

Pseudo-left groups champion Scottish National Party's independence referendum demand

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First Minister Nicola Sturgeon used the Scottish National Party conference to confirm that she will put a motion calling for a second independence referendum before the Holyrood parliament Wednesday.

The pseudo-left groups are already lining up to portray her party's unprincipled manoeuvre as a major democratic initiative and to once again dress up nationalism in progressive colours.

Sturgeon's address to the spring conference advanced the SNP as a "national party with a truly internationalist outlook" and an opponent of Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May's "hard Brexit" (exit from the European Union) strategy because it will mean austerity and cuts.

All that is required to accept this account is to ignore the SNP's role as a representative of Scottish business interests that has spent its years imposing the cuts demanded by Westminster—and which would do the same if cuts were demanded by Edinburgh and Brussels.

Amid her rhetorical invocations of democracy and the will of the Scottish people, there was little of substance. There would be an independence referendum, but possibly not before the Brexit process was completed in 2020. This evasiveness was made necessary because there is still no majority for independence. Moreover, among those who supported independence in 2014, a significant minority—rising to a third of SNP voters—voted against membership of the EU in the 2016 in/out referendum.

Access to the European Single Market is the sole genuine concern of the SNP's business backers, and is one shared by broad sections of big business throughout the UK. The SNP wants to maintain access at all costs, portraying the EU as a bastion of progress and ignoring not only its imposition of savage austerity on Greece, Portugal, Ireland and throughout the continent, but also the tidal wave of xenophobia it has encouraged against the

asylum seekers fleeing imperialist wars in Africa and the Middle East. Any honest discussion of European politics would expose the fraud of the SNP's much vaunted "civic nationalism," at a time when nationalist parties across Europe are assuming an ever more fascistic character.

Sturgeon made clear that she had sought "compromise and agreement" with May. But with May's "hard Brexit" stand threatening—in the words of Economy Secretary Keith Brown—to "rip us out of the single market against our will"—a second referendum was now required "at a time when we know the terms of Brexit... but before it is too late."

Even so, Sturgeon's referendum "bottom line" is open to haggling, with the SNP seeking exceptional powers to set corporation tax and freedom to negotiate on other forms of single market access. Her biographer, David Torrance, noted in the *Financial Times* that "possible Scottish membership of EFTA [the European Free Trade Association] or the European Economic Area is now frequently floated in the press."

There is nothing to distinguish the position of the SNP from numerous other bourgeois tendencies throughout Britain and Europe, who profess their commitment to "progressive values," to "free movement" of labour (or at least skilled European labour) and even "internationalism" solely from the standpoint of securing continued participation in the EU as a trading bloc dominated by the transnational corporations and financial institutions. Yet, just as they did in 2014, the pseudo-left groups are jostling for position as partners of the SNP and the most forthright advocates of "self-determination" for Scotland—supposedly as a staging post for a future "socialist Scotland."

This latest love-in with the SNP is made more difficult

because most of the tendencies involved supported Brexit, based on the assertion that they were advocating a “left Leave” vote that would open the way for a socialist Britain! But the pseudo-left groups have made their watchword Emerson’s dictum, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.”

The Socialist Workers Party declares, without blushing, in *Socialist Review*, “The SNP support for the free movement of people is positive, but unfortunately its support for the Single European Market, though superficially attractive to many SNP supporters, *exposes the party’s attachment to business and neoliberal capitalism... There is also the major issue of the Scottish government’s continuing refusal to confront the Tories’ cuts and austerity agenda.*” [Emphasis added] Raymie Kiernan adds that “the strategy of linking independence to membership of the bosses’ European Union (EU) and single market both weakens the fight and makes faulty assumptions.”

The Socialist Party Scotland, co-thinkers of the Socialist Party (England and Wales) continues to maintain that separatism, to which they give “critical support,” is a step towards “an independent socialist Scotland” that would, once established, “seek to forge the closest of relationships with a socialist England, Wales and Ireland as a step to a socialist Europe.” At no stage do they explain why the necessarily international struggle for socialism makes separation either desirable or necessary, because in reality they have no intention of fighting for a “socialist” Scotland, England, Europe or anywhere else.

The real role played by the advocates of “critical support” for nationalism is made clear by the statement issued by a specially convened meeting of the Scottish Socialist Party Executive. The SSP was formed through an earlier nationalist break with the Socialist Party. Its national spokesman Colin Fox is advertised on the SSP website as a “former Yes Scotland board member,” a body set up by the SNP in 2014 to champion separatism on which he sat alongside former SNP leader Alex Salmond.

Fox is ready to perform the same service once more. He explains politely, “Whilst we have many differences with the SNP, most notably on economic policy and the role of the European Union... [in fact the SSP urged a Remain vote] Nonetheless we will work alongside our partners in the movement to secure independence. It represents both an advance for working people and a defeat for the forces of capital which holds them back.”

The pseudo-left groups are in truth aligning themselves

with the “forces of capital,” that is with one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, and not against them. The gyrations they are presently forced to perform is because their previous nationalist and opportunist embrace of Brexit must now be “reconciled” with their nationalist and opportunist embrace of Scottish nationalism.

It is imperative that workers reject all efforts to divide the struggles of Scottish and English workers and tie them hand and foot to what is supposedly “their own” nation’s interests. It is now time for workers to adopt as their own the socialist and internationalist alternative fought for by the Socialist Equality Party.

As we explained in our 2014 statement, “Vote “no” in the Scottish referendum—Fight for a socialist Britain”:

“The unity and independence of the working class is the criterion against which every political party and every political initiative must be judged. This is essential under conditions in which the planet is being befouled with nationalist poison...

“The SEP is for a struggle against globally organised capital, not the offering of corporate tax incentives. We are for the overthrow of British imperialism and its state apparatus, not a negotiated settlement to set up a new repressive state.

“We call for working people to reject nationalism and separatism and to mobilise an anti-austerity, anti-war movement seeking the removal of the Conservatives, Scottish National Party and their Labour and Liberal Democrat allies from power and an end to the rule of the parasitic and unaccountable financial oligarchy they speak for.

“The SEP calls for the creation of a workers’ government committed to socialist policies. We stand for the formation of the United Socialist States of Europe, not the Balkan-style carve-up of the continent led by grasping regional elites who will use a ‘yes’ vote in Scotland as a green light for their own separatist agendas.”



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