

Refugee crisis exposes Scottish National Party's human rights hypocrisy

Stephen Alexander
5 October 2015

The response of the Scottish National Party (SNP) to the refugee crisis has exposed its supposedly progressive stance on human rights to be just as fraudulent as its pretensions of opposing the Conservative government's austerity policies.

The nationalists have struck a pose of sympathy for refugees. Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's First Minister and SNP leader, has called for the UK government "to extend immediate help to more people" and has offered to house "somebody fleeing Syria" at her official residence in Edinburgh.

This token gesture is intended to disguise the fact that her party has no substantial differences with Prime Minister David Cameron's miserly plan to accommodate 20,000 Syrians directly from camps in Lebanon and Jordan over the next five years. This is a tiny fraction of the many millions fleeing civil war in Syria and other imperialist provoked carnage throughout the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe. The devolved SNP government has pledged to take in its "fair share" of these, amounting to just 2,000 people, and has set aside only £500 to accommodate each one.

These derisory arrangements were only reluctantly conceded earlier this month, after a wave of popular solidarity for migrants and outrage at the government's callous and xenophobic attitude.

Britain deports around 15,000 asylum seekers every year under one of the most restrictive asylum regimes in the world. The Conservatives are hounding hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants, many of who have already fled wars and persecution, under expedited deportation procedures. Some 30,000 migrants are currently detained on an indefinite basis in Immigration Removal Centres under deplorable conditions that recently sparked a wave of hunger

strikes.

To the extent that the SNP criticises this at all, it has been to pressure Cameron into taking part in the European Union's (EU's) quota system, which it upholds as a beacon of humanitarianism.

SNP House of Commons leader Angus Robertson tabled a motion to this effect on behalf of six opposition parties including Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. It called for "the UK to play its full and proper role, in conjunction with European partners, in providing sanctuary to our fellow human beings."

In fact, the EU's scheme for parcelling out 120,000 refugees over the next few years is even more repressive than the UK governments. It amounts to less than 5,000 refugees per member state, fewer than the figure of new arrivals on most days. Nearly half a million migrants have reached Europe since January alone. The vast majority are to be interrogated and fingerprinted before being penned in concentration camp-like "hotspots" in Italy and Greece, pending deportation to refugee camps neighbouring war zones in the Middle East and Africa.

As well as rapid deportation procedures, Europe's rulers are now focused on tightly sealing the EU's external border, including the intensification of blockade-style naval operations that have already contributed to the drowning of thousands in the Mediterranean Sea. Countless border guards, police and military personnel have already been deployed, resurrecting the EU's internal borders and cutting off access for refugees to the wealthier core of Europe.

Alex Salmond, the former SNP leader and the party's current Commons Foreign Affairs spokesman, is covering for the EU's systematic violation of human rights by blaming Hungary solely. "There's one

country in Europe that's handling things worse than David Cameron," he commented, "and that's Hungary."

While the Hungarian government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been the most openly vociferous in repelling refugees and is in the process of permanently walling off its Balkan frontier, Salmond well knows that this is the ugly reality on the frontline of EU policies.

While the SNP's motion was defeated, the party has fraudulently lauded British imperialism as a guardian of international law with an otherwise impeccable history toward refugees. "Despite the Tories voting against the motion," Robertson opined, "the message from the overwhelming majority of parties in this parliament to the thousands of refugees seeking shelter is one of support and goodwill."

On tabling the motion, he had even invoked Britain's openness toward those fleeing Nazism during the Second World War. "Since that time," he gushed, "there has been a commitment to refugees and that has not stopped."

Underlying the SNP's cheap anti-Tory populism and fawning before the EU are definite material interests that have nothing to do with ameliorating the suffering of refugees.

The SNP's agenda has long hinged on the EU as a tool to expand Scotland's access to the European market while undercutting London as an entrepôt for big business and financial speculation. This is the central thrust behind nationalist calls for new economic powers to be devolved to Holyrood. As part of this drive, the SNP administration in Edinburgh advocates gradually expanding Scotland's population of 5 million, to provide Scottish capital with new ranks of cheap labour for exploitation.

This perspective was summed up in a *Scotsman* editorial entitled, "Syrian refugees could boost Scots economy." It underscored the immense benefits "they could bring—particularly in Scotland, where the population needs economic stimulation from people of working age." It continued, "Our economy needs more people working and paying taxes, that means more people need to come in."

Full control over income tax is to be devolved as early as next year, meaning the Scottish Parliament will be more reliant on revenues it raises directly. Especially

so, because one-third of public revenues are directed into the private sector in Scotland and state revenue functions as a major source of political patronage for the SNP among businesses large and small.

The SNP is implicated in all of the imperialist depredations that caused the refugee crisis in the first place, having completely abandoned its former opposition to the Iraq War and NATO. Speaking at the United States Council on Foreign Relations earlier this year, Sturgeon reassured the Obama administration that the SNP's differences with Westminster do not extend to Britain's military agenda in Iraq and Syria, or its involvement in the fascist-led coup orchestrated by the US and Germany in the Ukraine.

The response of the nationalists to recent revelations that the Cameron administration ordered the extrajudicial drone assassination of two British citizens in Syria, justified with claims that this prevented an imminent attack on Britain and under conditions where parliament has twice legislated against military action there, betrays the party's contempt for basic democratic rights and international law.

Echoing the government in twisting international legal conventions out of all recognition, Robertson remarked: "The UN Charter allows states to use lethal force in self-defence and the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) should be able to review the evidence that justified this attack."

This very same committee, to which Robertson has been appointed, hears the most damning evidence in secret and functions as a mouthpiece of the British military and spying agencies. Earlier this year the ISC affirmed the legality of mass spying on Internet communications.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact