

Ex-left seek alliances with Scottish National Party

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The election of a majority Scottish National Party government, controlling 69 of the 129 seats in the devolved Holyrood parliament, came after a campaign in which it received the backing of key sections of the ruling elite. This included the endorsement of the *Sun* and *Scotsman* newspapers, as well as leading business figures, whose support ensured that the party far outstripped its rivals in private donations. One of their leading donors, multimillionaire businessman and evangelical Christian Brian Souter, was recently awarded a knighthood by the Queen.

In their own embrace of the nationalist victory, the pseudo-radical groups in Scotland are revealing themselves as the left flank of the ruling class. At a time when the SNP is imposing significant attacks on workers, the SNP and the demand for an independent Scotland is being boosted by groups such as the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), Socialist Party (SP), and the International Socialist Group (ISG) as a means of betraying the emerging struggles of the working class.

In a piece entitled, “Why the left should back independence”, the SSP’s leading theoretician Alan McCombes bluntly lays out his party’s perspective. For McCombes, the existence of a capitalist world divided into nation states is a reality that the “left” must simply accept. On the issue of fighting for socialist internationalism he wrote, “Such a world may well be built sometime in the distant future by generations who are not yet born. But how do we begin to move from here to there? And how do we apply the principles of socialist internationalism to the 21st Century world that we live in?”

McCombes insists that the “move” to socialism will come by supporting and advocating nationalism. According to him, a capitalist Scotland represents a bastion of democracy compared to the British state. He

argues, “An independent Scotland would also mark an important democratic advance.... Whatever the shortcomings of the Scottish Parliament, it has marked an important democratic advance, opening areas such as health, education, transport and the environment to public scrutiny and democratic accountability for the first time ever”.

It would not be unreasonable to ask McCombes for an explanation as to how, given the supposed “democratic” nature of the parliament at Holyrood, it is possible for a government to impose multibillion-pound cuts to vital public services in the face of mass public opposition. The very same areas that McCombes claims have been opened up to democratic accountability “for the first time ever”—health, education, transport and the environment—are those targeted for public spending cuts of over £3 billion by the newly installed SNP government over the next four years.

The reality is that Scotland is an integral part of the British capitalist state, and its ruling elite has shared, and continues to share, in the spoils of the exploitation of the working class at home and the despoiling of the world’s resources and peoples by imperialism.

This has been on full display since the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008. When the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Bank of Scotland (HBOS) faced imminent collapse, it was a multibillion-pound bailout from the government in London that prevented this. To pay for this bailout, the Conservative/Liberal-Democrat coalition in London, like its Labour Party predecessor, is working closely with the SNP in Edinburgh to ensure that massive cuts to public spending can be made on both sides of the border.

As well as the imposition of austerity, the SNP has worked closely with the Tories and Lib-Dems on the

question of military spending. It has pushed strongly for the maintenance of British military bases in Scotland that are threatened with closure, as was demonstrated recently with regard to RAF Lossiemouth.

This is a relationship that McCombes deliberately obscures when he offers as proof that Scotland stands further to the “left” than other parts of Britain the SNP’s election on a “left of centre social-democratic manifesto”.

McCombes is not alone in his praise for nationalism and the SNP as a counterweight to the cuts being made in London. The ISG, recently formed by a breakaway from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) led by former SWP Central Committee member Chris Bambery, holds a similar stance. The group’s latest articles go so far as to call for alliances with the SNP, asserting that “the Left will look like a backward break on the movement if it doesn’t initiate the support of the SNP where necessary”.

Referring to the planned closure of a care centre in Glasgow, which has been verbally opposed by SNP leader Alex Salmond, they continue, “If Salmond can intervene to publicly oppose community centre closures, we should encourage this, without losing our own criticisms and alternatives in the process. If the SNP has the power to defend a community centre, it also has the power to stop any other cut that is ruining people’s lives”.

The same article urges, “We should not fall into the intellectual trap of portraying the cuts as ‘inevitable’. If the SNP truly had the courage of its convictions, it is feasible to reject the £3.3 billion cut by Westminster to the Scottish budget over the next four years, set deficit budgets and mobilise the people of Scotland against austerity”.

Such appeals to national unity would not be out of place at an SNP campaign rally. If only “the people of Scotland” were united together—under an SNP’s leadership displaying the “courage of its conviction”—then the rejection of cuts that are being imposed by “English” rule would be a viable alternative.

This is a message with which McCombes fully concurs. He urges the SSP to campaign vociferously for a “yes” vote in the independence referendum, which the SNP has promised to hold in the current

parliamentary term, arguing, “Silence will not be an option. We will have to spell out where we stand. Do we stand with the forces of conservatism on the side of the Union? Or do we strike out courageously on the side of change through participation in the Scottish Independence Convention that could eventually pave the way to a new, socialist Scotland?”

The reference to a socialist Scotland is, of course, mere window dressing. McCombes has already dismissed socialism as a project for “the distant future” to be carried through “by generations who are not yet born”. He is for a capitalist Scotland, led by the SNP, with the SSP acting as its political stooges and apologists.

Working people must reject outright such appeals to nationalism. The SNP and Holyrood is no less a defender of the interests of big business and the ruling class than the Conservative-Liberal-Democrat government and the Westminster parliament.



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