

Cameron appeals to “quiet patriots” to save the United Kingdom

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A speech by British prime minister David Cameron this month amounted to recognition that the British government is in danger of losing the September 18 vote on Scottish independence.

Speaking in London’s Olympic velodrome, Cameron draped himself in the Union Jack, evoked the long and bloody traditions of British militarism and appealed to patriots to mobilise to save the United Kingdom.

Cameron’s speech deepened what is fast becoming a major crisis.

Opposed by its Labour predecessor, the Cameron government agreed in 2012 to the Scottish National Party (SNP) referendum plan.

By insisting on a yes/no question on independence, Cameron reckoned that Scotland was certain to decisively reject the SNP’s proposition and put paid to the question for a generation. More devolution within the UK would then follow.

However, Cameron’s gamble has been shown to be reckless. While the “yes” campaign, remains behind in the opinion polls, the number of “don’t knows” is increasing as the poll date approaches.

Central to the “yes” camp’s appeal is the endlessly repeated lie that the brutal austerity being imposed by Westminster can only be alleviated by Scottish independence. And in his speech, Cameron made clear his government is intent on deepening the assault on living standards in all sections of working people in every corner of Britain—described euphemistically as “getting behind enterprise, dealing with our debts, a plan to give the people of this country peace of mind and security for the future”.

His one feint at expressing popular concerns could only sound as a grotesquely cynical note. “In this country”, claimed the wealthy hypocrite responsible for the most sustained fall in living standards ever seen

across Britain, “we don’t walk on by when people are sick, when people lose work, when people get old.”

Cameron could do no more than fall back on appeals to nationalism. He appealed “not so much to the people of Scotland but to the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland”. Cameron sought to warn “quiet patriots”, “shoulder shruggers” and those who “think we’d be better off without Scotland” that Scottish independence would be a serious blow.

He quickly revealed his true concerns to be the ability of British imperialism to compete against its rivals, stressing that “in the United Kingdom, Scotland is part of a major global player.... An open economy of 63 million people; we’re the oldest and most successful single market in the world, and with one of the oldest and most successful currencies in the world. That stability is hugely attractive for investors. Last year we were the top destination for foreign direct investment in Europe.”

“Together we’re stronger at getting out there and selling our products to the world.... We come as a brand—and a powerful brand,” he stressed.”

Cameron then celebrated the Scottish contribution to British militarism:

“Together, we get a seat at the UN Security Council, real clout in NATO and Europe, the prestige to host events like the G8. Together we’ve got the finest armed forces on our planet. I think of the fighter pilots originally operating from RAF Lossiemouth who flew sorties over Libya; the legendary Scottish titles now part of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, like the Black Watch and the Highlanders....

“It’s about Lord Lovat on the beach on D-Day, the bagpipes playing as his brigade landed ashore. It’s about HMS Sheffield, HMS Glasgow, HMS Antrim, HMS Glamorgan grey ships ploughing through grey

seas for 8,000 miles to the Falkland Islands,” he added for good measure.

All of this could have been written as a political broadcast on behalf of the pro-independence campaign. Indeed the “yes” side, into which all ex-left parties are integrated, has developed momentum precisely because the “no” camp incorporates the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats—parties who are hated and associated with austerity and illegal wars such as in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya.

This legitimate sentiment is being channelled behind the SNP and the bourgeois forces it represents, in large part thanks to the universal line-up of the pseudo-left behind the call for an “independent” Scotland.

No one wants or should want to be part of “Brand UK.” But the “Yes” camp want to replace this only with “Brand Scotland”—the creation of a new capitalist enclave based upon the gutting of welfare in order to facilitate low corporation tax and other measures designed to create a cheap investment platform with access to the European market.

The reality is that, in its essentials, the SNP’s aims are at one with the agenda outlined by Cameron—differing only in that they want more of the spoils from the exploitation of the working class to remain in their pockets and their business associates in Edinburgh and Glasgow. That is why the SNP wants to be able to set tax rates, but keep the pound and the monarchy, and to have membership of the European Union and the NATO military alliance. That is why its record in office has been one of imposing cuts whenever they have been demanded, relying on a favourable dispensation of UK taxes to make them slightly less onerous in some spheres. This would all escalate after any vote for independence.

For working people, the fundamental question that must determine the attitude taken to the referendum campaign is: what will facilitate a struggle against the ruling class?

The constant refrain of groups such as the Scottish Socialist Party and others gathered under the banner of the Radical Independence Convention is that anything that weakens the UK is by definition anti-imperialist and progressive. This is a lie. Today we are very close to the breakup of the UK, but this has led only to an outpouring of nationalist filth with workers urged to line up behind the Union Flag or the Saltire.

The end result is the division of the working class at a time when a unified struggle against militarism and in defence of jobs, wages and essential provisions such as the National Health Service is of paramount importance. The SSP knows this very well. It claims to be “a working class party,” only to boast, “But we work with other parties on the immediate objective of independence. The SSP was the first party in Scotland to sign up to the cross-party Independence Convention, which now draws together the SSP, the SNP, the Greens and a range of individuals.”

As far as the SSP et al are concerned, the Scottish working class are nothing but election fodder for the SNP. The working class in England may as well not exist—they merit no mention at all in the SSP’s policies.

The implications go far beyond Scotland.

Throughout the UK, the same demands for a bigger slice of the cake that inspire the bourgeoisie and their petty bourgeois placemen in Scotland are being raised in Wales and even in England’s northern regions and cities such as Sheffield. This balkanisation, with the disastrous results already witnessed in the former Yugoslavia, is now in danger of being repeated across Europe—beginning with the break of Catalonia and other regions from Spain.

Workers in Scotland should register a no vote, not out of loyalty to the UK state but in recognition of the need to continue and deepen three centuries of struggle against the common enemy by the British working class. That fight today demands not the setting up of new capitalist states, but the overthrow of capitalism and the formation of a workers’ government. It must be waged not only on an all-UK basis, but as part of the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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