

Third televised debate in Scottish referendum: No one speaks for working people

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The third debate broadcast over the past month in the lead-up to the September 18 vote on Scottish independence revealed once again the right-wing character of both sides of the official campaign.

Neither side offers anything other than deepening austerity, increased national and regional tensions, and the danger of war.

The debate, broadcast on local channel STV on Tuesday evening, involved three representatives from both the yes and no camps. The pro-independence side was led by Scottish National Party deputy (SNP) leader Nicola Sturgeon, who was joined by the Green Party's co-leader Patrick Harvey and actress and long-time campaigner Elaine C. Smith. The no side was headed by Labour's Douglas Alexander, and included the leader of the Scottish Conservatives Ruth Davidson and the Labour Party's Kezia Dougdale.

As with the two previous debates involving SNP leader Alex Salmond and the Better Together campaign's Alistair Darling, none of the genuine concerns facing working people were seriously addressed.

Sturgeon began the debate with the yes campaign's usual refrain about Scotland being one of the wealthiest countries in the world. She attacked the idea that Scottish revenue had to be sent to Westminster and asserted that only a small fraction was spent in Scotland.

Such claims are a defining feature of every right-wing separatist tendency that has emerged in Europe. They appeal to a layer of the regional ruling elite and middle class seeking to benefit from the financial resources extracted through the exploitation of the working class by establishing their own capitalist state. The remainder

of the debate made this clear, with all three speakers on the yes side backing a cut in corporation tax rates as outlined in the SNP's white paper on independence.

Claims that Scotland faces the prospect of unheard of prosperity for all are entirely at odds with the trajectory of the global capitalist economy, which is entering an ever-deeper crisis. This reality was ignored completely in the debate, in favour of the nationalists' claim that an independent Scotland could somehow act as a socially progressive bastion against the global economy.

In reality, such a state would be entirely subservient to the major corporations and banks. The panel's refusal to seriously respond to a question from the audience on how much of the oil reserves around Scotland's coast were owned by the major corporations spoke volumes on this.

The hostility towards working people from everyone on the platform was sharply exposed when an audience member asked if independence would benefit the working class, and a further question was posed to both sides on which policies they would propose to assist workers. After an awkward silence, Smith, a self-proclaimed "socialist," requested that the moderator not ask her the question first. She then failed to mention a single step or measure that would benefit workers.

For her part, Dougdale defended the right-wing record of the Labour Party, holding up the minimum wage and benefit reforms as having helped workers back into a job. She promoted the campaign for a "living wage," which is a miserly £7.65 an hour, as a means to lift workers out of poverty.

The insincere exchanges on social issues illustrated the central role being played by the pseudo-left groups

in selling the reactionary project of Scottish nationalism to workers.

The Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), Scottish Socialist Party and others translate the right-wing politics of the official yes campaign into left-sounding rhetoric to attract sections of workers angered by the assault on their jobs and living standards imposed by all of the political parties in London and Edinburgh. It is this that primarily accounts for the rise in support for independence, which according to the latest UGov poll is now at 47 percent, rather than the bankrupt nostrums which dominated Tuesday night's debate.

The nationalist pseudo-left all hailed Salmond's performance in last week's debate as a "tack to the left" (*Socialist Worker*), even as he was restating his intention to enter a currency union to use the pound, join the European Union (EU), and orient to global investors and the banks. He then unveiled the powers he would use to attract big business to Scotland last Thursday, including reduced taxes and government subsidies.

Sturgeon and Co. repeated Salmond's line on all of these issues. Sturgeon and Harvey warned that a no vote could take Scotland out of the EU, because the Conservative government under David Cameron plans to hold a referendum in 2017. The only way to guarantee Scotland's place in Europe, they said, was by supporting independence.

The pro-EU position embraced by the entire yes campaign exposes all of its posturing over social justice and poverty for the fraud that it is. The EU has overseen some of the most devastating austerity measures across the continent since the outbreak of the financial crisis, something that was never mentioned by anyone on the platform. A newly independent Scotland seeking EU membership would have to comply with similar rigorous conditions as set out in the stability criteria, necessitating an intensification of the destruction of public services and jobs, and a lowering of wages.

A further complication may arise due to the SNP's currency plan. Olli Rehn, EU economic and monetary affairs commissioner until this year, declared on the day of the debate that the plan of using the pound sterling and the Bank of England as a lender of last resort would not comply with EU regulations stating that each member must have its own central bank.

As well as urging EU membership, Harvey, who is held up by the pseudo-left as a radical and speaks regularly at RIC meetings, called for the creation of a Scottish defence policy to tackle "human security" and the "security issues of the 21st century."

The key factor allowing the pro-independence campaign to portray such reactionary policies as progressive is the complete inability of the official Better Together coalition to appeal to popular sentiment on any major political issue. The independence backers benefit from facing the most politically discredited and hated forces in Labour, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Davidson defended the integrity of Britain's armed forces, warning against any discussion on unilateral nuclear disarmament. Ukraine had unilaterally got rid of its nuclear weapons, she said, and now Russian President Vladimir Putin had claimed Moscow could march on Kiev within two weeks. Such provocative claims are part of a propaganda drive to cast Russia as the aggressor in a conflict that has been encouraged from the start by the western powers.

The only response offered by Alexander and his colleagues to the SNP's nationalist demands for the "economic levers" of power to be brought to Edinburgh to serve "our" needs was to promise more regional devolution within the UK. Alexander outlined proposals to allow the Scottish parliament to vary income tax by up to 10 percent, borrow up to £5 billion for investment on the financial markets, and expand Holyrood's powers over welfare benefits. This is part of Labour's strategy of devolving powers to regional authorities and cities across England.

These proposals would encourage the intensification of regional and national tensions across Britain by promoting increased competition for resources and investment. It would assist in the on-going manipulation of such divisions by the official parties and trade unions to prevent the emergence of a united movement of the working class in opposition to the entire capitalist set-up.



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