

Scottish Socialist Party takes its nationalist stand against Jeremy Corbyn

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The Labour Party was all but wiped out in Scotland at the UK general election in May. The party that has dominated Scotland's Westminster seats since the 1950s lost all but one of its 41 Scottish MPs.

Labour's share of the vote fell from 42 percent in 2010 to 24 percent, while party membership fell to as low as 13,500, although this is now said to have recovered to around 17,000.

The Scottish National Party (SNP), which is devoted to the creation of an "independent" Scottish capitalist state based on low taxes and cheap labour, has been able to posture as a left alternative to Labour on issues such as austerity and the Trident nuclear weapons system. This is despite its imposition of Conservative austerity policies and its evisceration of local government spending.

Having lost the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence by 45 percent to 55 percent, the SNP now holds 56 of 59 Scottish seats at Westminster. Party membership has soared to currently around 112,000. Next year's elections to the Scottish parliament were expected to consolidate its lead.

The central role in perpetrating the myth of the SNP as a "left" party has been played by the pseudo-left groups, who are the most vocal in claiming that independence from the rest of the UK would allow Scotland to pursue progressive politics, even leading to the creation of a socialist republic at some distant point.

Key to their insistence that only separatism offers a way forward for Scottish workers is their dismissal of the English working class as hopelessly backward, having supposedly embraced the right-wing nostrums of first Margaret Thatcher and then Tony Blair—and even gravitating inexorably towards the UK Independence Party. In contrast, they claim, not only did the Scottish working class want independence in

order to pursue a socialist agenda, but these "progressive" sentiments were so powerful that they had even been partially embraced by the SNP—which are now not "Tartan Tories" but well to the left of Labour.

The nationalist alliance between the pseudo-left and the SNP is based on the social interests of the privileged petty-bourgeois layer who make up their numbers. They see in nationalism and independence the opportunities for lucrative positions in local government, academia, political think-tanks, innumerable Scottish cultural institutions and, hopefully, in the Holyrood parliament. That is why, in contrast to their co-thinkers south of the border, the pseudo-left groups met the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party with barely disguised dismay and hostility.

For Corbyn to be elected on a landslide vote, based on professed opposition to austerity and militarism, cut across their propaganda in the service of nationalism, a problem made worse by the attacks he has since made on both separatism and the SNP.

Corbyn has opposed a second independence referendum. Asked by the Glasgow *Herald* if he was a unionist, he replied "No I would describe myself as a socialist... I would hope that we can offer a sufficiently radical economic agenda for the whole of the UK that all those traditions of Labour in Scotland, in Wales for that matter as well as in England, do come together within the party."

After his election, he attacked the SNP during a recent interview with Andrew Marr of the BBC. He told Marr, "Listen, if you're poor in Glasgow and you're poor in Birmingham, then you are poor. If you need a house in Glasgow and you need a house in London, then you need a house.

“There is the class politics issue of it. That is the message I am taking to Scotland—flags don’t build houses. Yes, the SNP have the headline of being opposed to austerity. But the SNP are privatising Cal Mac [ferries], privatised Scotrail, are also cutting college places and cutting local government finance.”

Corbyn made these statements based on his central assertion that Labour can be made over as an anti-austerity party, which is false. Not only has he faced an undeclared war against any such shift within the Parliamentary Labour Party, but in Scotland his attempt to revitalise the party’s electoral fortunes has met with a hostile rebuff.

Newly elected Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said in August of the possibility of Corbyn winning the leadership, “I don’t want to spend my whole life just carping from the sidelines.” After Corbyn’s victory, Dugdale agreed to work with him while continuing to oppose many of his policies. She told the *Scotsman*, “It’s a convincing victory which gives him a clear mandate to lead the Labour Party his way, just as I’ll lead it my way here in Scotland.”

Nevertheless, Corbyn’s comments point to the fundamental divisions in British society, Scotland, England and Wales alike, as being those of class rather than national identity. And it is for this that he came under immediate attack from the Scottish Socialist Party in its *Scottish Socialist Voice*.

Ken Ferguson states frankly that the SSP’s attitude to Corbyn and the SNP has nothing to do with their respective stances on austerity. Rather “Simply put, Corbyn is a unionist, leading a unionist party that opposes not just independence and a second referendum but further powers for Holyrood.”

SSP leader Colin Fox, warned, “Those drawn to Corbyn’s progressive ideas will recognise the nationalists are nowhere near as left-wing as they would like people to believe.”

This meant that the SSP’s role would be even more crucial in trying to preserve nationalism’s tattered credentials.

He stressed, “cross-party forces are more important than ever after Jeremy Corbyn’s election as Labour leader. Although he is increasingly a prisoner of his right wing and opposes independence, Corbyn is nonetheless well to the left of the SNP and capable as Ian Bell puts it of ‘lobbing repeated shells into

nationalist trenches’... In these new political circumstances, the role of the SSP and RISE, Scotland’s Left Alliance, will be crucial for the independence movement in returning Corbyn’s ‘shells’.”

This stands as a self-indictment of Fox. The people that wanted most to maintain that the SNP was “left-wing” were the leaders of SSP, Solidarity, the Radical Independence Convention and the rest. Fox even sat on the “Yes Scotland” advisory board in support of last September’s referendum on Scottish independence, alongside the SNP’s Nicola Sturgeon, who is now the party leader.

He might now step up the rate of his occasional swipes at the SNP, but only for having “demobilised the Yes movement and left it vulnerable to attack” by Corbyn. And he responded to this threat by offering to take part in a new Yes Campaign along with “our Yes partners in the SNP and Greens... to prepare for victory next time.”

None of the acute social and political problems posed to workers in Scotland and throughout Britain can be addressed by an attempt to revive Labour as a reformist party, any more than they can by a retreat into national separatism and the creation of a smaller, bourgeois state. But on one thing at least, Corbyn is correct—when he says, “There is the class politics issue of it here.”

Even a confused, partial—and highly distorted—re-emergence of class-based politics, as witnessed in Corbyn’s election, has served to expose the pro-capitalist, anti-working class politics of the pseudo-left fraternity in Scotland. The SSP longs for the day when the right wing of the Labour Party will deal decisively with the “Unionist” Corbyn and those workers and youth who support him—in the hope that their alliance with the SNP can then succeed in securing a Yes vote and they can finally have their day in the sun.



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