

Scottish National Party joins anti-Russia war chorus and embraces NATO

Darren Paxton
12 April 2022

Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's First Minister and Leader of the Scottish National Party, has signalled the party's full support for NATO's war drive against Russia. Speaking to ITV's *Representing Border* on March 9, she called for a "no-fly zone" over Ukraine and said that NATO should "keep its mind open to every way in which Ukraine can be helped".

Sturgeon and the entire spectrum of Scottish nationalist politicians, from right to "left", have dispensed with their anti-war pretences and emerged as full-throated imperialists.

Dismissing concerns over the implications of a no-fly zone in providing a potential trigger for nuclear war, Sturgeon said, "Nobody wants to see an escalation of that nature. But on the other hand, Putin is not acting in any way rationally or defensively." She continued, "The world cannot stand by and watch Ukraine's independence and sovereignty be extinguished."

This is not the first time Sturgeon has banged the war drum on Russia. In 2015, she went to Washington to speak with the United States Council on Foreign Relations to support the UK government sending troops into Ukraine to train far-right forces that spearheaded the coup which overthrew pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych in 2014.

In her 2015 statement to Washington, she stressed solidarity with Westminster and NATO saying, "Well, this is a good example on these issues where the Scottish government supports the UK position on Ukraine and Russia. We're supportive of the sanctions against Russia and have been a voice of support within the UK for the government's position and a voice of support wider than that for the international community's position."

She continued, "Do not think that the SNP and the Scottish government takes a markedly different position from the UK government on the vast majority of international issues. We don't... You will not find any great difference between our position and the position of the United Kingdom government."

The position on "international issues" Sturgeon solidarized herself with is the advancement of imperialist interests through the levelling of entire countries in the Middle East, the killing of millions of innocent people, the funding and training of fascist organisations, the arrest and persecution of journalists and whistle blowers, the overthrow of democratically elected governments and now the drive to a Third World War.

The SNP has always presented Scottish nationalism to the working class as an alternative to "Westminster aggression and domination". They have couched their calls for Scottish independence on appeals to anti-war sentiment among workers, feigning opposition to social inequality and promoting the anti-nuclear "bairns not bombs" slogan. This has been exposed as a cynical lie.

The SNP are one of the loudest voices calling for national unity. Faced with calls for the removal of Johnson as prime minister over illegal Downing Street parties in the midst of the pandemic, Ian Blackford, lead representative of the SNP in Westminster, responded, "There's a time and a place, and there are circumstances. We all have to be in recognition of

the place we are in and the responsibilities that we have."

Blackford reserved his harshest criticism of the Tories to the accusation that they have been insufficiently aggressive toward Russia. Addressing Johnson in the House of Commons, Blackford insisted the UK take "tougher and stronger sanctions". He said he had approached Johnson five years prior with a plan to pre-emptively attack Russian assets. He insisted, "We shouldn't wait for a Russian attack" before "cleaning up" the UK of a "sewer of dirty Russian money" running through London.

On March 2, Blackford called on the UK parliament to impose the "full range of war crime charges including the act of aggression" in the "prosecution of the Putin regime".

The SNP has been forging direct links with the Ukrainian government for some time. In 2019, after a visit with other SNP members, Stewart McDonald MP became one of only 24 foreign nationals to receive the "Order of Merit", Ukraine's highest state order.

In an article written for the *Huffington Post* March 13, McDonald explained that after ex-SNP leader Alex Salmond joined Russia's state broadcaster RT in 2017, his former followers scrambled to profess their loyalty to NATO. "Although no longer a parliamentarian or even in the SNP, it had the potential to be damaging to our party at the time... Having discussed this with some MP colleagues, a small group of us quickly set out to meet with European embassies in London to make clear that his action was not a reflection of my party's values, or in any way endorsed. Quite the opposite: we were mortified and angry, but this was his own gig, and he would wear it."

McDonald described how this this loud denunciation was used as a bridge between the SNP and the Ukrainian military. "As part of that outreach, I met with the then ambassador of Ukraine, Natalia Galibarenko... She put it to me that I should visit her country, and spend time in the east, which has been on the receiving end of Putin's war since 2014... It's no mistake to say that that trip had a profound effect on me and has given me cause to use my platform to champion Ukraine's democracy and independence back here at home."

During this visit McDonald met Ukrainian military officials and visited areas in the eastern region. He made repeated visits to Ukraine with the explicit aim of attending "security conferences" where he met unnamed "NGO's", and military heads to "discuss issues around defence". It was after these visits that Zelensky awarded McDonald the "Order of Merit".

McDonald lays bare the SNP's level of integration into NATO's war plans in Ukraine. He revealed that last February he was invited to a Ministry of Defence hearing in Ukraine to plan NATO's proxy war. "Over the last year the conversations I've had with people back there have taken a darker turn.... I was last there in February. I sat in the parliament, the ministry of defence and the ministry of foreign affairs hearing about the imminence of a full invasion by Russia. Yet even after all the maps, slideshows and discussions about anti-tank weaponry, there was a sense—a hope—that it wouldn't happen."

The Scottish Green Party, the SNP's lackeys, have also signalled their

solidarity with the war drive. In a statement dripping with anti-Russian hysteria, Ross Greer, Green Member of the Scottish Parliament for the West Scotland region, said, “The UK Government’s response so far has been weak and embarrassing” and called for “a comprehensive package of sanctions targeting all Russian state-backed businesses, any bank or other organisation connected to Russia’s arms industry and against Putin’s close associates themselves.”

With all pro-independence bourgeois parties aligned in support of the escalating NATO war drive, and publications like *The Scotsman* printing headlines such as, “With Ukraine in mind, the SNP needs a plan for a post-independence military”, the imperialist and pro-war character of an independent capitalist Scotland is clear.

And where is Salmond in all of this? In 2014, when the Scottish independence referendum was in full flow, Salmond headed the SNP and was held up as the bringer of freedom. In 2022, he is denounced by the very same party as being a Russian agent.

Salmond split with the SNP and formed his own pro-independence party, Alba, after the failure of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Salmond and Alba have issued statements of support for sanctions on Russia but have called for restraint and a recognition of Russian security concerns in any de-escalation process to avoid, in the words of Salmond, “Armageddon”.

Salmond’s warnings are duplicitous. Sanctions are aimed at isolating Russia and preparing it for regime change. To support these measures is to support a major aspect of NATO’s drive to war against Moscow.

However, the SNP’s attack on Salmond as a “Russian agent” is an attempt to paint anyone warning of the danger of a wider war as a purveyor of Kremlin sponsored propaganda.

The SNP’s pseudo-left satellites, the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and Tommy Sheridan’s “Solidarity” group have long played a decisive role in providing it with a left cover and lending a false anti-war, anti-imperialist character to the propaganda of the independence campaign. Now in the face of a war that has brought humanity close to nuclear catastrophe, their own anti-war pretence has dissolved, exposing its crude apologetics for imperialism.

The SSP’s leader Colin Fox issued a statement February 24, which does not even mention NATO’s role in the conflict. Nor does he find it necessary to utter the terms “socialism”, “imperialism”, “working class” or “capitalism” while he cites “independent Scotland” on multiple occasions.

Fox wrote that the SSP found it “necessary to record our opposition to the developments that have taken place overnight in Ukraine.” While opposing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the SSP haven’t found it “necessary” to “record their opposition” to NATO’s relentless eastward expansion in Europe or to criticise the drumbeat of NATO provocations that drew Russia into this war.

Fox continued, “It [Russia’s invasion of Ukraine] is an affront to the idea that nations like Ukraine are entitled to determine their own future”. When Fox later calls for “a negotiated way forward”, it was clear that these negotiations would take for granted Ukraine’s NATO membership and the deployment of US military personnel along the Russian border.

Fox then stated, “We do not support the behaviour of the Russian state. We support the rights of Ukrainian people to self-determination, as indeed we do for those in Scotland and elsewhere.”

Fox’s assertion that the conflict is at heart about Ukraine’s right to “self-determination” omits the role of NATO. One of the reasons that socialists historically called for self-determination was to defend oppressed nations from predatory imperialism. Fox uses the term to justify NATO’s use of Ukraine as a launch pad for conflict against Russia.

The “Ukrainian Resistance” Fox hails is comprised of far-right militias openly hailing the brutal Ukrainian fascist leader Stepan Bandera, and funded, trained and armed by NATO with billions of dollars of equipment.

Indicative of divisions within the SSP, it issued a 278-word statement March 6 which managed to combine support for Ukrainian “sovereignty” with respect for “the national rights of all minorities including those in the Donbas and Luhansk regions up to and including the right to democratic, independent self-government...”

This was all to be achieved “without outside interference whether that be from either the right-wing nationalist regime in Kyiv or the gangster capitalism of Vladimir Putin and his Russian oligarchs.”

This advocacy of competing nationalisms supposedly living in harmony reads as a sick joke under conditions where the “right-wing nationalist regime in Kyiv” is waging war on both Russia and the separatists in the Donbas region, with the support of NATO, and the actual perspective for the Donbas, if it is not conquered by Kyiv, is not a form of independence within Ukraine but incorporation into Russia.

The promotion of nationalism and separatism in Ukraine and elsewhere, including the UK, has proved itself to be a means of dividing the working class to the benefit of imperialism, paving the road to war. It underscores the extraordinary farsightedness of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in proposing the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—a revolutionary perspective grounded in internationalism that is anathema to the Saltire-waving nationalists of the SSP.

The SSP statement reeks of reformist ignorance, even describing NATO as “a belligerent relic of the Cold War” that “fundamentally mishandled the opportunities the post-1989 settlement offered the world”. The real opportunities they cite were for imperialism to seize advantage of the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy to regain control of the vast resources of the former Soviet Union. For more than a decade now, US imperialism and its allies have prepared the basis for doing so through NATO’s constant encroachment on Russia’s borders. The Ukraine war is not the product of “mishandled opportunities”, but of a conscious perspective of military conquest.

Tommy Sheridan, leader of Solidarity, which has liquidated into Salmond’s Alba, contrariwise, asserts that Ukraine’s “self-determination” will be upheld by Putin’s forces. Sheridan describes his blog as a platform for arguments for a mutually cooperative socialist world made up of independent and socialist nation states. Apart from his opening paragraph, Sheridan uses the word “socialist” once, and that is to limit the task of socialists to national coexistence, “Socialists should always promote peace and friendly co-existence. That is our core value,” he writes.

The fantasy of “peaceful co-existence” between Russia and US imperialism was the policy of the Soviet Union developed during the Cold War. It was a repackaging of Stalin’s “socialism in one country” policy—the rejection of world socialist revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy and the presentation to the working class of a supposed “national road” towards socialism. It isolated the Soviet Union, led to its eventual break up and the restoration of capitalism and laid the foundation for the crisis we face today.

Although Sheridan makes some correct points about the fascist presence in Ukraine’s Azov battalion and NATO’s war drive in the region, he has no answer other than pacifist appeals that NATO withdraw from the region to ensure a “peaceful situation”. Entirely absent from Sheridan’s calculations is the independent action of the working class. Peace, he argues, can only be achieved by redrawing national boundaries so they are more favourable to Russia and socialists must pressure the imperialists into “demilitarizing” Ukraine and pulling out of the region.

Scottish nationalism has proved itself to be a political dead end, sowing divisions in the working class and subordinating Scottish workers to their own capitalist class, thereby preventing a genuine, i.e., socialist, political struggle against British and world imperialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact