

Dramatic rise in support for the Scottish National Party

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Since last year's 75 percent 'yes' vote for the setting up of a Scottish Parliament in 1999, opinion polls and by-elections have consistently registered a dramatic and growing electoral swing from the Labour Party to the Scottish National Party (SNP). This month one poll put the SNP at 48 and Labour at 34 percent, compared to February this year when the SNP polled only 33 against Labour's 44 percent. A recent council by-election in North Lanarkshire showed a massive 36 percent swing from Labour to the SNP.

This has provoked a series of panic measures from the Labour Party. Besieged by hostile newspaper editorials, Labour has appointed a 'rapid rebuttal team' and a new deputy to Scottish Secretary Donald Dewar, to attack the SNP.

There is growing concern amongst sections of big business that the SNP could win a majority in the new parliament and may then seek to force a referendum to separate Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom. Labour's policy of establishing regional government was meant to provide a safeguard against the growth of separatism, while using it in order to divide the working class and encourage competition for investment. It has only fuelled the growth of nationalist sentiments, posing the British ruling class with the threat of a break-up of the UK.

Outside its traditional rural heartlands, the most dramatic swing to the SNP can be seen in urban working class areas, where Labour has been in control for decades. Today, various Labour councils are mired in scandal, while social services continue to be destroyed under the New Labour government. Glasgow, East Ayrshire, and North Lanarkshire have all recorded very large swings to the SNP. In all three, thousands of council workers' jobs are under threat. The opinion poll in Glasgow registered a drop in Labour

support from 63.6 to 43 percent.

For years, every political event in Scotland has been portrayed through the lens of the so-called 'Scottish question'. Every mainstream political party, excepting the Tories, has claimed that the source of poverty, inequality and unemployment in Scotland was 'English rule'. The solution was universally acclaimed to be 'Home Rule', ranging from a devolved Scottish assembly to outright independence.

Until recently, both Labour and the SNP claimed that a devolved parliament or separation would allow measures to alleviate poverty to be introduced. However, confronted with a Labour government worse than the Tories before them, sections of workers have begun to conclude that an SNP led assembly with or without separation is a viable alternative to the Labour government in Westminster.

The question facing the ruling class is how to control the SNP and restrain it within the context of the UK, while continuing to use the 'Scottish question' as an essential instrument of rule in dividing English and Scottish workers.

The SNP have indicated their willingness co-operate. They recently formed a 'Business for Scotland' campaign group. Having for decades promised a broad, if limited, programme of social reform that could be achieved through independence, they have since erased 114 pages from their web site referring to such policies!

The July 10 edition of *The Scotsman* commented on the possibility that the elections might see SNP leader Alex Salmond as First Minister in an SNP/Liberal Democrat or SNP/Labour coalition. This would allow Salmond to present the SNP as the best defenders of 'Scottish' interests, promoting Scottish business within the UK and Scotland as an investment location internationally.

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