

# UK party leaders in emergency visit to Scotland as official No campaign offers more regional powers

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The leaders of the three major British parties, Prime Minister David Cameron, (Conservatives), Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrats) and Labour's Ed Miliband made an emergency visit to Scotland on Wednesday to campaign in the independence referendum.

The visit follows a poll at the weekend showing support for separatism in a 51 percent majority for the first time. The poll triggered a political crisis within Britain's ruling elite, including widespread speculation over Cameron's future in the event of a Yes vote.

The pound fell precipitously, and billions were wiped off the value of banks and companies with links to Scotland. Financial analysts warned that ongoing instability surrounding the referendum could result in the currency dropping by up to 15 percent in the coming months.

On Tuesday, major Japanese investment bank Nomura advised clients to reduce exposure to British investments in the expectation of sharp declines. Scottish-based pensions fund Standard Life repeated its threat to move its business to England if Scotland became independent. Oil corporation BP issued a statement declaring that the best prospects for investment in the North Sea were through the maintenance of the United Kingdom.

The poll came in the wake of a series of surveys pointing to an increase in support for separatism. But to send Cameron, Miliband and Clegg to oppose this is equivalent to despatching the four horsemen to prevent the apocalypse.

The fact that a right-wing separatist project, led by an avowedly pro-big business Scottish National Party (SNP), can secure such widespread support reflects the utter bankruptcy of the entire "Better Together" No campaign and the hatred of the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour parties. So reviled are its leading representatives

that it has been unable to put forward a single positive argument in favour of maintaining the union.

In an opinion piece for the right-wing *Daily Mail* yesterday, Cameron appealed to Britain's standing in the world, writing, "If we pull together we can keep on building a better future for our children, we can make sure our destiny matches our history, because there really will be no second chances. If the UK breaks apart, it breaks apart forever."

Cameron said, "A hundred years ago, our boys went off to war together—and they did so as comrades, united by purpose and hope for a better world". Later, he commented that the UK was the "envy" of the world, having achieved the National Health Service (NHS) and state pensions that secured social welfare. But among working people throughout Britain the invocation of imperialism's bloody record as something to be proud of will provoke revulsion, perhaps more so still citing the achievements of the NHS and state pensions from someone heading a government hell-bent on destroying both.

In reality, all of the concessions won in the post-war period in Britain and internationally were forced from the ruling elite by the united struggle of the working class. This is the one overriding argument against efforts to divert social and political opposition behind calls for a separate capitalist Scotland that no one in official politics, least of all Miliband, can legitimately make.

Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish National Party, seized the opportunity to promote his regionalist agenda. He cast Wednesday's events as an example of "Team Westminster" taking on "Team Scotland," adding that the presence of the three party leaders was a sign of panic.

Telling something approaching the truth for once, Salmond remarked, "Our opponents are helping us

enormously, and their total disintegration is a helpful part. Contempt for Westminster is our major asset.”

On Tuesday, he outrageously claimed that the vote reminded him of South Africa’s first post-apartheid election in 1994. He told the *Guardian*, “Last Monday, I saw people queuing up—and it was not a short queue, a long queue—in Dundee to register to vote, almost reminiscent of the scenes in South Africa when some of a certain age remember 20 years or so ago people queued to vote in the first free elections.”

Such comparisons have been a theme of the pro-independence campaign, which insists that Scotland has a right to self-determination, as it is currently oppressed within the UK. Salmond made this comment at the site of the old Scottish parliament in Edinburgh, which was dissolved when the voluntary union with England was agreed in 1707.

All of the Better Together parties have responded to the latest poll figures by rushing to present plans for the devolution of even more powers to the regional administration in Scotland, and others to be established throughout the country. This would see Edinburgh gain extensive tax varying, budgetary and social welfare responsibilities if the referendum results in a No vote.

Former Labour Party prime minister Gordon Brown delivered a speech in Loanhead near Edinburgh on Monday night in which he unveiled a timetable for a new arrangement, in the event of a No vote on September 18. He declared that a government commission would begin work on a proposal on September 19, and that a white paper would be ready, following a period of consultation, at the end of November. A new Scotland Act, granting the agreed additional powers to the Scottish parliament, would be finalised in January 2015, he added.

Within hours, all of the major parties gave their backing to Brown’s proposals.

Conservative chancellor George Osborne, in appearances on Sunday morning television immediately after the poll figures were released, proposed a similar increase in powers over taxation and welfare spending.

Brown’s and Osborne’s plans are part of a broader effort to encourage regionalism throughout Britain. Miliband backed an initiative earlier this year to transfer significant powers to towns and cities throughout England, and senior figures within the party have begun calling for engagement with English nationalism.

In a speech in Scotland yesterday, Miliband pledged that a Labour government elected next year would implement Brown’s timetable for the devolution of more

powers. This would be part of a future Labour government’s commitment to what he termed the “Scottish values” of “fairness, justice and equality.”

Criticising the nationalists for encouraging a “race to the bottom” through tax cuts and wage reductions, he sought to invoke the solidarity between workers in different parts of the UK to promote the election of a Labour government that would take on “the vested interests from the energy companies to the banks,” and bring about an increase in the minimum wage.

This comes from the leader of a party that led Britain into an illegal war in Iraq in 2003, and presided over the deepest financial crisis since the 1930s, including the bailout of the banks to the tune of hundreds of billions of pounds. Labour’s introduction of the paltry minimum wage and reform of the welfare system were meant to slash labour costs and create a vast low-wage sector to boost corporate profits.

Moreover, the implementation of the devolution programme advocated by Labour would mean a further intensification of regional and national tensions throughout Britain, with disastrous consequences for the working class. The reactionary nationalist sentiments that have been persistently stoked throughout the current campaign would continue to be manipulated to drive up the exploitation of workers across the country in the interests of the ruling class.

The latest developments illustrate once again the urgent necessity of the working class intervening into political events with its own independent programme. In its campaign for the referendum, the Socialist Equality Party is urging a decisive No vote, rejecting a turn to capitalist Scottish nation-building and the adoption of a socialist and internationalist perspective to end the existing British state and to form a workers’ government.



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