

Humza Yousaf resigns as Scottish First Minister after ditching coalition pact with Greens

Steve James
29 April 2024

Humza Yousaf, First Minister of Scotland and leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), has announced his resignation after only 13 months in power. Yousaf's departure followed his precipitate decision last week to collapse a coalition agreement with the Scottish Greens.

Faced with a no confidence motion tabled by the Scottish Conservatives, Yousaf would only have been able to survive in office with the support of the Alba Party's sole member of the Scottish parliament (MSP), Ash Regan. Relying on Alba, a breakaway from the SNP led by Alec Salmond, was untenable for much of the SNP parliamentary leadership.

With Yousaf dispensed with, the Greens have indicated they will oppose another no-confidence motion in the government itself, tabled by the Labour Party, thereby allowing the government to continue in office.

The SNP now has 28 days to fill the first minister post or else face a Scottish general election for the devolved parliament at Holyrood. Likely candidates are reported to include former leader John Swinney, the clear favourite, in a caretaker role, former finance and economy minister Kate Forbes, and current education minister Jenny Gilruth. Should an election be unavoidable, a mark of their sharply declining popularity, the SNP stand to lose many of their Holyrood seats.

The ongoing crisis around the SNP marks the end of all claims that the party, and its project of Scottish independence, represents a left alternative to the right-wing warmongers of the Labour Party. In government since 2007, under former leaders Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP has overseen a gutting of social services provided by local government and continual pressure on health provision, accelerating the opening-up to private operators. The party has emerged as a pro-war party of NATO, supporter of the war in Ukraine and staunch supporter of British imperialism.

Yousaf came to power last year following the surprise resignation of Sturgeon, who walked away from a position she had held since the 2014 resignation of Salmond in the

aftermath of their defeat in the referendum on Scottish independence. The SNP parted company with Salmond after he was unsuccessfully targeted for a #MeToo type operation to prevent his return to politics that was orchestrated by Sturgeon's inner circle.

Salmond subsequently formed Alba with policies largely indistinguishable from the SNP, other than stressing an immediate campaign for independence and denouncing the party for "wokery" on transgender issues. Relations between Salmond and his former party remain toxic. Prior to Yousaf's resignation, Salmond made clear that he was willing to keep the SNP in power in return for moves towards an electoral pact and progress towards a second independence poll. But the SNP would have none of it.

Shortly after resigning, Sturgeon, her husband Peter Murrell, then SNP CEO, and the party's treasurer Colin Beattie were arrested. Murrell, who has resigned from the party, was formally charged with embezzlement earlier this month, while the Operation Branchform investigation continues.

Yousaf was presented as the candidate providing "continuity" with Sturgeon. Until last week, he maintained the Bute House Agreement negotiated with the pro-independence Greens under Sturgeon's leadership. Under the terms of the agreement, made necessary because the SNP failed to win an outright majority in the 2021 Scottish general election, the Greens held ministerial posts in return for supporting SNP legislation and providing the SNP with a working majority.

Greens co-leader Patrick Harvie became the minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights, while Lorna Slater was minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity. The agreement included proposals for some limited environmental policies, a commitment to rent controls and a review of public transport fares. In return, the Greens allowed the SNP to push forward with its pro-business policies including low tax free ports,

freezes on social spending while supporting the massive arms industry, which includes BAE Systems, Leonardo, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and Thales.

One of the last acts of Yousaf—in the name of the SNP/Greens alliance—was to cut the ribbon six days ago on the lavish new 14-storey HQ of US banking giant J.P. Morgan in the aptly named “International Finance District” of Glasgow city centre.

Both parties have become increasingly unhappy with the agreement as support for the government has collapsed because of its brutal social policies and nakedly pro-business and pro-war agenda. All manner of tensions have emerged.

Within the SNP, for example, the close association with the Greens was being blamed for hindering investment in what remains of the North Sea oil and gas industry. The SNP’s leader in the UK parliament in Westminster, Stephen Flynn, MP for the oil industry base of Aberdeen, has called for oil exploration licences to be handed out on “energy security” grounds, in defiance of the SNP’s presumption against new projects.

Shortly before Yousaf pulled the SNP out, the Greens were reported to be considering withdrawing from the agreement because of the SNP’s ditching of supposedly legally binding climate change targets.

An anti-democratic Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform Bill backed by both the SNP and the Greens has generated broad opposition. Among the bill’s measures are proposals to pilot juryless trials in sex cases and reduce the number of jurors required for jury trials. A survey by the Scottish Solicitors Bar Association said 97 percent of defence lawyers would boycott the pilot. Six SNP MSPs abstained on the first Holyrood vote on the bill.

Shortly before Yousaf scrapped the agreement, his government stopped use of “puberty blocker” medicines at Glasgow Sandyford Clinic, the only site in Scotland where the controversial treatment was available. The move, opposed by the Greens, came in the aftermath of the Cass Review which found there was “not enough evidence” for their continued use and complained of a “toxic” public discourse over the poorly understood issue.

Yousaf is also likely to have alienated the most militarist elements within the SNP, who are deeply integrated into the UK security establishment. His wife’s parents, British nationals with a Palestinian background, were trapped in Gaza in the early stages of the Israeli government’s genocidal assault.

Reports of their desperate plight cut across the British media’s systematic downplaying of the apocalyptic violence being deployed against defenceless citizens. Around this time, Yousaf also met Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan without UK officials being present, while the Scottish

government donated £750,000 to the beleaguered UNWRA aid agency in Gaza. In response, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron threatened to remove support for Scottish government visits abroad.

Despite the tensions, and now Yousaf’s removal, the Greens and the SNP remain committed to each other. Yousaf admitted as much in his resignation speech: “My hope was to continue working with the Greens, in a less formal arrangement... unfortunately, in ending the Bute House Agreement in the manner that I did, I clearly underestimated the level of hurt and upset I caused Green colleagues.”

Leadership contender Kate Forbes, a pro-business evangelical Christian, echoed the sentiment. She said of the Greens: “The question is whether their world is big enough to embrace me. I hope and believe it is.”

The entire affair underscores the right-wing character of the SNP and the Greens, and the anti-working class character of both.

Whatever emerges subsequently will be an ever more openly right-wing administration, committed to austerity, imperialist militarism and deepening conflict with the working class.

More important still, the myths of a “civic nationalism” free from all manifestations of militarism and xenophobia that were supposedly artificially imposed on Scotland by its subordinate relations with England, have been dealt a devastating blow.

Promoted by Salmond and Sturgeon, the boosting of civic nationalism was echoed by numerous pseudo-left tendencies to legitimise their orientation to the SNP and the creation of a separate Scottish capitalist state. It was hailed as providing the basis for eventually achieving socialism utilising Scotland’s supposedly more progressive political and state arrangements, once “liberated” from British imperialism.

This was argued for in favour of an alliance with the Scottish bourgeoisie and its main party, and in opposition to the struggle to mobilise the working class on both sides of the border against imperialism and for socialism. The end result is that the working class was divided and weakened while Scottish bourgeois politics at Holyrood lurched along the same rightward trajectory as at Westminster.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)