

Britain's Socialist Workers Party endorses Scottish capitalism

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The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) specialises in presenting Scottish independence in a pseudo-internationalist and democratic guise. It joined the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) between 2001 and 2006.

The SWP has now responded to the last year's announcement by the Scottish National Party (SNP) government in Edinburgh of the 2014 referendum on independence with a pamphlet, "Scotland, Yes to Independence, No to Nationalism," written by the party's Scottish organiser, Keir McKechnie.

The 36-page document makes yet more concrete the SWP's embrace of Scottish independence, despite the rightward march of the leading proponents of Scottish nationalism, the SNP, and more fundamentally the reactionary character of the independence proposal.

McKechnie acknowledges that the SNP "finds it increasingly difficult to hide its right face". Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* tabloid offering support for the SNP and independence has served to expose SNP leader Alex Salmond and his party as a neo-liberal outfit advocating a "race to the bottom" in terms of the pay and conditions of the working class.

McKechnie rejects most of the traditional lines put forward by the Scottish "left" nationalists. Scotland, he concedes, is not an oppressed nation. He also rejects the old "Its Scotland's Oil" slogan, arguing, "What happens to the oil in Scottish waters is nothing to do with national oppression and everything to do with capitalism in general."

He also admits that Scotland's working class is not more radical than its English counterpart, which is most often used to justify pioneering a more "progressive road" through independence. It is "false to counterpose Scottish and English workers' struggles, because these fights are linked together and the victory of each often depends on the other," he states.

Having said all this, one would think that McKechnie is obliged to reject the dominant position on the Scottish pseudo-left in favour of separatism. The garbled reiteration *ad nauseam* of these false and thoroughly reactionary positions constitutes the daily output of the SSP, for example.

McKechnie even acknowledges that in certain circumstances sections of the ruling elite might seek the break-up of the United Kingdom.

He muses, "the situation can arise when the immediate issue of workers' unity in struggle is the paramount consideration. At that moment the independence card would play into the hands of a ruling class keen to divide worker from worker."

This is a devastating statement. McKechnie sees fit to place a caveat on the importance of "workers' unity in struggle" and speaks only of a situation that may or may not arise when this becomes "paramount". But it is the fundamental basis on which socialists must oppose the cultivation by the pseudo-left of Scottish nationalism.

McKechnie never returns to the issue again in his pamphlet, but his co-thinker Neil Davidson, a historian, was more expansive. Speaking at the party's Marxism in Scotland 2012 event last year, Davidson stated, "In conditions of major working class insurgency across Britain, I think you would find sections of the ruling class who would say yes, let's split up the UK. This has happened before, in Yugoslavia, for example. Think about the arguments being put forward now by right wing provinces of Bolivia to break up away from a left wing government."

He went on: "It is not impossible. In fact, Winston Churchill came up to Edinburgh in 1946 and spoke at the Usher Hall. He said you know if Scots wanted to leave socialist tyranny of the Attlee government, I

would fully understand that and support it. That position could become real, it's something we have to be aware of. We support independence but it's not an absolute position."

"In certain circumstances we think it would be a diversion and a way of pulling attention away from the class struggle. That's not happening at the moment unfortunately, but bear in mind that might happen."

What are McKechnie and Davidson saying here?

Faced with ever-sharpening levels of austerity, an unrelenting offensive by the British ruling class against living standards and a deepening economic crisis with no end in sight, the leaders of the largest pseudo-left tendency in Britain reject basing their politics on the possibility of a "major working class insurgency" because...its "not happening at the moment".

Any genuine socialist, viewing the social crisis in Britain, in the global context of ongoing economic and political breakdown, would be forced to conclude that a "major working class insurgency" is inevitable and that their primary responsibility is to politically prepare such a movement, encourage it and seek to win leadership of it. They would aim to create the best conditions possible for that movement to develop into a genuine struggle against capitalism in Britain and internationally and thereby strengthen the working class everywhere.

Instead, the SWP embraces a strategy once promoted by Churchill in Scotland, utilised by British imperialism in India, Africa and Ireland, and deployed to a bloody conclusion in the restoration of capitalism via civil war in the former Yugoslavia. The same imperialist strategy of Balkanisation is currently in operation in Syria, with the full support of the SWP through its backing of the pro-imperialist insurgency.

Writing in the September 17 *Socialist Worker*, Dave Sherry sums up the SWP's argument in a few paragraphs. Shorn of all socialist rhetoric, it is a naked advocacy of a capitalist Scotland.

Support for independence is not based upon any democratic response to the popular demand of the working class, he admits. Rather, "Polls have regularly put support for independence at no more than a third and the Yes camp has been unable to shift opinion in their favour."

"Devolution has meant delegating responsibility for the cuts," he adds. As for independence, Sherry

declares, "The existence of Scottish nationhood is not in question and there is no reason why Scotland could not become a capitalist nation state like any other.... An independent Scotland would not be a socialist Scotland. Scots are not more left wing than the English and there can be no Scottish parliamentary road to socialism."

What then is left to justify support for independence? It rests upon McKechnie's pathetic claim, which most of the ex-left parrot, that "Independence for Scotland would diminish Britain's role as junior partner to US imperialism, weakening both sides of the 'special relationship'."

In reality, the emergence of powerful regional tendencies in Scotland, Wales, Quebec, Catalonia, the Basque country, Flanders and Northern Italy, to name only the most prominent, expresses the extent to which the old nation states of Europe and the world no longer function as the essential unit through which production is organised in a globalised economy. It is the wealthy elites of these regions who view the creation of their own mini-states, or greater powers to set corporation taxes at least, as a means to attract investment and enrich themselves in the process. The ex-left groups are vehicles through which a petty bourgeois layer seeks to benefit from these processes by hitching their political wagon to the regional bourgeoisie and its parties such as the SNP. In return, they specialise in providing a left veneer in an effort to sell a capitalist and nationalist agenda as some ill-defined step towards a Scottish "socialist republic".

This is a rotten and increasingly threadbare lie. The task before workers in Scotland and the UK is to join in struggle against their common enemy, whether they wave the Union flag or the Saltire. The overriding goal is not to build new, smaller states but to end the nation state system through social revolution and the building of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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