

Scottish National Party's Salmond and Sturgeon pitch to Labour and the ex-left

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25 November 2014

Alex Salmond's exit from the leadership of the Scottish National Party (SNP) was marked by repeated overtures to the Labour Party that the Scottish nationalists would assist it to power in the May 2015 General Election.

Salmond announced his intention to resign as first minister and SNP leader in the hours after the decisive defeat of the "Yes" campaign in the September 18 referendum on Scottish independence. Having represented Banff and Buchan in Westminster between 1987 and 2010, Salmond has hinted he will seek election to a Westminster parliamentary seat.

With UK opinion polls showing the likelihood of a hung parliament at the 2015 election, the SNP's clutch of Westminster parliamentary seats could hold the balance of power. Opinion polls forecast that in Scotland, the SNP could win most of Labour's current 41 Westminster seats.

Although the SNP has been in a de facto alliance with the Conservative and Liberal Democrats since 2010, imposing Westminster cuts on social spending in Scotland, it sees itself as more likely to cut a deal with the Labour Party.

In his parting speech as leader, Salmond said that, "Far from reflecting on what might have been, we are focused on what now must be. Our job is incomplete. Our role is clear. First, last and always this party will argue Scotland's cause."

The SNP is arguing that the 2015 election should be turned into another referendum on Scottish independence. Should it emerge as the largest party, it intends to use this to strike a deal on greater powers for Scotland.

Salmond praised Johann Lamont, the recently resigned leader of the Labour Party in Scotland. According to Salmond, Lamont deserved "praise for

confirming what we all knew—that Scottish Labour was treated by London Labour as a branch office."

Salmond's successor, and soon to be first minister, Nicola Sturgeon expanded on the theme in her inaugural speech as party leader. "The SNP will never, ever, put the Tories in government," Sturgeon said. She went on: "Think about how much more we could win for Scotland from a Westminster Labour government if they had to depend on SNP votes. They'd have to deliver real powers for our parliament" and "rethink endless austerity" and "think again about putting a new generation of Trident nuclear weapons on the River Clyde".

Sturgeon and Salmond are relying on general ignorance of the SNP's role when it was previously in a position of influence in Westminster. In 1979, it was the SNP that triggered the no-confidence motion that brought down the Labour government of James Callaghan, triggering a general election won by the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher.

This time around, however, the SNP is feeling out terms with Labour through which the Scottish political establishment could chisel out the most concessions for themselves.

Foremost among these is greater devolution of tax varying and lawmaking powers. Horse-trading between Labour and the SNP is likely to revolve around whatever is recommended by the Smith Commission, set up in the aftermath of the referendum. Under ennobled financier Baron Smith of Kelvin, the commission is obliged to propose substantial new "financial, welfare and taxation powers." Seizing control of tax-cutting power in order to rival Ireland's 12.5 percent corporation tax rate has long been the SNP's goal.

Sturgeon's suggestion that Labour might be capable

of “rethinking endless austerity” is a fraud. The SNP leadership is well aware that Labour is as committed to austerity as the Tories, and for that matter, the SNP itself. Scottish-based banks, including the vastly indebted and nationalised RBS, have benefited enormously from the vast sums pumped out of social spending into the hands of the financial oligarchy.

Sturgeon’s posturing on “rethinking austerity” is a sop for the benefit of the pseudo-left and the large numbers of “Yes” campaigners who, in the aftermath of the referendum, joined the SNP.

Seeking to sound radical without implying the slightest encroachment into corporate wealth, Sturgeon announced that her first “Programme for Government” will involve “radical action on land reform, empowering communities, raising attainment in our schools and tackling some of the deep injustices in our society, like domestic abuse and gender inequality.”

Sturgeon, who said the Labour Party had “lost its soul”, intends to deepen her party’s alliance with environmentalists, feminists and the ex-left, by offering a few minimal programmes. In the hands of the ex-left, these will be used to portray the SNP in the most progressive terms.

The ex-left responded warmly to Sturgeon’s overtures. The leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, Colin Fox, who along with Sturgeon sat on the official Yes Scotland advisory board, wrote excitedly, “I believe the Labour Party could be defeated in several seats in Scotland if we field a single Independence candidate. This can best be advanced by fielding single candidates on an alliance ticket as it were in those areas that voted Yes on September 18th.”

Fox went on, “This could break the stranglehold Labour has had in such areas for generations and challenge its austerity policies. Allowing voters a choice which goes beyond narrow party interest is bound to be more attractive.”

Former International Marxist Group member George Kerevan, now a leading nationalist commentator for the *Scotsman*, went so far as to claim that “the SNP under Nicola Sturgeon is a genuine social democratic party with a mass working-class base.”

Such absurd remarks are refuted by Sturgeon’s own speech, when she emphasised whom the SNP really represents.

“My job, as First Minister, will be to champion the

interests of Scottish business at home and around the globe”. She went on: “I will set out directly to Scottish business the support they can expect from my government to help them innovate, export, be more competitive and create more jobs.”

Sturgeon’s posturing on Trident also cannot withstand scrutiny. The notion that the Labour Party, which under Clement Attlee instigated British imperialism’s nuclear weapons programme in 1945 and has upheld it ever since, will abandon Trident for anything other than a greater and potentially bloodier strategic advantage over Britain’s economic and military rivals is absurd on its face.

The SNP is not opposed to militarism. Its defence spokesman, Angus Robertson, has repeatedly made clear that the SNP’s primary objection to Trident is that the military budget would be better spent on fast jets, long-range patrol aircraft and more frigates capable of combating Russian influence in the far North.

The SNP and the ex-left called for a yes vote in the referendum on the basis that Labour had betrayed its social democratic roots, which, they all falsely claimed, could be revived with an SNP-led independent Scotland.

A yes vote, they claimed, would be a vote against war and austerity. Two months later, the SNP is mooting a ruling Westminster alliance with the same Labour Party, the party of successive wars under Tony Blair and of global austerity, as advocated by his successor, Gordon Brown.



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