

Greens join the Scottish National Party-led government to give pro-independence majority

Steve James
5 September 2021

The vote last weekend by around 800 members of the Scottish Green Party to approve an agreement with the Scottish National Party (SNP) government opens, for the first time, the corridors of state power to the environmentalist party in Scotland.

The deal follows the SNP's landslide election victory earlier this year which left the party one short of an overall majority. Aided by the Greens' eight seats (seven with the parliament's presiding officer position now taken by a Green member of the Scottish parliament), the SNP under First Minister Nicola Sturgeon can muster a safe working majority.

By accepting a "cooperation" agreement and shared policy document, "Working Together to Build a Fairer, Greener, Independent Scotland", the Greens are entering into an effective coalition with the SNP, in power since 2007.

The terms of the agreement grant the SNP the Greens' support for a second Scottish referendum, the Scottish budget and in any no confidence votes. In return, the Greens have secured a couple of junior ministerial positions, supervised by the SNP. Green co-leader Patrick Harvie is now Scotland's minister for "zero carbon buildings, active travel and tenants' rights" while Lorna Slater holds responsibility for "green skills, the circular economy and biodiversity". Neither are in the Scottish government cabinet. Both parties have agreed a "no surprises" rule, each agreeing to keep the other informed of their plans.

By eschewing the term "coalition", the Greens hope to put some distance between themselves and the SNP's most reactionary policies.

No one should be taken in by this. The Greens are helping the SNP advance its independence strategy for Scottish capitalism while providing a nominally "left" cover for its offensive against the working class. The agreement, which will see the Greens underwrite the SNP's right-wing agenda, confirms the party's character as a pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist representative of the upper middle class.

Key features of the policy document include:

- A pledge to "secure a referendum on Scottish independence after the Covid crisis" during the current parliamentary session,

due to end by 2025, along with moves to increase the powers available to the Scottish parliament in the meantime and open Scottish government offices in North and Central Europe. Both parties support Scottish independence. First Minister Sturgeon has repeatedly claimed the election result gives a mandate for a new independence poll, despite support for independence hovering consistently at only around the 50 percent mark.

- Minimal measures towards climate targets based on reduced car use, rail electrification, increased rail freight and alternate fuels. These are contradicted by ongoing road building projects which will be subject to "normal statutory assessment and business case processes."

- Targets on alternative energy generation, more insulated homes, and the "decarbonisation of our energy system". This amounts to more onshore wind turbines and a draft of a "credible pathway to achieving the 2030 [climate] targets" merely for consideration. The agreement hardly mentions oil beyond noting that the parties "do not entirely agree on the role of the oil and gas sector" —hardly surprising given that the SNP's slogan for decades was "It's Scotland's Oil" and that the SNP has offered tacit support to corporations for further development of the potentially vastly lucrative Cambo oilfield off the Shetland isles.

The policy document calls for a "national strategy for economic transformation", as yet unwritten, which will include a "vision for reinvigorating Scottish manufacturing and heavy industry, supporting Scottish supply chains and creating high-quality jobs". In reality, this will be a recipe for the Greens' bending over backwards to help the SNP ensure that Scottish-based capitalists are able expand their profits on the basis of a low wage, low tax economy.

In 2016, the Scottish government launched a Sustainable Development Commission to explore the prospects for the Scottish economy, post-independence. A 2018 report from the commission called for rapid increase in productivity, population growth and low welfare spending to overcome the funding gap that a newly independent Scotland, deprived of UK taxes, would confront. The report, to which many sections of business contributed, called for a national strategy based on

attracting investment, high levels of exports and labour flexibility.

In local governments in the rest of the UK, the Greens have enforced attacks on the working class no less brutally than their Labour and Tory counterparts. In Brighton, home of the Green Party's sole elected MP Caroline Lucas and a Green minority council from 2011-2015, the party imposed an 11 percent increase in council tax, £37 million of spending cuts, and pay cuts of up to £4,000 for refuse workers. In Bristol, Green deputy mayor Gus Hoyt helped preside over £91 million of cuts and an explosion of homelessness in the city.

A few derisory provisions are outlined in the SNP-Green policy agreement to address inequality and poverty, including some form of rent controls, postponed till after the next election, and a miserly £20 a week "Scottish Child Payment"—again only available by the end of the parliamentary session. Proposals for a National Care Service and a review of social care, after Covid-19 devastated the sector, do not touch private ownership of care homes and make empty calls for "ethical commissioning" and "fair work". The primary purpose of these minimal measures is to bolster the case for independence, after which, because of the vast economic uncertainty of the project, all bets are off, and all promises worthless.

The agreement also sets out an annex of "excluded matters" on which the parties have agreed to politely disagree, and which can be added to as necessary. The exclusions list SNP policies which the Greens would prefer not to talk about but which, by sharing power, they are implementing or preparing.

These include:

- "The future of green ports", the SNP's twist on the Conservative government's policy of freeports—investment and export locations offering companies low or no taxes, fewer regulations and cheap labour—with minimal restrictions added in Scotland for the most egregious forms of exploitation.

- The Scottish government's "direct financial support to the aerospace, defence and security sectors"—one of the unmentionables of Scottish political life. Arms and security companies operate major facilities for BAE and Babcock international, both of which build warships, and Leonardo, which builds missiles and radar systems. First Minister Sturgeon's constituency includes the large Govan shipyard in Glasgow, currently building Type 26 frigates for the Royal Navy. The SNP has long supported production of large numbers of frigates to confront Russian warships.

- Scotland's "commitment to membership of NATO following independence". This is prefaced with the assurance that both parties "believe that Scotland should be an independent, outward-looking country, playing a full part in an inclusive, rules-based international system," indicating that the Greens will continue to turn a blind eye to the SNP's ongoing and critical daily collaboration with British imperialism's military operations and its aspirations for military

independence.

- "The role of Gross Domestic Product measurements, and economic principles related to concepts of sustainable growth and inclusive growth"—a nod to the Greens' reactionary anti-growth politics, which holds the expansion of humanity's productive forces responsible for the social and environmental destruction caused by the capitalist system of production.

The Greens' alliance with the SNP brings them fully into line with the reactionary role their counterparts have played internationally for decades. Wherever a Green Party finds itself in a position of power, it inevitably proves itself a committed party of capitalist government. This is especially the case in Ireland and Germany, where the Greens have imposed brutal austerity and became the foremost advocates of military interventionism.

In Ireland, the Green Party formed a coalition with Fianna Fail in 2007, which responded to the global financial crisis the following year by imposing successive punitive emergency budgets. These measures, designed to pay for state bailouts of the banks, led to wage and benefit cuts, tax hikes and large-scale redundancies for broad sections of working people.

In Germany in 1998, the Greens entered into a coalition with the Social Democrats to form a government at the federal level. Green Party Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer was in the forefront of the campaign for the first international combat mission by the German army since the Second World War—as part of the NATO bombardment of Serbia. In the ongoing federal elections, the Greens advance a militarist programme for German imperialism, investing in the military "so that rifles shoot", in the words of the party's candidate for Chancellor, Annelena Baerbock.

The role of the Greens in government will be no less filthy in Scotland. The securing of a right-wing majority government in favour of independence makes more urgent the building of the Socialist Equality Party and its perspective for a joint struggle of the British and international working class against national divisions, militarism and austerity, and for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact