

Scotland's Radical Independence Conference pledges to divide the working class

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The Radical Independence Conference, held in Glasgow late November, was neither radical nor independent.

An aspirational middle class layer led by the ex-left tendencies, and including Scottish nationalists, Greens, pacifists and former members of the Labour Party, put forward a jumble of vaguely left and green-sounding proposals premised entirely on the creation of a Scottish capitalist state.

All are politically tied to a section of the financial oligarchy that sees independence as a means of attracting global investors primarily through tax cuts that demand the smashing up of the living standards of the working class.

The specific role of this unprincipled amalgam of political groups is to sell this agenda to workers and youth who are hostile to its more overt proponents, the Scottish National Party, whose own pretensions to left reformism have not survived the austerity measures it has imposed at the devolved Scottish parliament at Holyrood and in various local authorities it controls.

That is why Scottish First Minister and SNP leader Alex Salmond was among the first to welcome the holding of the convention. He told Northsound radio, "As the largest party in Scotland the SNP is the anchor of the independence cause, however we know and welcome that the journey to independence is not just about political parties but also about the growing independence movement.

"We welcome voices to the left of the SNP's social democratic position speaking up in favour of independence—just as we welcomed the creation of Labour for Independence and welcome support for independence from the entrepreneurial and more free-

market perspective."

Salmond is right at least in placing the nationalism espoused by the Radical Independence Convention in a political spectrum stretching to the "entrepreneurial" and "free market" perspective that in fact animates the independence project his own party is pursuing. His economic blueprint for Scotland is based upon pledges to make the country "among the 15 most competitive countries in the world" by lowering "corporation tax to 20 percent (currently 30 percent) to attract corporate HQ activity to Scotland and to make indigenous businesses more competitive", lower "business rates to below the English level", "Reduce business burdens which have a severe impact on small businesses in particular", etc., etc.

To conceal their support for such measures, Peter McColl, current rector of Edinburgh University, opened the convention with claims that "independence is an opportunity for radical change", while Patrick Harvie of the Scottish Greens insisted that independence would open up a "transformational change". Such statements have all the sincerity of the unspecified calls for "change", "hope" and "progress" made by US President Barack Obama and innumerable capitalist politicians.

Speaker after speaker expressed great excitement over the Scottish government's 2014 referendum on independence. All insisted that the problem facing humanity was not a world historic breakdown of capitalism and the danger of a descent into war, mass immiseration and barbarism, but the domination of neo-liberal ideology that somehow resides in London but has bypassed Edinburgh. All considered that a new capitalist state in Scotland would for some reason be less influenced by this ideology, and could therefore function as a more socially just, ecologically friendly,

nuclear-weapons-free paradise on earth.

The real social interests that lay behind this mass of vague and insincere promises are those of a relatively small middle class layer organised in various grandly-named groups that in some instances—such as Solidarity Scotland—barely function and which in all cases act as a mechanism for the political advancement of their core leadership figures. All are united by their efforts to personally benefit from the flurry of national and local government, institutional, cultural and trade union positions that will come with independence.

Writing on the significance of the congress, one of its more prominent participants, George Kerevan, stressed the opportunities for place and position he saw opening up:

“RIC proved much more than a tribal gathering of the left. In fact, a new political movement looks likely to emerge. ... New movements are difficult to predict or direct, which is why they are movements not parties. But the emergence of RIC suggests that there is a space in Scotland for a Red-Green Republican Left Party (or coalition of parties) committed to Scottish independence—a grouping that could command 10 or maybe 15 percent of the popular vote on a good day.”

The pseudo-left tendencies have a particular role in selling as progressive a nationalist agenda, knowing it to be a lie.

A workshop, “The Scottish Republic: what is real democracy?” included Neil Davidson of the Socialist Workers Party and Graeme McIver of Solidarity Scotland. Davidson admitted that there was nothing implicitly radical about independence. It was, he conceded, supported by Brian Souter, multi-millionaire boss of Stagecoach, and by George Mathewson of Yes Scotland, the official campaign for a “yes” vote, a former head of RBS bank who now runs a hedge fund.

Devolution and independence were in fact “delegating the axe to those below”. There was, he explained, “a tendency to devolve responsibility for the cuts as far down the chain as possible.”

Why then would anyone support independence? According to Davidson, “content to independence has to be supplied by us ... we have to push for answers outside of existing political structures. Independence opens up a space which we can fill with socialist ideas.”

The reason why Davidson needs to claim to be filling

independence with a socialist content was made clear by McIver. “People in this room, people on the left, people out there on picket lines don’t share our view of an independent Scotland”, he said. “Many of these comrades will be beside us on marches and picket lines, they believe in the unity of the British working class, they dismiss some of us who argue for independence as useful stooges of the ruling class.”

The ex-left groups are fully aware that they confront layers of workers who distrust the SNP and disagree with independence precisely because they recognise that it weakens the struggle to defend living standards, health care and social provision. The ex-lefts view a “radical independence” movement as a means of breaking down the deeply rooted convictions in the British working class that “unity is strength.”

In the aftermath of the convention, the December 1 edition of *The Scotsman* featured a column by Scottish Socialist Party convenor and board member of the Yes Scotland campaign, Colin Fox. He could not have done more to confirm the charge that the pseudo-left are useful stooges of the ruling class if he had set out to do so.

Fox noted that the SNP were fully aware that a referendum campaign based simply on support for the SNP and Alex Salmond would fail. “Scottish politics is far too tribal for one party to defeat all others in a straight vote”, he wrote. Fortunately, “all the parties involved in the independence movement realise it is much bigger than the sum of its parts. We are all fully committed to widening its base of support and to ensure it enjoys the backing of a majority of Scots in 2014.”



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