

Scottish government in crisis over Trump victory

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Formally congratulating Donald Trump on his election to the office of US President, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon conceded that his victory was “not the outcome I hoped for.”

“Many in America and across the world will also feel a real sense of anxiety,” she continued before appealing, absurdly, for the far-right billionaire to “be a president for everyone in modern, multicultural America.”

Sturgeon, making clear her own reliance on identity politics, praised Hillary Clinton’s defeated right-wing militarist campaign as “a major step forward for women in America and across the world.” According to Sturgeon, the corrupt corporate warmonger “is owed a deep debt of gratitude.”

Sturgeon’s remarks contrasted with British Prime Minister Theresa May’s gushing offer to “look forward to working with president-elect Donald Trump, building on these ties to ensure the security and prosperity of our nations in the years ahead.”

The difference in tone is more than packaging. Trump’s election threatens to sharply deepen the fault lines in a ruling class in Britain that is divided over the unknown duration and uncertain destination of Brexit, over the fate of the European Union (EU), and even the survival of the UK itself.

Trump favours Brexit. The first British politician to meet him was Nigel Farage, currently reinstated as leader of the UK Independence Party, and the man who Trump has now suggested should be UK Ambassador to the United States! Since her elevation to 10 Downing Street, May has repeatedly made clear that, despite the chaos and disarray surrounding all aspects of the Brexit process, she and much of the Conservative Party she leads are determined to press on with it. This includes the growing possibility of a “hard” Brexit, in which no

agreement is reached at all on future British access to the European Single Market.

Sturgeon, on the other hand, and most of the Scottish National Party (SNP) she leads, along with a section of the British Labour Party, all the Liberal Democrats and sections of the Tories, consider Brexit an unmitigated disaster to be prevented at all costs. From the standpoint of attracting investment, exporting to the EU, and advancing the interests of the vast financial sector most dependent on Europe, EU membership is considered obligatory.

Sturgeon et al had anticipated a Clinton victory and were considering how best to utilise a Democrat-led administration’s opposition to Brexit to add weight and leverage to their case for a reversal of the June 23 EU referendum vote, in which a majority in Scotland voted to remain in the EU. The SNP has also been mooted as supportive of a “progressive alliance” of pro-EU parties seeking to overturn the result.

Trump’s election victory, therefore, pitches the SNP into a considerable crisis. A turn by the US to “America first” nationalism undermines every post-World War II institution underwritten by American power, foremost of which is the EU itself. Across the EU, the outcome has been greeted with alarm that both NATO and the hundred-year-long US engagement in European political affairs might come to an end.

Moreover, SNP leaders, supporting both NATO and the EU, have been unusually outspoken against a Trump presidency. For years now, Trump and the former SNP leader, Alex Salmond, now the party’s foreign affairs spokesman, have been conducting a public feud over the view from an Aberdeenshire golf course.

Salmond was initially happy to grovel to the billionaire tycoon, and glad to trample over local

environmental concerns in pursuit of a lucrative development in Menie in Salmond's own constituency. The relationship turned sour, however, when Trump went to court to prevent a £230 million wind farm project being built some miles off the coast of his development, arguing the windmills would spoil his wealthy guests' view of the North Sea.

Speaking bitterly of Trump, Salmond recently informed a local radio station, "I've met him, I've spoken to him, and ... I absolutely tell you from what I know of this man's character he is not fit to be President of the United States of America." Salmond went on, "There are many sociopaths about, but they shouldn't be in the Oval Office, they shouldn't be president of the United States."

Trump was recently stripped of his role as a GlobalScot business adviser and of his honorary degree from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen because of his anti-Muslim rants.

The SNP's stance against Trump was echoed by the Scottish Labour Party's Kezia Dugdale, who not only supported Clinton but twice crossed the Atlantic to work for a Clinton victory. Dugdale, a right-wing Blairite, warned of "a dark day for those of us who believe in compassion, tolerance and equality." Even the Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson complained that Trump's election was not the one she wanted. Davidson has previously turned to Shakespeare, describing Trump on Twitter as a "clay-brained guts, a knotty-pated fool."

Under these conditions, although the SNP is preparing legislation for a second independence referendum, the party's overriding aspiration is for Scotland to remain in the EU by reversing the Brexit decision.

Last week, the UK Supreme Court ruled that both the Scottish and Welsh governments could take part in the legal case currently before the Supreme Court over Article 50, which initiates the process to leave the EU. The case is a legal challenge by the government to the High Court decision that triggering Article 50 will require parliamentary approval and cannot be done on the basis of the Royal Prerogative powers enjoyed by the prime minister. The Scottish government has argued, in line with the High Court ruling, that Article 50 would "lead to a fundamental alteration of the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom."

After the High Court decision, Mike Russell, the Scottish government's minister for Brexit, urged May to drop the appeal they have launched against it. "Parliament has the right to determine the triggering of Article 50," Russell said.

Proposing the Welsh case, Labour's Mick Antoniw, counsel general for Wales, explained that issues of "profound importance not only in relation to the concept of parliamentary sovereignty, but also in relation to the wider constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom and the legal framework for devolution" were at stake.

Nevertheless, the Brexit debacle has also exposed divisions in the supposedly monolithic SNP. Over the last month, it emerged that former SNP government minister Alex Neil and a significant number of SNP voters had opted for Britain to leave the EU. According to Neil, "The EU is no longer the progressive force it used to be, especially in relation to its pursuit of a policy of severe austerity, which is doing so much damage to the people living in the poorest countries in Europe, like Portugal and Greece."

Neil has formed a cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament with the Labour Party's Neil Findlay. The pair issued a statement seeking to put a left gloss on Brexit, claiming, regardless of the trajectory of the British government, that there were now opportunities "to make our country much fairer, where social justice reigns supreme and where we end the dominance of and adherence to the market solutions."

The extraordinary disintegration and disorientation expressed at all levels of official politics is a remarkable confirmation of the correctness of the stance taken by the Socialist Equality Party in calling for an active boycott of the June 23 referendum and in support of the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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