

Counterfire attacks socialist opposition to Scottish nationalism

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15 September 2014

The referendum on Scottish independence has exposed various “left” groups as proponents of a new capitalist state, aimed at deepening the exploitation of workers and building closer ties with global corporations and banks.

The Counterfire group, a split from Britain’s Socialist Workers Party (SWP), has published, “No excuse for no,” authored by James Meadway. It is a naked piece of political propaganda, which unapologetically boosts the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the official Yes campaign.

Making clear where his allegiance lies, Meadway presaged his article with an image of the Yes campaign’s logo, a movement led by the SNP and its backers in big business and finance. In the first line he declares that the prospect of independence “represents a profound challenge to the UK’s constitutional status quo, and contains the potential for a thorough-going offensive against the pro-market politics that have dominated this country for thirty years.”

The reality is that the movement he paints in such glowing colors is a reactionary, right wing development, whose central goal is the creation of a low-tax, low-wage environment to attract investment. Moreover, the SNP and its allies have repeatedly insisted they would seek negotiations with the government in London to secure a currency union, keeping the Bank of England as lender of last resort and the Queen as head of state.

Counterfire views such a prospect as progressive. Describing the SNP’s “tartan Tories” image as a “fantasy” of “English progressives,” Meadway continues, “The SNP has, under [Alex] Salmond’s leadership, positioned itself unabashedly to the left of Labour, offering to defend the gains of the post-war settlement--the NHS [National Health Service], the welfare state--against Westminster’s neoliberalism. They opposed the Iraq war, support Palestine, and want rid of Trident. They have adroitly used the powers granted them under devolution to remove

Scottish tuition fees and abolish the bedroom tax.”

It is Meadway and his co-thinkers who are dreaming. His attempt to cast the SNP as an anti-militarist party is dishonest. The SNP is committed to remaining in NATO, a nuclear alliance currently engaged in a sustained offensive against Russia, which carries with it the danger of world war. It has insisted it will seek membership in the European Union, which is rolling out austerity across the continent. On several occasions, Salmond has also pledged his allegiance to the foreign policy of the United States, hailing Washington as a “great nation” and “great power.” Quite how this fits with support for the Palestinian people is anyone’s guess.

The removal of tuition fees only applies to Scottish and European Union students and has only been possible because, in a blatantly discriminatory move, Scottish universities have been able to impose sizeable tuition fees on students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Meadway’s claim that the SNP abolished the bedroom tax is a flat out lie. The punitive tax, brought in by the coalition in 2013 and implemented fully in Scotland by the SNP until February this year, was temporarily suspended for a year through a settlement between Edinburgh and Westminster. Under the deal, the Scottish government will use no more than £15 million to cover the tax for twelve months. It had no impact on those already in arrears with the tax or who had lost their homes. The measure was no more than political posturing in the lead-up to the referendum campaign.

The numerous lies and distortions contained within Meadway’s article express the anti-working class character of his political agenda which, like that of the entire pseudo-left, aims to protect the interests of a privileged layer of the middle class.

Meadway earns his daily bread as a senior economist at the New Economic Foundation (NEF) think tank, where he leads a team responsible for “developing a new

analytic model for the UK economy, aiming to develop a better understanding of how the financial system, production, and the environment interact to shape economic outcomes.” Prior to this, he worked as a policy advisor at HM Treasury on “regional economic development.”

NEF produced a recent comment on Scottish independence in which it called for a more “creative” approach to the question of currency. Holding up Germany’s banking system and complementary currency systems for stronger businesses, such as the “wir” in Switzerland, it wrote that NEF would be advising on “what Scotland could do to build an economic system that really works for people and businesses.”

Its “advice” comes at a high price, with its donor’s page listing the European Union Commission as having awarded NEF £138,000, while the office of the Northern Irish first minister and deputy first minister gave almost £100,000 to NEF last year.

The social interests of the layers represented by Meadway are irreconcilably hostile to the working class. They seek a new settlement, which will allow them to obtain access to the advisory, consultative and managerial positions that would emerge through the creation of a new capitalist state. This is the social constituency of groups like Counterfire, which seek to fool workers with rhetorical invocations of socialism.

Meadway’s fealty to capitalism makes him an implacable opponent of anyone seeking to unite working people in a struggle for the overturning of the capitalist system and warning of the dangers of nationalism. In what is clearly an attack on the Socialist Equality Party’s intervention in Scotland, he writes, “English socialists becoming hot and bothered about the ‘illusions’ of nationalism show a stunning lack of self-awareness. Scottish nationalism is not some freakish outgrowth of the far north.”

Meadway’s casual dismissal of the dangers of nationalism is in truth a devastating exposure of his criminally negligent “lack of self-awareness.” He does not venture to explain why Scottish nationalism finds support among some of the most right wing forces throughout Europe, such as Italy’s Northern League, or why repeated concerns have been raised as to how the divisions engendered by the referendum campaign will be managed afterwards. In a world where national, ethnic and linguistic differences are being manipulated everywhere to promote brutal wars in the interests of the imperialist powers, such as in Ukraine and Iraq, it is the

height of political irresponsibility to ignore the threat that a similar development could occur in Britain.

But this is no concern to Meadway who, like the rest of the camp of state capitalists and Pabloites, are nothing more than the left-flank of the bourgeois political establishment, allying themselves with the most right-wing and anti-working class forces and supporting “human rights” imperialism.

According to Meadway, the policies of the last 30 years have in any event led to the “break-up and atomisation of the British working class.” He makes the outrageous claim that therefore support for “no is support for British nationalism”—making clear again his hostility to the fight for the unity of the working class, across all borders, on the basis of a socialist program.

Coming from Counterfire, claims that the working class is incapable of fighting are particularly cynical. Leading Counterfire members, like Lindsey German, found themselves at the head of a major working class mobilisation in 2003 against the Iraq war. Hostile to an independent political perspective, they drove it into the ground with impotent appeals to the Liberal Democrats, the United Nations, and German and French imperialism to stop the conflict.

Pseudo-left parties like Counterfire and the SWP maintain a firm alliance with the trade union bureaucracy, in which many of their members are firmly ensconced. The trade unions have worked to betray every struggle by workers over the past three decades and helped demobilise any opposition to the social counter-revolution implemented by the ruling elite since the 2008 financial crisis. They have long enjoyed a parasitic role as political apologists for the Labour Party and are now seeking a similar arrangement in Scotland with the SNP.



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