

Ex-left groups champion “Yes” vote in Scottish referendum

Steve James

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The ex-left groups in Scotland have leapt to embrace the campaign for a "Yes" vote in the proposed referendum on Scottish independence, likely to be held in 2014.

Their position expresses the interests of a privileged layer of the regional middle class.

The official “Yes Scotland” campaign was launched in May. It is led by the Scottish National Party (SNP), the ruling party in Scotland’s devolved parliament at Holyrood. In power since 2007 and with a majority since 2011, the SNP is currently imposing public spending cuts on behalf of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government.

A few days later, the rather half-hearted “Better Together” campaign run by Labour, the Tories and Liberal Democrats was launched. Its position is to call for a "No" vote, while pushing further devolution.

Those endorsing the "Yes Scotland" launch included former RBS boss and hedge fund manager George Mathewson, a long standing ally of SNP leader Alex Salmond, Sir Brian Souter of Stagecoach, Sir Tom Hunter, Scotland's first billionaire, and Peter de Vink, a former fund raiser for the Conservative Party who manages his own investment consultancy.

De Vink has stated that independence will enable Scotland to stop being a “subsidy junkie”. It is the possibility of making massive cuts in public spending, while slashing corporate tax that is the basis for the support of such figures for the pro-independence campaign.

Also on the "Yes Scotland" platform was Colin Fox, co-leader of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). Fox has been announced as one of the campaign’s directors, while Mathewson has taken up an advisory role.

Fox's appointment alongside Mathewson and leading SNP figures underscores that the SSP is fully integrated into Scottish bourgeois politics and in an open alliance with a section of finance capital.

Similar interests inform the International Socialist Group (ISG), a Scottish-based split from the Socialist Workers Party. The ISG have no discernable political differences with the SWP, although their focus is primarily to push for Scottish independence.

The ISG have drawn a number of students and young people around them, including some who briefly supported the Occupy movement in Glasgow and Edinburgh. A Radical Independence Conference has also been called for the autumn, with the support of various nationalist writers and cultural figures.

The ISG recently published a pamphlet, “Britain Must Break”, written by former Glasgow University student journalist James Foley, which recycles many of the positions held by the ex-left. Foley presents a “Yes” vote in the referendum as a stand against austerity and war. His claim is that the break-up of the United Kingdom, regardless of what replaces it, must be supported.

Foley writes and argues like a snake oil salesman, concealing the real social interests arguing for a “Yes” vote. His principle concern is that the rightward trajectory of the SNP threatens to discredit the entire independence project before it has even been put to the vote.

He concedes that “SNP are not a left-wing party” and that there “is a mutual admiration between British elites and Alex Salmond”. He even states that “we have Thatcherism with Scottish characteristics.”

The reason for this, according to Foley, lies not with the SNP's big business agenda but that Salmond is not Scottish enough. “The problem with Alex Salmond is that he concedes too much to Britain's national ideology.”

Foley outlines the growth of inequality in Britain under both the Tories and Labour and announces that British nationalism is “bound up with preserving the bounty of elite privilege”. The absurd implication is that Scottish nationalism is free from association with a section of the capitalist class.

The historical development of *all* serves to secure the domination of one or other section of the capitalist class over the working class. Scottish nationalism, whether it takes the form of the Saltire-waving jingoism popular in the SNP, a supposedly left variant of the same, or the pro-British Scottish nationalism of previous decades, is no exception.

The theories, symbols and cultural reference points of the entire ideological scrapyard known as Scottish nationalism serve in final analysis only to advance the class interests of Scottish-based banks, financiers, companies, and their wealthy hangers-on in the media, academia and the trade union bureaucracy in a country that has long formed an important constituent element of British imperialism.

The shift of a layer of the regional bourgeoisie away from its alliance with the rest of the UK is solely in order to secure more relations with transnational corporations and investors, while promoting Scotland as a low-wage corporate tax haven within the framework of the European Union.

Foley presents a brief outline of British imperialist crimes and reviews the current role of British imperialism as a junior ally of the United States, as if all of this would change with independence. He states: “An independent Scotland would face no military enemies. The rational decision is to break from the orbit of Anglo-American imperialism.”

He calls for a commitment to abolish Trident nuclear missiles in favour of “genuine multilateralism in the United Nations and commitment to resolving conflicts by negotiation and diplomacy.”

The eruption of US militarism rests on the drive by US imperialism to reorganise the globe in its own interests. British imperialism, supported by all the official British parties, plays the role of its vicious and thieving sidekick.

Foley’s embrace of the United Nations—a clearing house for innumerable imperialist crimes that has lent its blessing to one imperialist war after another—shows how far the ISG is away from genuine socialism. His assertion that Scotland can somehow step aside from this unfolding re-division of the world’s resources ignores the fact that an independent capitalist Scotland would be a minor imperialist power, much like Denmark or Norway, and seek ways to benefit from such a re-division.

The SNP understands this very well. Its leadership is insisting on their right to all British military resources on Scottish territory, including submarines, fast jets, frigates and an army brigade. Their intention is to work with the

nationalist British military within NATO, while securing a greater freedom of manoeuvre to pursue their own interests, particularly in the Arctic. The SNP has also stressed that the call for Trident missiles to be moved should be seen as an opportunity to buy more “conventional” arms.

Foley outlines a minimal and vaguely reformist programme, predicated on Scottish independence. “Those who look to a post-British future, and have most to gain from it, are working people in Scotland, especially young people,” he claims.

The chauvinism of this statement is clear enough. Foley is well aware that working people, especially young people, across Britain and Europe are facing an unprecedented assault on their living standards. His answer is that Scottish workers should simply go it alone and all will be well. Not only does this divide the working class in the UK in its struggle against big business. Anyone who believes Scottish workers would benefit from setting up a smaller country should look to the fate of Greece.

At crucial junctures over the last four decades, particularly 1974, 1979 and 1999, appeals for devolution or independence projects for Scotland and Wales, alongside regional projects in England, have been brought forward by the ruling class to break up and disarm unified movements in the working class in defence of living standards.

To confront big business-driven austerity measures, militarism and war requires a united social and political struggle by the European working class aimed at the abolition of capitalism. This is what the entire Scottish nationalist project is directed towards preventing—and why it has the support of the ex-left.



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