine both opportunities and limitations of different proposals;
- Questioned the limited binary (Yes/No to independence) choice and asks for explorations of a third option.

The STUC has the opportunity to unite the movement around its radical strategies to redress current imbalances of power and wealth.

The positions adopted by the General Council and the 2021 Congress give the STUC a unique role in taking the debate beyond crude nationalism and the indefensible status-quo.

WORKING-CLASS SOLIDARITY

The STUC calls for the debate on Scotland's future to be driven by the principles working-class solidarity and equality.

Earlier this year, the STUC published a series of proposals for economic recovery, the People's Recovery². These could provide a useful *starting point* for the sort of Scotland we want to see. At core, the STUC's document is calling for:

- Industrial and economic democracy;
- Strategies to eliminate poverty and a reframing of our social services system from one built on a punitive approach to one based on solidarity;
- Public investment and domestic supply-chains to drive a green future
- Universal public services;
- The devolution of equality and employment law;
- A right to collective organisation and enforcement mechanisms to make this meaningful.

We know that a Tory-led Westminster won't deliver the radical changes necessary but the evidence from Holyrood is not much better. The Scottish Government already has powers it doesn't use. Despite talking a good game, we know that the Scottish Government could already have done much more to improve the life of working class people but it has not.

THIRD OPTION – WOULD IT WORK?

The current debate is presented as if there is only a binary choice either for or against independence. This forces trade unionists into opposing camps rather than entering a debate looking at how different changes to the constitutional position will either help or hinder the delivery of meaningful, material change for the people of Scotland.

We were not offered a 'more powers' option on the ballot paper in the 2014 referendum. The STUC general council supports giving the "greatest possible choice to the Scottish people, should the time come for another referendum." and has re-affirmed that "any future referendum need not be confined to a binary vote".

As Professor James Mitchell of Edinburgh University says: 'A third option must be on the ballot paper in any future referendum if we are truly to understand the views and aspirations of the Scottish people. Instead of one simple binary option, the question of whether people want change could be asked, and then, assuming an affirmative vote, two change options would be offered, independence or more powers. This broadens choice and avoids forcing voters to choose between the lesser of two evils.'

MODEL MOTION

Trade unionists must be at the heart of the debate about the future of Scotland.

To help ensure the widest possible debate among trade union members, why don't you consider debating the following motion attached at the end of this paper at your next branch or trades council meeting?

Footnotes:

¹ See General Council statement

http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Congress2021/GC_statement_K.pdf and Composite K

http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Congress2021/Updated_Composites_Amended_Motions_Cong21.pdf

² <http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/Research-papers/peoples-draft-6.pdf>

TEXT OF MODEL MOTION

This meeting of [insert name] welcomes the position agreed by the STUC at the 2021 Congress. We note that the General Council is charged with:

- Adopting a "proactive" approach;
- Establishing a working group to examine a range of constitutional proposals;
- Set up a union led 'constitutional convention' with affiliates to represent the voices, views, and vision of working people across Scotland for our future.

We call on the General Council to ensure that:

1. The working group's examination of constitutional proposals includes expert input on options developed in other countries;
2. The working group considers the opportunities and limitations of these different proposals to deliver material improvements for working class people, to reduce inequality, to support the growth of trade unions in Scotland, and to bolster and working-class movements in Scotland, and to encourage solidarity between workers in Scotland and beyond;
3. Proposals for its establishment of the STUC's constitutional convention are developed as a matter of urgency and constituent unions and trades councils are fully engaged on the proposals prior to establishment.

RED PAPER COLLECTIVE – WHO WE ARE/INVITE US TO A BRANCH MEETING

The Red Paper Collective came together at the end of 2011 after it became clear that there would be a referendum on independence in Scotland.

We asked what constitutional change could deliver for working people. We were concerned about the redistribution of wealth and control of the Scottish economy, particularly as most of the Scottish business is owned outside Scotland.

We opposed the disastrous move of the Labour Party joining with the Tories in 'Better Together' arguing that the case to voters needed to be built around progressive, socialist, policies and solidarity.

There is now a well-researched publication outlining how our case for Progressive Federalism can work:

<https://redpapercollective.net/?p=22>

If you would like to invite a member of the collective to a future branch or trades council meeting, please contact:

redpapercollective@yahoo.co.uk