

Scottish Socialist Party manifesto: Nationalism and class collaboration

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With the release of its manifesto for the May 7 General Election, the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) has plumbed new depths in the universal collapse of the pseudo-left groups into Scottish nationalism and the orbit of the Scottish National Party (SNP).

Friedrich Engels, the co-founder of scientific socialism, described parliamentary cretinism as an “incurable disease” and the SSP is a terminal case. Its manifesto is framed not in the tradition of socialism, which it long ago rejected, but that of petty-bourgeois nationalism of the worst stripe.

Every issue facing working people is approached solely from the standpoint of the ability of the Scottish bourgeoisie to grab more powers from Westminster. Holyrood, the Scottish legislature, is name-checked no less than 27 times, and glorified as “*our* devolved parliament” (emphasis added).

The manifesto says not a word on the looming danger of a third world war, while the savage onslaught on the conditions of the working class across Europe warrants just one line.

Even the references to the situation facing working people in Scotland (and it is solely with Scotland that the SSP is concerned) stand out for their complacency. Essentially everything will continue after May 7 pretty much as before, with the SSP confining any criticism of the bourgeois parties to its lack of “confidence” in their “half-hearted efforts” to turn the “situation around.”

By peddling the myth of an independent Scotland where all classes are united in the national interest, the SSP seeks to subordinate the working class to capitalism and to secure its own access to the corridors of power.

The first part of the manifesto is an extended complaint against the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Greens for rejecting the SSP’s proposal to stand a unified slate of “Independence Alliance” candidates in all 59 Scottish seats at the General Election.

The proposed slate was the logical outcome of the SSP’s championing of Scottish independence as a route out of austerity and the big business SNP as a progressive alternative to the “Westminster elite.”

So thoroughly has the SSP been incorporated into the bourgeois political set-up in Scotland that its leader Colin Fox sat on the “Yes Scotland” advisory board in support of last September’s referendum on Scottish independence, alongside SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon and hedge fund owner George Mathewson, former CEO of the Royal Bank of Scotland. The SSP’s ride on the

gravy train to Holyrood hit the buffers when the referendum saw the defeat of Scottish independence by 55 percent to 45 percent. But Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron’s convening of the Smith Commission in the wake of the referendum to decide on new constitutional arrangements for the UK meant the SSP’s aspirations were not entirely dashed. Under ennobled financier Baron Smith of Kelvin, the commission is to propose substantial new “financial, welfare and taxation powers” to the devolved regions as part of the ruling elite’s efforts to further smash up workers’ social rights.

In its efforts to get a seat at the Smith Commission’s deliberations, the SSP submitted its “fully costed” proposals for greater powers for the Scottish bourgeoisie—the so-called Devo Max option. However, to its dismay, its participation was rejected.

This gave added impulse to the SSP’s desire for an alliance with the SNP. The purpose of its joint slate was to “inflict most damage on Labour,” the manifesto states. Labour was not to be punished for its role as a political spokesman for the financial elite, but for its betrayal of the “Scottish people” in opposing independence.

By helping the SNP gain at Labour’s expense in Scotland, the SSP calculated that the nationalist bloc would have sufficient strength in Westminster to influence the Smith Commission. The electoral alliance would then contest the 2016 elections to Holyrood where, with the SSP working to block any challenge to Scottish nationalism from the left, the SNP would consolidate its hold in the Scottish parliament and would press for another referendum on independence.

Only in August, Fox was boasting, “If, in 2016, the SSP, the Greens and the SNP get a majority, the very next day we’re all on the first train from Edinburgh to David Cameron.” It was intent on getting its nose in the trough, as the various factions of the ruling elite compete to carve up national assets and divide the working class.

Alas, “it was not to be”, the manifesto laments, because the “SNP rejected our offer.”

Having utilised the pseudo-left to endow it with progressive colours, the SNP is now set on carving out its own niche in the central state apparatus through an alliance with Labour.

It is this which has forced the SSP to stand a token slate on May 7 of four candidates in Glasgow and Edinburgh. It reluctantly made the decision only in order to convince the SNP that its services are still required. The SSP has targeted four Labour seats where it hopes any votes it picks up will help to ensure the election

of SNP candidates.

At the same time, it has pitched its campaign as a respectful appeal to the Smith Commission to allow it on board. Extraordinarily, its 23-page election manifesto is largely a recapitulation of its submission to the commission, shaped as little more than a begging letter.

The exclusion of the SSP from these “multilateral deliberations” is “a rejection not only of the spirit of this debate, but also the specific instructions laid down by the Prime Minister that this discussion should involve ‘cross-party talks and facilitate an inclusive engagement process across Scotland’,” the group writes.

The SSP describes the referendum as a “unique national plebiscite,” so as to claim that the defeat of the independence option actually expressed the desire of the “Scottish people” for greater devolved powers! On this basis it appeals to the Smith Commission to help develop “civic participation,” for which it claims, “there will be widespread agreement between all parties that Scotland’s democracy could well do with it.”

The evisceration of bourgeois democracy in Britain—the assault on civil liberties under the guise of the “war on terror” and the build-up of the repressive powers of the state exposed by Edward Snowden—is passed over in silence. Instead, the SSP claims that democracy can be reinvigorated by building on the “cross-party progress” made by the Smith Commission’s deliberations. All that is apparently required is that Holyrood be given the powers “to come forward with such a Written Constitution for Scotland that sets out and enshrines the values upon which we wish to build our modern nation.”

So slavishly does the SSP follow the terms laid down for the Smith Commission by the “Prime Minister” that the manifesto deals with the issues of militarism and war in just seven lines—as defence is not one of the powers up for consideration.

British imperialism’s role in NATO provocations in Eastern Europe and its aggression in Libya, Syria and Iraq are omitted. Indifferent to these crimes, the SSP complains that current defence policy is unfavourable to the “Scottish economy” because it is “too heavily dependent on defence industries and MOD contracts.” A “diversification of all those jobs and industries” would “surely be Scotland’s peace dividend following the end of the Cold War.”

The SSP’s attitude towards austerity is similarly defined by national, as opposed to class interests. The “devolution of all fiscal and tax raising powers” would ensure that “our countrymen and women” are not denied the opportunity to “fulfil their potential.”

Reassuring the bourgeoisie that its call for a £10 minimum wage, as with its other measly proposals, are based on a “modest formula,” it states that this is needed because a “*competitive*, modern Scottish economy cannot be constructed on slave wages” (emphasis added).

The defence of immigrants against victimisation is similarly determined by the assertion that they “pay far more taxes into the UK Treasury than they take out.”

As for the driving up of the exploitation of working people, the SSP wants employment legislation devolved so as to “establish a *level-playing field between employees and employers* in Scottish industrial relations” (emphasis added).

The one instance in which the SSP breaks with its overtly nationalist narrative is to defend the European Union (EU). But this is only a continuation of its anti-working class agenda.

While admitting that the EU is a “neoliberal trap”, it claims that the task at hand is to “change it from within” by working in a “pan-European socialist alliance”—a reference to the European grouping comprising Greece’s Syriza, Germany’s Left Party and Spain’s Podemos.

This is a thoroughly bankrupt and reactionary perspective, as the SSP well knows. Fox was invited to Athens by Syriza to witness its victory in January’s election, where he waxed lyrical about the election of the first “anti-capitalist” government in Europe for decades.

In reality, Syriza—like its European counterparts—represents the social interests of a privileged stratum of the upper-middle class. All its talk of finding a negotiated means to end austerity was entirely subordinate to its defence of the capitalist profit system, as epitomised by its support for the EU—the very mechanism responsible for creating a social catastrophe in Greece.

It took just a matter of days for Syriza to betray all its election promises. Having formed an alliance with the xenophobic Independent Greeks, it has prostrated itself before the EU and International Monetary Fund as it desperately seeks to honour Greek capital’s debt to international financiers by raiding public funds.

The SSP manifesto mentions none of this, while Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras features prominently on the party’s web site. However, writing shortly before the manifesto was issued, Fox admitted that Syriza has “effectively rescinded their commitment to the Greek people.” Even so, he continued, the government has likely only bought itself a few weeks—the timeframe laid down by the EU for massive debt repayments—before it could collapse, leaving the fascist Golden Dawn potentially the “biggest beneficiaries.”

Irrespective of this damning appraisal, Fox endorsed Syriza’s actions, asserting that “politics is a serious business where difficult decisions must often be made under enormous pressure.”

Syriza had little alternative, he insists, deriding “those dogmatists who abide by the hackneyed formula that demands the ‘mobilisation of the Greek working class to take over the commanding heights of the economy’.”

It is this hostility to the mobilisation of the working class against all the institutions of bourgeois rule that is the class basis of the SSP’s support for Syriza, as for the SNP. Just as Syriza is betraying the working class in conducting the “serious business” of bourgeois politics, so the SSP is making clear it would do the same in Scotland.



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