

George Galloway defends British capitalism in Scottish referendum campaign

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Former Labour Party MP George Galloway has held a series of meetings throughout Scotland calling for a “No” vote in the Scottish independence referendum scheduled for September 18.

In opposing independence, Galloway is attempting to secure support from broad sections of the working class who are hostile to the separatist agenda of the Scottish National Party and its supporters in the fake left. Several hundred people attended his speaking appearances at various locations as part of his ongoing “Just Say Naw” tour.

In his public speeches, Galloway has denounced the campaign for Scottish independence for dividing workers. Paying reference to the historic struggles of the British working class, he has stressed that there are no fundamental differences between the lot of a worker in Glasgow and one in Liverpool. He has also criticised the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) economic policy for its reliance on North Sea oil, and its failure to clarify its position on which currency would be used if Britain refused to allow the use of the pound.

Galloway, however, is an inveterate opportunist—one all too adept at utilising left-wing phraseology to bolster his own right-wing agenda, whether that is bolstering the credentials of various bourgeois nationalist leaders or various Muslim “community leaders” allied to his Respect Party.

So it is the case in the Scottish referendum where his evoking of the common conditions facing workers in the UK is aimed not at forging class unity against the ruling elite but at promoting national unity against the potential rivals of British capital. For all his complaints against the supporters of Scottish nationalism, he is no less hostile to the independent political mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme than the pro-independence camp.

Despite his assertions to the contrary, Galloway

functions to all intents and purposes as part of the official “no” campaign “Better Together.” Following his speech at an Edinburgh debate, which was sponsored by the right-wing *Spectator* magazine, the Conservative-aligned publication asked whether out of all the UK’s politicians, Galloway could be the one to “save the union”.

The *Spectator*’s online editor Sebastian Payne reported, “Unionists frequently lament the lack of passionate figures on the Better Together campaign, able to take on [SNP leader] Alex Salmond. Thankfully, there is at least one such person—George Galloway. His nine-minute speech at last night’s *Spectator* debate is one of the most forceful and convincing arguments we’ve heard so far against Scottish Independence.”

The enthusiastic praise was occasioned by Galloway’s Edinburgh speech, which also formed the basis of an article in the right-wing *Daily Mail* under the headline “This new battle of Britain is nearly as vital as the last.”

Galloway invoked the legacy of World War II as a time when Britain stood together as one nation against a common enemy. This period in history saw “Brylcreem boys from all classes and every part of our land” come together at “a moment of national peril.”

“If we had not stood, but capitulated like others had done before us,” he continued, “we’d be having this meeting this evening in German.”

“A similar spirit of national unity was required today,” he went on. “We will need to pull together as one mighty effort employing every sinew of our strength. As with the last, if this battle of Britain is lost then they can bring the curtain down, at least on many of the ideals I and many people in Scotland and Britain still believe in,” he said.

Such appeals to national unity are deeply reactionary. In every country, the ruling elite are banging the drums of militarism and war. Still dripping with blood from its crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, Britain’s ruling elite is up to its neck in engineering new wars of “regime-

change,” whether in Ukraine or the Middle East. At the same time, tensions are once gathering within Europe between the major powers.

As for the need to “pull together,” Galloway makes such a call under conditions in which the bourgeoisie is implementing the most savage austerity measures since the 1930s, which are impoverishing millions of working people.

That is why he has been received so rapturously by the conservative right, which fully understands that radical sounding rhetoric is indispensable to conceal the predatory aims of British capitalism.

This in no way contradicts Galloway’s enduring loyalty to the Labour Party, which has sought to portray itself as the “one nation” party over recent years. Like Galloway, party leader Ed Miliband regularly makes calls in his speeches for national unity and “British values,” while adopting the anti-immigrant chauvinism of the populist right.

According to Galloway, a “real Labour” government is required to improve social conditions and redistribute wealth. This under conditions where the really existing Labour Party—as opposed to the illusion Galloway seeks to create—is committed to austerity.

Unsurprisingly, Galloway’s promotion of a party widely reviled for its assaults on social provisions and living standards at home, and aggressive militarism abroad produced hostility. Asked at another event what Labour could offer ordinary people, Galloway responded arrogantly that the previous Labour government introduced the minimum wage, a policy which has facilitated the slashing of wages and an explosion of low-paid jobs.

Galloway naturally made no reference to the fact that it was this same Labour government which organised the largest transfer of public funds into the hands of the super-rich in history with its implementation of the bank bailout in 2008 to avert the collapse of Britain’s financial sector. Nor did he raise the fact that it was under Labour that many of the moves to privatise health care and education, which have now been vastly expanded by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, were initiated.

Though Galloway was expelled from Labour following his opposition to the Iraq war, his subsequent political career has been dedicated to claiming that it is possible to pressure it to the left, while manoeuvring to advance his own personal and political fortunes.

Galloway maintains that the best way to achieve the goal of preserving British capitalism is through the

devolution of additional powers to a Scottish parliament and other regional assemblies within a federal Britain. At one of his public meetings, he boasted that the movement for home rule, which culminated in the establishment of the Scottish parliament in 1999, was initiated from his office in 1992. He added in his *Daily Mail* piece, “I was one of the leaders in the movement for Scottish devolution. It was right to set up a Scottish parliament and it is right that it will be given more powers.”

There is nothing to distinguish Galloway from the official campaign on this issue. Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats have promised that should Scotland vote no in September, plans for increased devolution to the regional parliament in Edinburgh will be brought forward. Labour has proposed a similar programme throughout England to enable business to play off one region against another.

Such proposals offer no alternative to working people. Increased powers for the Scottish parliament within the framework of a British capitalist state would merely be another means to intensify the race to the bottom in wages and living standards through the granting to regional administrations of more tax raising powers and responsibilities for budget setting. This would inevitably result in the elimination of what little remains of a welfare system as each regional administration seeks to compete against the others to attract inward investment.

It is not enough to “just say naw” in the referendum, as Galloway is advising in his campaign. Instead, a strong no vote must be combined with the drive to build a political party capable of uniting the working class throughout Britain and internationally on the basis of a socialist programme.



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