

# What is Scotland's Radical Independence Campaign?

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Set up in 2012, the Radical Independence Campaign's (RIC's) aim is to promote a yes vote in the referendum on Scottish independence due September 18.

Its second conference late last year in Glasgow included no debates, and, despite many speeches, there were no votes. If one wanted clarity on the RIC's position on anything besides Scottish independence, it could not be done. Neither does the RIC offer much explanation of its origins and history.

Yet the formation claims, in the words of one of its leading lights, Robin McAlpine of the Jimmy Reid Foundation (JRF), that "this is the new centre of gravity in politics in Scotland". More will be said of McAlpine, but although it cares not to mention it, the RIC, or at any rate its components, does indeed have a prehistory.

Among the organisations whose members are taking part in the RIC are what little remains of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the Socialist Workers Party, the International Socialist Group, the JRF and various members of the Green Party, Scottish National Party (SNP) and a host of smaller Stalinist, green, pacifist and nationalist groups.

These are the political forces who, for decades, have systematically promoted Scottish separation from the UK as the only conceivable means through which working people in Scotland can defend themselves.

The RIC's roots lie immediately in the spectacular implosion of the SSP between 2004 and 2006.

The SSP was formed in 1999 specifically to campaign for election to the newly opened Scottish parliament. The party, led by ex-members of the Militant Tendency led by Tommy Sheridan, drew together Stalinists and the middle class pseudo-left groups on the basis of falsely proclaiming that extending the powers of the Scottish parliament, up to and beyond independence, created a platform for social reform and represented a stepping stone to socialism. At its peak, the SSP won seats in the Scottish parliament, based on more than 6 percent of voters. Under the slogan of "self-determination," the SSP embraced the Scottish flag, celebrated Mel Gibson's idiotic *Braveheart* film, and advanced Scottish chauvinism crudely masked as opposition to the British government's social policy.

The party's embrace of Scottish nationalism was an expression of a broader response by the ex-left tendencies to the globalisation of capitalist production. Universally, the ex-lefts became flag wavers for the creation of new nation states based on the fragmentation of the working class and the destruction of its social conditions.

The material roots of this shift lay in the strivings of sections of the regional elite for direct relations with the transnationals, the European Union and US imperialism. The ex-lefts portrayed these sections of

the bourgeoisie in the most favourable light and supported separatist movements including those in Canada, Spain, Belgium and Britain. The eruption of civil war in the Balkans, where competing nationalist and regionalist tendencies, themselves supported by the ex-lefts, became instruments for the restoration of capitalism, was only the most immediately disastrous expression of this policy.

In Scotland, the character of the SSP's courting of the Scottish media and political establishment was sharply exposed in the legal battle between Sheridan and Rupert Murdoch's News International newspaper empire. Over the course of two trials, the majority of the SSP leadership pursued a factional dispute with Sheridan by systematically colluding with the press, above all with News International, the courts and the police to ensure the destruction of Sheridan's political career. Sheridan ultimately served six months in jail following a perjury conviction, largely set in motion by the SSP leadership stewarded by Sheridan's factional rival Alan McCombes.

Discredited in the working class by its collaboration with the state, the SSP largely collapsed and split in two. Both components lost all their parliamentary seats. Sheridan's party, Solidarity, was stillborn, while the SSP has been reduced to a rump nominally led by Colin Fox, who sits on the board of the official pro-independence "Yes Scotland" campaign.

The repellent debacle served only to politically disorient workers and young people, not least those who had given support to the SSP. Many SSP voters shifted to the SNP and helped it win the 2007 Scottish election, after which it formed a minority government.

But the intervening years have put the SNP and its perspective to the test. The party came to power presenting itself as a "social democratic" alternative to the Labour Party of UK prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. It won a majority in 2011 following the formation of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition in the 2010 UK general election.

During the SNP's period in office, world capitalism has been pitched into its greatest crisis since the 1930s. The Northern European "arc of prosperity," which the SNP used as an example of the benefits of independence, now includes two of Europe's most ruined economies—Ireland and Iceland. Norway, run by a far-right anti-immigrant government, sits nervously on a pool of oil cash but is wholly dependent on world oil prices, while Sweden, once the model of "welfare capitalism," is synonymous with privatisation and assaults on democratic rights.

The SNP's favourite bank, Edinburgh-based RBS—once one of the world's largest—was the recipient of a multibillion-pound bailout from the British Treasury and remains in state ownership. Resources to stabilise RBS, and the rest of the banking system, have been gouged

from the working class through the greatest onslaught on social spending in British history.

For its part, the SNP has not blinked from imposing all the cuts demanded by central government. Under SNP rule, public spending has fallen by 24 percent in Scotland, with only the complexities of the Barnett funding formula delaying the 30 percent cut levelled across England and Wales.

In acknowledgement of this, Prime Minister David Cameron conceded an independence referendum, reversing the policy of the previous Labour government.

For both the London and Edinburgh governments, the flag waving around the referendum serves to divert and divide the working class and block the development of a unified movement in defence of living standards. The SNP stands exposed as a tax-cutting party of austerity, differing with the Tories, Labour and the official “no” campaign only on independence.

This is why the RIC is crucial for the SNP, in presenting some form of left camouflage for a divisive and sharply right-wing policy.

Writing the day before the RIC conference, the former member of the International Marxist Group turned SNP-parliamentary candidate and right-wing commentator for the *Scotsman*, George Kerevan, took out a two-page spread in the paper headlined “Radical left’s referendum role”.

Kerevan hailed the RIC for providing a “non-sectarian platform”, “bringing together practically the entire Scottish left outside the Labour party” and called for the RIC to transform itself “into a popular movement” that can contribute to “meaningfully transforming Scottish society within the economic boundaries imposed by global capitalism.”

The 2013 RIC was more than ready to accept the parameters set by global capital on its independence agenda.

Former Labour politician Dennis Canavan, speaking at the opening plenary, hailed the forthcoming SNP white paper on independence and called for all criticism of the SNP to be suppressed. “Now you may not agree with all of the details in that plan,” said Canavan, “but...the prize of an independent Scotland and what unites us in pursuit of that prize is far more important than any point of disagreement.”

The white paper makes clear that the “prize” will be based on the intensified exploitation of the working class. An independent Scotland’s first priority would be the slashing of corporation tax by 3 percent to create one of “most competitive and attractive economies in Europe” for investment. Scotland would join the European Union, while remaining dominated by the Bank of England. It would create its own army, state and intelligence infrastructure to be used against the working class.

The rump SSP also praised the white paper. Writing in the *Scottish Socialist Voice*, Colin Fox declared, “There is much in the White Paper to welcome,” but warned that “if we are to win the working class majority to independence, we need to provide them with better reasons to vote Yes than we have done so far.”

In the same publication, Ritchie Venton, the SSP’s industrial commentator, was ecstatic that the trade union bureaucracy’s role would be enhanced by independence. “Trade unions and their members,” he insisted, “cannot afford to be neutral on the referendum.” He welcomed the proposal of “partnership” with the unions outlined by the SNP, including a “National Convention on Employment and Labour Relations, involving employers and trade unions”—in other words, an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy to suppress the working class.

The RIC and its ex-left components speak for a narrow layer of the middle class seeking the highly paid advisory positions, financial windfalls and ministerial posts that will come with the formation of a new state based on the break-up of assets currently controlled by the UK. Making this plain, McAlpine explained, “The negotiations for separation from the UK are absolutely crucial...whether this is the share of military assets we take, whether it is the share of debt and assets.”

He asked the conference, “Where do we want our embassies?”

To undisguised glee from the conference, thrilled at his audacity, he added, “We own 22 stops on the London Underground. London Underground is national infrastructure.... We paid for it because the Londoners believed that national infrastructure meant them.”

Indicating he would support a sell-off of London Underground, McAlpine noted, “There is a massive asset base there.”

“In our trade unions”, he stated, “in our business sector, our political sector and academia we have the knowledge and expertise, not only to make a very good negotiating stance but to really nail it home.”

McAlpine and the rest envisage a brutal and aggressive carve-up of assets, regardless of the consequences, so long as they get their share of the spoils.

The creation of a nominally independent Scotland would be a reactionary development that would set a dangerous precedent across Europe, and all working people should categorically oppose it. The immense social crisis in Europe cannot be resolved by the creation of new smaller and even less viable nation states, but only through transcending the nation-state system on which European capitalism is based. This poses the urgent need to construct a genuine socialist party, which seeks to unite workers across Britain, Ireland and Europe, for the creation of workers’ governments and the United Socialist States of Europe.

All those in Scotland who have a vote in the September referendum should vote against independence, as a declaration against nationalism of all stripes and articulating a desire to maintain a united front of the working class throughout the UK in the struggle against the common class enemy, whatever flag they might wave.



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