

Murdoch press endorses Scottish independence

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The first Scottish edition of Rupert Murdoch's new *Sun on Sunday* contained a statement, headlined "Day of Destiny," that Scottish National Party government sources in Edinburgh had revealed exclusively that October 18, 2014 is the preferred date for a referendum on "independence and equality for Scotland."

The alliance between SNP leader and Scottish first minister Alex Salmond and the billionaire founder of News International testifies to the real character of the project for Scottish independence as an initiative carried through in the interests of the financial aristocracy.

The new Sunday tabloid, published to replace the *News of the World*, which closed following ongoing exposures of systematic phone hacking and corruption at News International, also featured a letter from Salmond.

His comments, oozing sycophancy, were an unqualified endorsement of the new tabloid and Murdoch's media empire. The first minister said he was "delighted" to see the new paper. The Leveson inquiry—set up in response to the hacking scandal—was looking at the practices in the industry as a whole, he stressed, as if the specific practices at News International were merely side events.

The *Scottish Sun* was, rather, an "example of the good newspapers can do," Salmond gushed. The launch of *The Scottish Sun on Sunday* was an important day "for Scottish public life as a whole," and the new paper "will play an important part in the great debate on our future", he wrote.

His praise followed on from tweets on Murdoch's personal Twitter account claiming that the SNP leader was "clearly the most brilliant politician in the UK" and endorsing Scottish independence.

"Let Scotland go and compete. Everyone would

win", Murdoch tweeted.

Salmond has systematically courted Murdoch since before the SNP won the 2007 election, when Murdoch still supported the Labour Party. He bombarded the oligarch with syrupy invitations to sporting and state events, hosting numerous meetings with News International executives.

As early as 1992, then-*Scottish Sun* editor Bob Bird abandoned the paper's traditional support for the Conservative Party and sought to persuade Murdoch to back the SNP. Although the Labour Party won its support in 1997 and again in 2007, Salmond was paid £15,000 annually for his weekly column in the newspaper between 1998 and 2003.

Commentators on News International note that Murdoch's enthusiasm for Salmond has really warmed in the last 12 months, precisely when the phone hacking scandal has been filling column inches in publications produced by all of Murdoch's rivals. Murdoch's biographer, Michael Wolff, described the oligarch as seeking revenge on both the Labour Party, whose MP Tom Watson has been prominent in the campaign against News International, and even the whole of Westminster. Murdoch, his son James and numerous News International executives have had to appear before the Leveson inquiry as it proved impossible for the ruling elite to any longer conceal the extent of illegal activities at News International.

More is at stake, however, than simple revenge.

Press reports last week suggested that Murdoch had offered to headquarter News International or its satellite wing BSkyB in Scotland if Salmond could offer a corporation tax rate of between 10 and 15 percent. Murdoch, in return, reportedly offered to campaign for both independence and so-called "devo-max"—devolving corporate tax-cutting powers to the

Scottish executive in the Holyrood parliament.

Murdoch and the vastly wealthy layer he represents also see the SNP's proposals as a valuable precedent in furthering their ever-greater enrichment through the smashing up of social welfare and working conditions across Europe.

The SNP has long presented a low corporation tax rate as one of the fruits of its independence project, citing Ireland's 12.5 percent rate as a target. The party has offered tax cuts to its backers in big business and the financial sector, while attempting to project itself as an advocate of social reforms to working people.

It has been abetted in this deception by the various pseudo-left tendencies. They all hail measures such as free prescriptions and lower university costs—that are entirely dependent on the additional funding presently granted to Scotland from national revenues—as proof that full independence would be a basis for more extensive and progressive social reform.

Even so, the party's key perspectives of emulating Ireland, Iceland and the Scandinavian countries as part of an "arc of prosperity" and securing "independence within Europe" have taken a battering from the world financial crisis and the threat of the euro zone unravelling.

This has prompted Salmond to be far more explicit in guaranteeing to his big business backers that the SNP is fully committed to policies of austerity. Speaking on the BBC's *Sunday Politics* programme, he told Andrew Neil that the SNP would support a "stability pact" within a Sterling zone, with interest rates set by the Bank of England. "Your room for fiscal manoeuvre is limited in the modern world anyway," Salmond stressed, and a stability pact would ensure long-term borrowing "should not exceed three percent of GDP".

The combination of low corporation tax and restricted borrowing laid down by agreement with the Bank of England is an agenda for savage attacks on the working class. It is consistent with the SNP's policies to date of imposing spending cuts in alliance with the Conservative-led coalition in Westminster.

Recent figures released by the SNP administration concede that a further 18 percent of spending cuts can be anticipated over the next seven years, amounting to a total of £51 billion, compared to £39 billion announced last autumn. By means of a council tax freeze, the SNP

has imposed annual spending cuts on local authorities.

The SNP tries to conceal its own plans by blaming London and the Union with England and Wales for undermining social provision in Scotland. According to Salmond's deputy, Nicola Sturgeon, speaking at Glasgow University's School of Law, "Many see that it is the Union, under the Westminster government, that poses the biggest threat to [the] values and...vision" of the post-war welfare state. Independence, she claimed, offered protection from policies that "offend our sense of decency and social cohesion".

Murdoch's endorsing of the SNP and its independence project gives the lie to all such claims.

Whether as part of the UK, or as an independent state, capitalist rule will guarantee that Scottish workers will face the same devastating attacks as workers in England, Wales and the rest of Europe. The benchmark is no longer Iceland pre-2008, but Greece in 2012.

Opposing these plans means rejecting the policy of national divisions between workers and unity with sections of the ruling class as championed by the privileged layers of the middle class in academia, the trade union bureaucracy and their ex-left apologists.



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