

“Now Scotland”: Pseudo-left groups form new alliance with nationalist hardliners

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Hardline Scottish nationalists and sections of the Scottish pseudo-left have formed “Now Scotland”, described as a “grassroots, non-party campaign”.

The new formation emerged from the All Under One Banner (AUOB) collection of Saltire-waving demonstrators who, pre-lockdown, held monthly marches in favour of an immediate second referendum on Scottish independence. A series of online meetings last year resulted in the group forming “Yes Alba”, before ditching the name in favour of “Now Scotland” so as not to offend Gaelic language activists.

The new organisation is an adjunct of the most pro-independence faction of the ruling Scottish National Party (SNP). Its purpose is to emulate the Yes Scotland alliance of the SNP, Scottish Greens and the pseudo-left Scottish Socialist Party, which mobilised nationalist campaigners prior to the 2014 Scottish referendum. Scottish elections are due this year. The SNP is committed to tabling legislation for a new referendum should it win a majority.

Now Scotland’s leading lights include George Kerevan, former member of the Pabloite International Marxist Group and the Labour Party, who joined the SNP in 1996. Kerevan, a former associate editor of the *Scotsman* newspaper, was a Westminster MP for the SNP between 2015 and 2017. His model for Now Scotland is the Catalan nationalist ANC (Catalan National Assembly) which organised a series of demonstrations prior to the 2017 Catalan referendum that were brutally suppressed by the Spanish government.

Angus Brendan Macneil, SNP MP for the Na h-Eileanan an Iar constituency, is a supporter of former party leader and former First Minister, Alex Salmond. Others involved include Salmond ally Craig Murray (a prominent campaigner for Julian Assange’s freedom) and a number of AUOB organisers and supporters of the Wings over Scotland nationalist blog. Salmond is publicly keeping his distance, thus far.

Two leading members of the pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party in Scotland, Keir McKechnie and Charlotte Ahmed, are also on the new organisation’s inaugural committee. An SWP statement in *Socialist Worker* outlined:

“The creation of Now Scotland opens up the possibility of a new membership organisation, not controlled by the SNP hierarchy. Those who want to campaign for a radical alternative

to the British state and to the limited vision of independence presented by the SNP leadership must seize the moment.”

The “radical” alternative to the British state the hardliners want to see is a Scottish capitalist state, formed in the midst of a protracted and potentially violent carve up of the resources of the British state, and a politically catastrophic division of the working class. Their primary differences with the current SNP leadership are over the speed and legality of the process by which this division of assets is initiated.

The SNP is riven with the most bitter disputes on this question between Sturgeon and her former mentor, Salmond, who stepped down from SNP leadership and resigned as First Minister following the 2014 referendum defeat.

Following the 2016 UK-yes vote in the Brexit referendum, Salmond let it be known that he felt Sturgeon was too slow in taking advantage of the vote—with Scotland voting 62 to 38 percent to remain in the European Union (EU)—to press for another independence poll. Sturgeon and her allies have stressed that they intend to proceed in consultation with the British government and state, NATO, and the EU, to ensure the most stable basis to attract investment.

Salmond is viewed as a prospective leader of a “Plan B” movement, which would hold, if necessary, an illegal referendum, along the lines of the Catalan poll in 2017.

When it became known that Salmond was seeking a return to active politics, he was targeted by a Scottish government investigation into alleged sexual misdemeanours. He fought back, and in 2019 a judicial review ruled strongly that the Scottish government’s investigation was “tainted by apparent bias”. In 2020, he was found innocent of all charges in a subsequent trial, despite a major police operation trawling for evidence against him.

Sturgeon is now in deep trouble and may be forced to resign if found to have breached the Scottish government’s ministerial code over the extent of her prior knowledge of the moves against Salmond. At the SNP’s last conference, supporters of the pseudo-left and Stalinist-influenced Common Weal Group won between 44 and 50 percent of seats on key committees. Salmond supporter Joanna Cherry MP was recently sacked from a front bench position in the party’s parliamentary party at Westminster.

The SNP's problems are rooted in the bankrupt and right-wing character of its *raison d'être*, Scottish independence. In power for 14 years, the SNP has supervised a relentless assault on social spending, in line with targets set in Westminster but serving the interests of the Scottish bourgeoisie just as surely as their English counterparts.

Local authority services to the most vulnerable have been shredded, while living standards for the poorest are abysmal. Scotland recently recorded the worst annual drug death figures, by a huge margin, in the whole of Europe—1,264 drug related deaths in 2019, more than double the figure in 2014. In 2018, Scotland registered 295 drug deaths per million, compared with 81 in Sweden, the next highest, and 76 across the UK. The year to April 2020 saw demand for food banks increase by 47 percent, including a 62 percent increase in the number of children supported.

The pandemic has intensified the exposure of the SNP's anti-working class agenda. Its response in Holyrood has been every bit as catastrophic as that of the UK government led by Boris Johnson at Westminster. Scotland reported the highest rate of COVID-19 related care home deaths of any part of the UK. Between March and May, 338 COVID-19 positive patients were released from hospitals into care homes. By August, 47 percent of all COVID-19 deaths were in care homes. A Crown Office investigation has been set up to consider prosecutions over 474 care home deaths. By January, the unit had received 2,242 death reports.

The Scottish government has also led the charge to re-open schools with the pandemic still unsuppressed—some primary years are returning this week, in advance of similar moves in England.

To maintain a popular base, the SNP relies massively on the wretched, right-wing character of the Labour Party and the refusal of the trade unions to lead any struggle to unite workers against the assault on living standards. It is reported to be heading for a landslide victory in the May elections and a number of opinion polls have recorded narrow majorities for independence.

But no faction of the nationalists can offer workers even a minimal alleviation of the relentless destruction of jobs and social services. They champion rival strategies for the further drastic division and impoverishment of the working class.

A recent article in the *Scotsman* from Sturgeon supporters Alyn Smith and Stewart McDonald delivered an anti-Russia rant and hailed the pro-EU “Maidan” uprising in Ukraine of 2014. According to the pair, this fascist backed coup, which saw street fighting between the neo-fascist Right Sector and government forces and brought the world to the brink of war, was “the Revolution of Dignity” which took place because the Ukrainian people wanted “prosperity and integration with their European neighbours.”

The SNP's defence and foreign affairs spokesmen hailed the British government's commitment to the 1994 Budapest

Memorandum upholding the inviolability of Ukrainian borders, which has repeatedly served as the pretext for military manoeuvres against Russia. Ukraine's social policy of mass immiseration, under conditions of the pandemic, threatens 9 million of the country's 42 million population with “extreme poverty”, according to the UN.

Salmond supporter and blogger, Craig Murray, last year outlined his view that Scottish secession could be based on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision on the right of Kosovo to secede from Serbia.

Murray, speaking at an AUOB rally, avoided referring to the succession of civil wars, NATO bombing and catastrophic levels of poverty that were imposed on the working class across the Balkans during the breakup of Yugoslavia, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. But he made clear he viewed a British civil war over Scottish independence as something for which preparations should be made: “There is going to be no process of Independence agreed with the British government. We have to take Independence, not beg for it. At some stage, there is always the danger that the British government may try to react by sending in the British Army to enforce Westminster's will. If we believe we are an independent nation, we have to be prepared to defend ourselves as an independent state should the worst happen.”

Now Scotland seeks to cover for the reactionary implications of its separatist strategy by relying on the hysterics of the middle class identity politicians and appeals to the trade union bureaucracy. These work to divert immense class tensions, intensified by the pandemic—which objectively tend to unify workers in Britain and internationally—along nationalist anti-English lines that portray Scotland as an oppressed nation, rather than part of an imperialist state ruled by a unified imperialist bourgeoisie for more than 300 years.

Opening a new axis of struggle for workers in Scotland, across Britain and internationally is urgent. Opposition to imperialism, war and mass poverty cannot be mounted through the creation of a new minor imperialist power in Scotland, with a state apparatus staffed by pseudo-left careerists. It demands a unified movement of the working class across all borders, for an end to capitalist rule and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states, for a socialist Britain, within a United Socialist States of Europe.



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