

Radical Independence Campaign does dirty work for Scottish National Party

Chris Marsden
4 December 2014

The annual gathering of the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) was a showcase for Scotland's various pseudo-left groups to offer their services as recruiting sergeants for the Scottish National Party (SNP).

The 3,000 in attendance were led by the International Socialist Group (ISG), a splinter from the Socialist Workers Party, and included the leading figures within the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), Solidarity Scotland and similar formations, all of whom hobnobbed with SNP and Green politicians.

There was the usual talk of setting up a "left" nationalist alternative to the SNP and some waxed lyrical about emulating the successes of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Both parties have their origins within the former Stalinist parties and factions of the various pseudo-left groups, having been catapulted to prominence as a result of rising hostility to all the major parties and their savage austerity programmes. Both are pro-capitalist formations, socially based on a petty-bourgeois layer similar to those gathered in the Clyde Auditorium, Glasgow Science Centre and Crowne Plaza Hotel.

However, for the most part, those present at the RIC balked before the prospect of standing independently of, let alone against, the SNP. Instead, talk was of electoral pacts with the SNP to help it defeat Labour Party candidates while exerting "maximum pressure" to push the SNP "to the left."

The primary function of the RIC is to channel hostility to the Labour Party, provoked by its right-wing, pro-business, anti-working class policies, behind a section of the Scottish bourgeoisie and its party, the SNP. To this end, it opposes any unified action by the working class north and south of the border in favour of the national unity of Scots, portraying Scottish

nationalism and separatism as the only basis for "opting out" of austerity and implementing social reforms.

Prior to the RIC meeting, its various affiliates set out their stalls for the SNP to peruse. SSP leader Colin Fox proposed an alliance with the SNP, as well as the Greens, in a letter to newly elected SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon and Scottish Green Party leader Patrick Harvie. He urged support for "Independence Alliance" candidates from the Scottish independence referendum Yes campaign in the 2015 Westminster general election, putting "our own individual interests to one side" so as to "break the Labour Party's historic stranglehold on Scottish politics."

For their part, the RIC's leading figures in the International Socialist Group have formed the Scottish Left Project (SLP) and secured the backing of the ageing former SNP deputy leader, Jim Sillars. Stressing that this is not a new party, its leaders, Jonathan Shafi and Cat Boyd, have said they too are holding out in the hope of an electoral pact and will focus on the Scottish parliamentary elections in 2016.

Sillars has appealed to the SNP to allow other pro-independence campaigners to run alongside its own candidates next May "to maximise the vote that we take to Westminster on behalf of Scotland."

"If we want to be able to go into the [urban] central belt and win, we have to remove the influence of the Labour Party," he said. "We've got to hammer the Labour Party. The question for the SNP is how best to do that."

Tommy Sheridan, the former leader of the SSP and now head of Solidarity Scotland, embarrassed his supporters in the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party by urging a simple vote for the SNP. This prompted his organisation to propose a face-saving list of possible alternatives "to both maximise 'yes' unity

and to damage the reactionary ‘no’ parties,” including a “Yes alliance” to advocate a vote for SNP candidates and a “united electoral challenge from the left.”

However, “On a personal note,” Sheridan still stresses, “I believe uniting the ‘yes’ vote behind the SNP...is the most productive tactic.”

With the SNP staging its own event to launch Sturgeon as new party leader that same night at the nearby SSE Hydro, with 12,000 in attendance, the RIC event degenerated into a pathetic, extended begging letter to the SNP.

The first speaker was Suki Sanga, who politely suggested that the rich could pay “a bit more tax.”

A member of the Scottish Trades Union Council and the International Socialist Group, she got bigger applause when she declared that trade union funding for the Labour Party must end. It is not hard to see who will be the main beneficiary of such a shift, given that the SNP Trade Union Group now claims membership of over 12,000.

Colin Fox made his appeal for a Yes alliance at the General Election, but his putative partner, Green Party Member of the Scottish Parliament Patrick Harvie, instead called upon the RIC to hold the SNP to account “as they enter a period of single-party domination the like of which the Labour Party only dreamed of.”

The conference closed with the reading out of a “People’s Vow” delivered pretentiously by author and playwright Alan Bissett and Cat Boyd “on behalf of the disappointed, the disaffected, the impoverished and the frightened” that would be “eternal, and will be honoured for so long as we, and the generation which follows us, and the generations which follow them, have breath in our lungs to do so.”

In reality, many of its policy prescriptions on fracking, nuclear weapons, gender equality in political party representation and the like are already formally upheld by the SNP, while its “people’s budget,” as described by Boyd, promises nothing more than “to protect public services from the worst of the cuts.”

Austerity is naturally depicted as “the creed of the London elite,” rather than one held to by the SNP.

Iain Macwhirter in the *Herald* wrote scathingly, and accurately, of the vow owing “more to environmentalism than Marxism.” It “did not even mention capitalism, let alone class struggle or smashing the state or seizing the means of production....”

He concluded regarding the RIC: “The idea of a pan-nationalist Yes Alliance at the 2015 General Election has also been dropped, as has talk of a new Left-wing party on the lines of Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain. The view in Radical Independence seems to be it is best to let the SNP lead the battle against the Westminster Establishment, which does raise questions about what the campaign is for.”

In a similar vein, George Kerevan, a leading SNP member and therefore no impartial commentator, asked in the *Scotsman*, “Is it too late for new radicals?” Noting that the SNP “have enjoyed a staggering 60,000 new recruits,” he wrote, “Unfortunately for a Scottish Podemos, this revolutionary wave has flowed straight into the SNP, by-passing the far left.”

The RIC and its affiliates are being exposed for all to see as nothing more than an adjunct of the SNP. Sturgeon herself told the *New Statesman*, “I don’t agree with everything Radical Independence put forward, but their contribution to the referendum both in terms of ideas and in a hard, organisational sense—doors knocked and miles covered—was hugely positive.”

Sturgeon may or may not allow the RIC and its affiliated groupings to take part in some sort of formal electoral alliance with the SNP in order to deliver a few blows to Labour. “I haven’t ruled anything in and I haven’t ruled anything out,” she told the *New Statesman*.

In any event, she is more than happy to utilise the RIC’s lies to reinforce the SNP’s threadbare claim to be a left alternative to Labour, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats—even as the SNP imposes cuts and cuddles up to bankers and businessmen. The SNP has agreed to allow individual non-party activists to stand under its banner rather than their own, and there will be those in the RIC happy to take up the offer.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact