

Pseudo-left seek formation of Scottish Syriza

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A collection of pseudo-left groups in Scotland are engaged in talks, aimed at establishing an electoral alliance ahead of next May's elections to the regional Scottish parliament.

Considering the political forces involved, and the fact that the project has been labelled a "Scottish Syriza," it is already clear that whatever organisation emerges will be politically hostile to the working class. Current names for the alliance being considered are United Left, Scottish Left or Left Alternative—all proposals which will avoid even a formal reference to socialism.

Last weekend, representatives of the new alliance met with figures from Greece's Syriza and Spain's Podemos in Edinburgh. Colin Fox, co-convenor of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the largest group involved with the new initiative, declared to *The Herald*, "Sunday's meeting is to learn from Syriza and Podemos's experience. Podemos have just fought regional elections in Spain. I would expect to get endorsements from Syriza and Podemos later this year."

Fox's eagerness to obtain an endorsement from Syriza speaks volumes. The party secured victory in last January's Greek elections by promising an end to the brutal dictates of finance capital. It claimed that this could be achieved on the basis of defending Greek capitalism and by securing a just compromise with the European Union (EU), European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund that would maintain Greece's position within the EU.

In a matter of weeks, Syriza abandoned its election promises after forming a governing coalition with the right-wing, xenophobic Independent Greeks. On February 20, it signed up to the memorandum agreed to by the previous right-wing government, agreeing to continue the implementation of austerity measures. Fox explicitly defended this course, declaring that politics was a "serious business" and that Syriza had no

alternative.

A spokesperson for the Scottish Left Project (SLP), also involved in the new alliance, was equally enthusiastic. "We are also working with representatives of Syriza, and are looking to see how a variety of their organisational and political techniques could be implemented in Scotland," they told *The Herald*.

What they are intent on obtaining from close collaboration with Syriza is advice on how to access the corridors of power and consolidate privileged positions for themselves within the capitalist state. They already share Syriza's programme of upholding the EU and defending the interests of the ruling elite.

Even if it stands in the forthcoming elections, the new alliance will continue to boost illusions in the Scottish National Party (SNP).

In the immediate aftermath of last September's independence referendum, the SSP appealed to the nationalists for an electoral pact, claiming that this would help defeat Labour and represent a shift to the left. This was rejected, and the SSP stood a handful of candidates pledged to deal a blow to Labour in what were previously considered safe seats while saying little that was critical of the SNP. The SSP congratulated the SNP on its victory.

The new alliance's aim is to run candidates in next year's Scottish regional elections on the list system. Elections for the Holyrood parliament are conducted using a mixed voting system, under which 73 constituency deputies are elected and 56 from a regional list. By only standing on the list, the alliance will leave the way clear for the SNP to sweep the board in the constituency vote. This policy is therefore an electoral pact in all but name.

The pseudo-left groups have systematically promoted Scottish nationalism and the SNP over the past two decades.

The SSP was founded on an explicitly nationalist and

pro-capitalist basis in 1998 to run in the first elections to the Scottish parliament. It proclaimed the newly devolved parliament at Holyrood as the vehicle for realising a limited programme of reforms that would not be possible in the rest of the UK—largely, they argued, because of the political deficiencies of the English working class.

The SSP sat alongside the SNP on the Yes Scotland board during last year's independence campaign, which was also composed of investment bankers and businessmen. They all welcomed the SSP because they understood its usefulness in providing the reactionary programme of Scottish separatism with the left cover it desperately required.

The SSP will be joined by the SLP, composed of forces that were part of the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) during the independence campaign, such as the International Socialist Group (ISG), a right-wing split-off from the Socialist Workers Party.

The RIC focused on campaigns in working class areas, selling independence as a progressive way to oppose the assault on jobs and living standards, imperialist wars and attacks on democratic rights. The end result was an influx of members into the SNP. The SNP's leader Nicola Sturgeon acknowledged the services provided by RIC, telling 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."

More is at work in the current manoeuvres than mere electoral politics.

The SSP's vote to join talks came just two weeks after the Labour Party suffered an unprecedented defeat in the UK general election, losing all but one of its 41 seats in Scotland and falling well short of defeating the Conservatives elsewhere. This result reflected the deep hatred within the working class for this right-wing, big business party, whose record on war, attacks on democratic rights, bank bailouts and austerity measures was seen as no better than that of the Tories.

Aware that sections of workers and youth are seeking an alternative to the current set-up, the pseudo-left is attempting to establish a political mechanism for diverting growing social anger along reactionary nationalist channels to prevent a confrontation with the

capitalist system.

Leading SNP member Jim Sillars hailed the proposal to create an electoral alliance in time for next year's vote, saying he was "absolutely delighted." Indicating the role such a formation would play, under conditions in which the SNP will continue to impose the attacks on jobs and living standards demanded by the ruling elite, he commented, "I'm not saying that the SNP has become overmighty at the moment, but I think in a democracy it is not healthy for the parties or society to have one party that's dominant for too long. There have to be alternatives available to people."

The purpose of such "alternatives" was explained by Fox in an analysis of the general election result. Portraying the SNP's near wipeout of Labour as a victory for a social democratic party, he wrote that "The SSP's role today as Scotland's socialist party" was "to hold social democracy's feet to the fire so to speak."

"We will work as a party and with others to ensure the SNP keep the promises it has made to its working-class constituency," he continued.

Such claims are made about a party that is committed to slashing corporate taxes to attract investment in a cheap labour economy, pitting workers in Scotland against their class brothers and sisters in the rest of the UK and internationally.



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