Murdoch’s Scottish Sun backs the Scottish National Party

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The *Scottish Sun* announced last Thursday that it was supporting a Scottish National Party (SNP) vote in Britain’s May 7 general election.

The paper superimposes a picture of SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon on Princess Leia’s body, next to a headline, “May the 7th be with you: Why it’s time to vote SNP.”

Media commentary made much of the fact that, while supporting the SNP in Scotland, the right-wing tabloid called for a Conservative vote in the rest of the UK. Criticism was made of the paper’s inconsistency—and some dismissed it as merely an expression of its anti-Labour agenda. The *New Statesman*, for example, wrote, “Of course, there is one uniting factor in these two front pages: they are both calculated to do maximum damage to Ed Miliband.”

The problem with such an explanation is that it does not address the central fact that the media’s attack on Labour has focused on the claim that the SNP will hold party leader Miliband “to ransom”, forcing him to adopt anti-austerity measures, while endangering the unity of the UK. The *Sun* ’s English edition lists as the second reason, after the economy, for supporting the Tories, “Stop the SNP running the country.”

Whatever other motivations are involved, Murdoch’s endorsing of the SNP punctures this carefully constructed myth of the SNP representing an anti-austerity party.

On this fundamental issue, no contradiction exists from the standpoint of the ruling class in backing the Conservatives in England and the SNP in Scotland. Both parties are in reality right-wing organisations fully beholden to the financial elite. They are both committed to driving down the living standards of the working class, each using their own brand of nationalism in the process to keep workers divided.

While Murdoch backed a No vote in last September’s referendum, he built up close relations with former SNP leader Alex Salmond over several years. Salmond cultivated his ties with the media mogul as part of his efforts to present the SNP as a business-friendly party ready to slash corporate taxes and establish a cheap-labour platform in Scotland to attract inward investment.

In the current election campaign, concealed behind a blizzard of anti-austerity rhetoric, the SNP is holding firm to this right-wing programme. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) think tank acknowledged that the SNP’s policy commitments implied support for austerity along with the other main parties. According to the IFS analysis, the SNP’s spending plans would impose the longest period of austerity of all the major parties.

The party commits to balancing the UK’s budget deficit of £90 billion by 2023. As an SNP source told the *Herald*, “Our proposals would see the deficit fall in each and every year of the next Parliament, bringing the overall deficit down to below 2 percent by 2019-20, in line with the average of the last 60 years. The current budget deficit will be eliminated at this point.”

The only difference between the SNP’s programme and that of the Conservatives and Labour is therefore one of timing. Prime Minister David Cameron’s party has pledged to eliminate the budget deficit by 2018 through a further multi-billion package of spending cuts following the election.

Cameron has made a deliberate appeal to English nationalism, releasing a mini manifesto for England two weeks ago that supported calls for English votes for English laws. In this way, he has sought to exploit the divisions whipped up during the campaign for last year’s Scottish independence referendum to split the

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working class along regional lines—so as to prevent a united movement in opposition to the assault on living standards.

The SNP's election campaign thus far has sought to tone down talk of Scottish independence, in favour of pursuing an alliance to prop up a Labour government in the next parliament.

In comments on BBC's "Question Time" Thursday, Miliband rejected a coalition or any formal agreement with the SNP. But speaking in Cardiff the next day, he told *Sky News*, "It will always be a matter for the House of Commons how they vote on the Queen's speech, for example"—indicating his belief that the SNP will back Labour without any formal pact.

The *Daily Telegraph* revealed an internal SNP document identifying areas of common ground between its policies and Labour, confirming that it would seek an arrangement with a minority Labour government to back it on a case-by-case basis.

The SNP portrays a deal with Labour as the "Progressive Alternative" to the Conservatives. The internal document declares, "By electing SNP MPs, the people of Scotland can vote to get rid of the Tories, protect the welfare of everyone who lives here, and promote progressive politics across the UK."

The SNP's orientation to Labour exposes its anti-austerity pose. Reviled by workers across the country, Labour is the party that organised the multi-billion pound bailout of the criminal financial elite in 2008, led Britain into successive wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq, and initiated the brutal austerity drive expanded by the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and imposed in Scotland by the SNP.

The SNP's ability to portray itself as an anti-austerity party is largely thanks to the support given to it by the pseudo-left groups in last year's referendum, and in the current election campaign by figures like Tommy Sheridan.

Murdoch's backing for Sturgeon and Salmond is nevertheless a high-risk gamble.

The SNP is still committed to stoking national divisions on behalf of sections of the business elite in Scotland who support the devolution of powers, such as setting taxes and possibly outright independence, as a means of competing with its rivals and pressing ahead with the assault on the working class.

In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, the former deputy leader of the SNP, stated that the SNP would make a call for a second independence referendum the centrepiece of its 2016 manifesto for the Scottish parliamentary elections. Sturgeon refused to deny Sillars' suggestion, stating that the party could support a referendum in principle in a future manifesto.

The re-emergence of the issue of another independence referendum, barely six months after 55 percent of the electorate voted No in last September's vote, reflects the depth of the crisis of capitalist rule in Britain. Far from putting an end to the debate over Scottish separation, the referendum laid the basis for deepening regional and national conflicts across Britain and for the SNP and its allies to misdirect popular hatred of the Tories and Labour.

Sillars' latest call is in part an attempt to apply pressure to Labour or the Conservatives to reach a favourable deal with the SNP following May 7. Asked how Sillars' demand for a new referendum could be justified, an SNP spokesman stated, "If we can achieve the kind of policy objectives we want to see, particularly around the anti-austerity and the devolution of powers, then that is fantastic. If they backslide then the dynamics change."

One could hardly be more explicit. If powers to cut corporation tax and other measures are not extended to Holyrood, the SNP would initiate a campaign for another independence vote. In either case, the consequences for workers throughout Britain will be the same: an intensification of regional competition for investment, which will produce a race to the bottom in wages and living standards.

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