

The Scotsman newspaper misrepresents SEP campaign

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On April 18 *The Scotsman* newspaper published an election round-up of what it describes as the “small parties” standing for election to the Scottish parliament on May 3.

Written by political correspondent Louise Gray it covered 23 parties, running a brief description of their policies beneath their names and symbol.

The Socialist Equality Party was misnamed as the Scottish Equality Party. This is despite its logo being published along with a link to its website www.socialequality.org.uk. One must assume that Ms. Gray visited the site in order to make her compilation.

To make matters worse, the one sentence description of the SEP’s policies fundamentally misrepresented what we stand for. It stated that the party’s “Five candidates in the West of Scotland calling for a ‘genuinely Socialist Scotland.’”

The use of quotations implies that this is taken from the SEP’s manifesto, when it is not. Even assuming Ms. Gray could only be bothered to give a cursory glance at the SEP’s policies, to get both its name and central message wrong would be an example of journalistic incompetence.

Her reference to “genuine socialism” has only one possible source in the SEP’s manifesto, in the second paragraph where it calls for a “new and genuinely socialist movement” against the Labour government.

The next paragraph explains, “We seek to unite workers throughout Britain with their brothers and sisters internationally in opposition to the eruption of US aggression, which, with Labour’s support, threatens to spread the illegal wars against Iraq and Afghanistan into Iran.”

Had Ms. Gray taken the time to read any further she would have found numerous passages explaining the SEP’s opposition to the separatist agenda championed

by the Scottish National Party and its left appendages such as Solidarity and the Scottish Socialist Party.

The manifesto even has a section under the heading “For the unity of the British, European and international working class.” In this section the manifesto states “We oppose all those who portray Scottish or Welsh nationalism as the basis for the construction of a new workers’ party, and who support the efforts of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru to attribute the problems in these countries to ‘English’ rule.

“Such claims glorify the Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly as being somehow more democratic than Westminster, and seek to obscure the essential social interests that dictate policy in these devolved bodies.

“National separatism has nothing to do with socialism. It expresses the interests of a layer of the aspiring middle class who are seeking to make their own relations with local capital, the transnational corporations and the European Union.”

It should be noted that *The Scotsman*, like its competitors, has ignored the campaign of the SEP. And in what will almost certainly be its only mention prior to the May 3, it runs a single line report under the cynical headline “The good, the bad and the faintly ridiculous.”

The contempt and hostility expressed in the overall coverage also conditioned the newspapers response when the SEP informed it of its political error. The politics desk and then the editorial office would do no more than promise to make a formal correction in its regular column buried at the bottom of the “Letters to the Editor” on page 30.

The correction, published in a small point size, reads, “In Election Agenda (18 April), the Socialist Equality

Party was incorrectly described as the Scottish Equality Party. The party would also like to point out it does not stand for a ‘genuinely socialist Scotland’, as stated, but for ‘genuine socialism in Scotland’. We apologise for the errors.”

The correction on the party’s policy as reported is clearly meaningless. When SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden, who is heading the West of Scotland regional list, spoke to Sonia Marshall of *The Scotsman*, he told her that the correction that she proposed to him would not clarify her paper’s readership as to the difference between the SEP and those supposedly socialist parties that champion Scottish nationalism.

To rectify this situation, Marsden said, a letter would be sent later that day for publication in *The Scotsman*. Marshall said the newspaper would “look out for it”, but could not guarantee its publication.

Within one hour, Marsden sent the promised letter, which explained, “The SEP is the British section of the Fourth International, which seeks to unite the working class across all national, racial and ethnic divisions in the struggle for socialism. The formulation employed by the *Scotsman* suggests that the SEP supports Scottish separatism and is reminiscent of the slogans advanced by Tommy Sheridan’s Solidarity and the Scottish Socialist Party. In their case this translates into advocating a capitalist Scotland ruled from Edinburgh.

“We have nothing in common with such left nationalist formations,” Marsden continued. “Moreover, we have warned consistently of the political dangers of legitimising nationalism in the eyes of working people and the disastrous consequences of separatist movements internationally, not least in the Balkans.

“Socialism means ending the division of the world and its peoples into antagonistic nation states and implementing planned production for need not profit—something that will not be achieved by apologists for the pro-big business Scottish National Party and its ambitions to transform Scotland into a ‘tartan tiger’ to rival Ireland.”

The letter was not published.

The Scotsman’s response is highly revealing as to the degree to which the media seeks to marginalise a left wing opposition to nationalism.

In the first instance, the SEP is ignored and then—when the newspaper can do so no longer—its name

and policies are misrepresented. One should make clear that there is no such organisation as the Scottish Equality Party, which Gray confused with the SEP. She manufactured both the name and the quote.

If such an error had been made in connection with any of the major political parties, *The Scotsman*’s apology would have been grovelling. And there would have been no question of refusing to publish a letter from the offended organisation.



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