

RISE: “Scottish Syriza” seeks alliance with Scottish National Party

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Writing in the *Scottish Socialist Voice* in early December, Jonathan Shafi, the national organiser of RISE, “Scotland’s Left Alliance,” made clear that RISE aims to emerge, after the May 2016 elections, as a loyal opposition to the Scottish National Party (SNP) within the Scottish parliament. With opinion polls suggesting another landslide victory for the SNP, largely at the expense of the Labour Party, RISE’s tactic, Shafi explained, is to aim for SNP supporters’ transferable vote under the regional list system of proportional representation.

RISE advances itself as more nationalist than the SNP. Shafi explained, “RISE exists to provide a countervailing pressure. We back the SNP’s goal of independence, indeed we’re for a fuller independence than they’re willing to contemplate. But a strong RISE will also give the SNP’s new radicals the energy and ideas to ensure their party stands up to frackers, landlords, NATO and so on.”

In other words, under conditions where the SNP government is enforcing much the same brutal austerity policies as the Conservative government of David Cameron in London, the pseudo-lefts and nationalists in RISE aim to ensure that disaffection with the SNP is contained, kept on board and channelled along nationalist and separatist lines.

Shafi was writing on the eve of the organisation’s founding conference, held in Glasgow late last year. Despite being presented as an “attempt to unify the ideas of many hundreds of people” who attended a recent tour by RISE activists, conference documents were drawn up by Shafi and a small group of pseudo-lefts, including members of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) the Republican Communist Network, a SYRIZA supporter in Scotland and supporters of the Radical Independence Campaign.

Their draft policy program, passed by the conference, consists largely of disposable, Scotland only, proposals for somewhat less inequality, and an expansion of the public sector through a strengthening of the Scottish capitalist state. According to RISE, wage inequality should be restricted between a pay cap of £100,000 and a minimum of £20,000. Making clear the token character of this proposal, they add that the National Minimum Wage should be enforced, “particularly in the bar and hospitality industry”, while “public sector workers should receive at least £10 per hour.” Private schools should lose their charitable status, drugs decriminalised and “police forces should come under community control.”

This is mere packaging for the central proposal, which is for RISE to demand that “an independence referendum is solely a matter for the Scottish parliament, free from any Westminster veto.”

Motions proposed to the conference were along the same lines. Echoing the pseudo-democratic and fraudulent rhetoric of Podemos in Spain, which the RISE leadership also admire, one motion explained, “We have no desire to build career politicians. We want a politics of many leaders, not just one or two.”

Other motions called for a £1 tax on whisky, a landlord tax, an end to corporate tax evasion, and a land register. A new layer of local government was proposed from Dundee, “on the basis of small communities and more directly accountable to local residents.”

A trade union resolution called for an end to government subsidies to “those companies which don’t pay the living wage”—a policy not as radical as that recently espoused by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn that such companies would not be allowed to pay dividends to shareholders—and called for employment laws to be devolved to Scotland.

RISE's piecemeal social measures are explicitly based on the fragmentation of the working class in Britain. One composite resolution on the National Health Service (NHS) *made no reference at all to the NHS in England*, to the struggles of junior doctors in England, which led to the first strike in 40 years this month, or the destruction of health care south of the border. Another motion opposing "cuts and closures" called for a campaign to prevent the closure of steel plants in Motherwell and Cambuslang. This motion made no mention at all of the threatened steel plants employing many hundreds of workers in South Wales, Yorkshire and the West Midlands.

Motion 45 did refer to England, noting that "the largest part of the working class in the UK is in England." But rather than call for a united struggle against austerity and the Conservative government, the motion called instead for RISE to strengthen links with "Anti-Unionist socialists in England, Ireland and Wales"—that is those sections of the pseudo-left who also support Scottish nationalism.

Motions referring to international events and examples were an even deeper morass of contradictory cynicism. Motion 24, for example, called for Scotland to "emulate the example of Ireland, and following independence to become a neutral country."

The resolution made no reference at all to the fraudulence of Irish neutrality. Ireland is a key refuelling station for US flights to the Middle East. In any case, in the very next sentence, the motion noted that "this does not preclude a future debate about [European Union] membership". Ireland, of course, is also an EU member, having suffered some of the most brutal austerity measures as a condition for EU "bailouts" to rescue its collapsed banking system.

Making no comment at all on the nature of the EU itself, another motion, from RISE Lothian, noted "the recent experience of Greece shows the immense pressure that RISE will come under when it starts to gain the ear of the masses". In other words, the gross betrayal carried out by Syriza was not the result of that party's perspective of defending Greek capitalism and its place in the EU, but simply the vindictive response of the EU bureaucracy for Syriza having deceived Greek workers into believing they would oppose austerity.

Motion 10, "Sexism and the Left," proposed by a

Jack Ferguson, was drawn up by an organisation formed through a split with the Socialist Workers Party over allegations of rape against a leading member and the mishandling of the charges by the SWP's "Disputes Committee". The motion, calling for a "clear process for challenging and raising issues with comrade's behaviour" insisted on the "inappropriateness of leading RISE activists investigating each other." It insisted that "serious concerns should be referred to outside support and advice from organisations such as Rape Crisis, or where necessary and if requested by those involved, the police."

This blanket endorsement of the police is made under conditions where the systematic infiltration of police spies and provocateurs such as Mark Kennedy, some of whom were serial abusers of female activists, into "left" and protest movements, is now well known. It dovetails with the SSP's ongoing factional warfare against its former leader, Tommy Sheridan, who now heads the rival nationalist group Solidarity Scotland, which saw the SSP openly collude with the police to secure his imprisonment on charges of perjury.

RISE is a vehicle for a rightward moving upper middle class layer in and around the leadership of the pseudo-left tendencies, in academia and the media seeking their place in the corridors of power around the Scottish parliament and the host of think tanks and supporting organisations. Their specific role is to package Scottish independence in terms that can be foisted onto the working class by proclaiming it as progressive and obscuring its bourgeois and necessarily disastrous social, economic and political consequences.



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