

Scottish Socialist Party denounces No2EU campaign—a tale of rival nationalisms

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The Scottish Socialist Party's (SSP) leading theoretician, Alan McCombes, has published a polemic against the No2EU campaign created by the Rail Maritime Transport trade union (RMT). Entitled "'Little Britain' politics and the left", it demonstrates how completely the nominally left groups have forged alliances with competing sections of the financial elite and the trade union bureaucracy.

The RMT and its leader Bob Crow formed No2EU as an electoral alliance with the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), a Stalinist tendency, and the Socialist Party (SP) for the June 4 European elections.

No2EU advances a nationalist opposition to the European Union, based on an alliance with British-based business. The campaign emerged following the protests around Lindsey refinery, where a section of the trade union bureaucracy, backed by the CPB and with the SP acting as apologists, sought to channel workers grievances into a struggle over quotas guaranteeing "local jobs" against the use of foreign contractors. The slogan that dominated the dispute, which was taken up by the right wing media and the British National Party, was "British jobs for British workers".

No2EU takes this perspective to its logical conclusion, a defence of British sovereignty and independence from Brussels as the supposed basis for securing workers' living conditions.

It calls for a "Europe of independent, democratic states" and to "Repatriate democratic powers" to EU members so that a Labour government can supposedly "defend public services such as Post Offices and the NHS and...renationalise our railways and develop manufacturing in Britain".

No2EU's backers include the SP as well as Solidarity, Scotland's Socialist Movement, led by former member of the Scottish parliament for the SSP, Tommy Sheridan. The SSP, SP and Solidarity all trace their roots to the Militant Tendency, which operated as a faction within the British Labour Party for most of the post-war period.

Militant for decades opposed any attempt to build a party outside of the Labour Party. Its perspective was to transform Labour into a vehicle for realising socialism through parliament. It defended this until the transformation of "New Labour" into an avowedly pro-business party and the mass

disaffection of workers from it made it impossible.

Militant was reluctantly forced to abandon work in the Labour Party, provoking a split in its ranks. The section of Militant led by Peter Taaffe championed the "Open Turn" and formed Scottish Militant Labour as an independent group on the basis of adapting to Scottish nationalism, and later the Socialist Party in the rest of the UK.

Forming an alliance with other left groups, Stalinists and environmentalists, the group championed Scottish independence as the basis for securing social reforms based on claims that Scotland's workers were more politically advanced than those in the rest of the UK. The Scottish Socialist Party was formed to stand candidates for the Scottish parliament and split from their former comrades in England and Wales and has operated throughout as a pressure group on the Scottish National Party (SNP).

In 2006, the SSP split following a libel case involving Sheridan and the tabloid *News of the World*. Two programmatically identical parties emerged, the SSP and Solidarity, which was supported by a group sympathetic to the SP and affiliated to its Committee for a Workers International (CWI) as well as the Scottish-based members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Sheridan has moved into No2EU, despite its leading tendency, the Communist Party of Britain, opposing Scottish independence. In addition, the SWP in Scotland is now standing as part of an election alliance that is not supported by the SWP south of the border.

McCombes makes much of these opportunist twists and turns only in order to reassert support for Scottish nationalism.

The SSP views No2EU's defence of "British" interests as detrimental to the fight for Scottish independence. It continues to present the SNP under Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond as a progressive alternative to the Labour Party.

Presenting the EU in the best possible light is a necessary component of the SSP's support for Scottish independence. For decades, the SNP, in government in Edinburgh since 2007, has advanced "Independence in Europe" as one of its main slogans. The SNP policy for an independent Scotland is heavily reliant on being recognised by the EU. Certain areas in Scotland have received considerable levels of EU infrastructure funding.

Although the SSP claims that independence will create the best conditions for establishing socialism, its actual perspective is for an independent capitalist Scotland. Similarly, though McCombes calls for a “social Europe”, he makes clear that this is only reform of the EU—a “new European Union based on democracy, diversity and decentralisation”.

The SSP will “campaign with the left across Europe for the downgrading of the European Commission to the status of an administrative backup unit”, he continues.

Nowhere is the character of the European Union as an instrument of European capital even alluded to. There is no suggestion that the EU is an imperialist power bloc in its own right, an ally and rival to the United States, a powerful, rich, armed and dangerous enemy of the working class across Europe and beyond. Instead, McCombes cites French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in their denunciation of the “Anglo-Saxon counties” for “dragging the world economy into a deep slump.”

Despite acknowledging that EU directives are pushing forward privatisation, McCombes exonerates the continent’s ruling parties. “Across Europe, even the right wing parties appear more left wing than Britain’s three big parties,” opines McCombes.

In the end, McCombes makes clear that his primary objection to No2EU is that “while supporting the right wing conception of ‘British sovereignty’ [No2EU] does not support the progressive idea of Scottish independence”.

“The balance of class forces in Scotland is overwhelming tilted towards the working class”, he claims, “a process which will be accentuated in the years to come as a consequence of the collapse of the countries two major capitalist institutions, the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Bank of Scotland”.

The collapse of RBS, Scotland’s financial flagship and HBOS, are symptoms of world economic meltdown, which do signal a dramatic turn in *global* politics. Immense class struggles are on the agenda, but success depends on the ability of the working class internationally to forge a unified struggle against globally-operating capital. The national divisions championed by McCombes serve only the interest of the ruling elite.

The SSP’s perspective articulates the interests of a middle class layer that has sought to secure its interests by asserting Scotland’s right to control tax revenues from North Sea Oil and its once burgeoning financial sector, while attracting investment through low corporate taxes.

By threatening to separate from the UK, the regional bourgeoisie and its petty bourgeois hangers-on have secured greater social spending for Scotland than other UK regions, though this did not counter the appalling levels of deprivation to be found in parts of Glasgow and Edinburgh

It also secured Scotland its own regional parliament, Holyrood, which provides opportunities for employment and social advancement to far greater numbers than its 129

members. For years the pay packets of its six MSPs, their expenses, etc., largely funded the SSP.

The sharp loss of financial weight in Edinburgh makes support for the EU even more central to the independence rhetoric of both the SNP and its political shadow, the SSP.

RBS is now owned by the British government, its gargantuan debts guaranteed far beyond the resources of any conceivable Scottish government to sustain. The nationalists once hailed Ireland and Iceland as proof that small countries with rich resources and an ability to set their own tax levels represented an “arc of prosperity” that Scotland could join once freed from control by London. Instead Scotland has joined these states only inasmuch as it has also suffered a financial collapse.

This leaves the SSP even more reliant on appeals to EU largesse to back up its claims that an independent Scotland can resolve the social questions facing the working class, accompanied by ever more overt displays of national chauvinism. McCombes complains, for example, that No2EU’s list of candidates “was not even decided in Scotland.... It was drawn up in London...by two London controlled factions who are anti-independence—the Socialist Workers Party and the CWI.” The No2EU coalition was even “launched from London”.

The working class must reject the contending nationalist demagoguery of both SSP and No2EU. Rather working people must advance their own strategy to unify Europe and bring an end to the profit system. Only by establishing the United Socialist States of Europe can the continent’s immense wealth and vast productive resources be directed towards fulfilling social need.



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