

# Scottish National Party issues independence blueprint

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The Scottish government's white paper, "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland," released November 26, reads like a cut and pasted prospectus for a minor business project. Even the preface's image of Scottish National Party (SNP) leader and Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond is taken from earlier SNP documents.

Notwithstanding its 670 pages, all the paper offers is a minimal—and fraudulent—package of social measures as a "progressive" fig leaf for its defence and elaboration of the class interests of the SNP leadership's wealthy backers. Stripped to its essentials, the SNP proposal reduces itself to the false claim that the creation of a new capitalist state in Scotland would offer workers some prospect of shelter from the worst assault on living standards and social conditions in modern history.

Independence, we are told, for example, offers the opportunity for a "transformational change" in child care in Scotland. There will also be some marginal protection for pensioners and welfare claimants, it is asserted, in comparison with what is currently available within the UK. The postal service will be taken into public ownership, health provision will not be privatised for the moment.

However, a much clearer indication of the social interests the white paper serves is the repeated insistence that a priority of independence would be a "pre-announced reduction in corporation tax of up to 3 percent," designed to "reverse the loss of corporate headquarters which has been a feature of the Scottish economy over the last 30 years."

National Insurance contributions and regulation for small businesses would also be cut.

The most detailed areas of the document deal with the SNP's efforts to find a *modus vivendi* with the rest of the UK, the European Union (EU) and the NATO military alliance, while giving the Scottish financial elite greater

freedom of manoeuvre to grab as much as they can.

The SNP envisage an 18-month "transition" period, following a "Yes" vote on Scottish independence, during which a carve-up of the UK's current and vast assets, obligations, services and state functions would supposedly be negotiated. These include North Sea Oil, the national debt, pension obligations, the civil service, the BBC, the armed forces, overseas embassies and property, to name only a few.

The SNP will nevertheless continue to seek support from the Bank of England, which will be "accountable to both countries, will continue to provide lender of last resort facilities and retain its role in dealing with financial institutions which posed a systemic risk."

Nowhere does the document mention the vast sums poured into Scotland's leading bank, RBS, at the expense of working people throughout Britain.

Sterling will be maintained as the currency of choice, through the creation of a Sterling Area.

The document contains a set of fiscal projections purporting to show how much better off Scotland would be if it controlled 90 percent of North Sea Oil. The SNP's figures are based on the most optimistic estimates about what might be extracted from the North Sea in the future, as well as on the assumption that this oil would be willingly and peacefully ceded to Scotland, an unlikely turn of events.

The SNP embrace of the EU, the instrument whereby European banks have fleeced the continent's working population and imposed brutal austerity on country after country, further reflects the party's social agenda. EU membership is "central to Scotland's continuing success as a leading financial centre," the white paper declares on behalf of the financial elite.

Elsewhere, the white paper makes clear that an independent Scotland would be as highly militarised a surveillance state as the UK it is seeking to leave. The

SNP intend to create “a new security and intelligence agency” among whose functions would be “traditional covert capability,” maintaining “intelligence sharing” with the rest of the UK (i.e., GCHQ, MI5 and MI6), while “developing closer relationships” with the “NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence; the European Network Information Security Agency; and the European CyberCrime Centre.” What an appealing prospect!

Scotland would also maintain the European Arrest Warrant regime, used to persecute WikiLeaks’ founder Julian Assange.

Despite calling for a marginally more lenient immigration policy, based on labour requirements and the dependence of Scottish universities on international students, Scotland would maintain its own visa system within the UK’s Common Travel Area. It is claimed this would not require internal borders. Failed asylum seekers would continue to be deported.

Lastly, the SNP document makes clear that the stated party policy of allowing no nuclear weapons on Scottish soil is worthless. Having agreed that negotiating the removal of Trident missiles would be an extended bargaining process, the white paper referred to Norway and Denmark’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach to nuclear armed NATO warships visiting their shores. “Scotland will adopt a similar approach as Denmark and Norway in this respect.”

None of this should have the slightest credibility in the working class. If it does, it is largely by default: the parties that officially oppose the SNP’s nationalist, pseudo-reformist agenda are thoroughly hated and discredited because of their policy of brutal social cuts and austerity—the Tories, Liberal Democrats and Labour, organised collectively in the “No” to Scottish independence campaign.

Responsibility for popular confusion as to the right-wing character of the SNP and its agenda lies chiefly with the myriad ex-left tendencies, who have lined up behind the independence campaign. Their specific role is to present the reactionary and divisive strategy of Scottish nationalism as progressive and opposition to it as a pro-imperialist defence of the British state. None of these tendencies continue to argue that Scottish independence would be a major step towards socialism. All they assert is that British imperialism would be weakened and an independent and capitalist Scotland would be somehow less reactionary.

The Scottish Socialist Party’s leader Colin Fox, for

instance, in all essentials dutifully echoes the propaganda of the SNP. He merely insists in his recent pamphlet “The Case for an Independent Scotland” that independence under capitalism in some unexplained way “offers working class people in Scotland the chance to ‘dodge the bullet’ that this recession represents.”

This is a rotten and conscious political betrayal. The SSP and similar tendencies are staffed by a petty bourgeois layer that sees “independence” as an opportunity to ride the coat-tails of the Scottish financial elite to secure positions of influence and privilege within the new state apparatus. To this end, they are prepared to lie through their teeth to the workers they claim to defend.

National states, large and small, act as mechanisms of rule for the bourgeoisie in its ongoing war against the working class. Nothing expresses this with greater clarity than the policies pursued collectively across Europe by all member states of the EU. The primary function of an independent Scottish state under capitalism would be to attract global investment and establish more direct relations with the major banks, corporations and speculators by offering to drive up exploitation, smash up wages and working conditions, destroy or privatise social services and eliminate as far as is possible taxes on corporate wealth.

To oppose this demands above all else a unified movement of the working class. From this essential criterion, the separatist agenda is reactionary, as it sows and reinforces national divisions at the very point when these must be overcome at all costs.

As with workers facing similar separatist movements in Spain, Belgium, Canada and elsewhere, the task confronting workers in Scotland, England and Wales is not the creation of new and even less viable capitalist states through the Balkanisation of the UK. They must seek instead to overthrow the British capitalist class and its governments in London, Edinburgh and Brussels, as part of a struggle for a workers’ government within the United Socialist States of Europe.



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