

# Scotland: Yes to Independence, No to Nationalism

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Scotland is scheduled to hold a referendum on independence in September 2014. This poses many big questions. Can an independent Scotland offer a way out of economic crisis and protect people from its worst effects? Would workers be better off in an Independent Scotland or sticking with the union? Can an independent Scotland act as a beacon to the rest of Europe by creating a society based on equality and social justice? Or will it just be a low wage, pro-free market economy that panders to multinational businesses?

I want to argue that socialists should vote Yes to independence in the 2014 referendum. The break-up of the British state could be a significant step in weakening British imperialism, its reactionary unionist ideology, and its ability to intervene militarily in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria. This should be welcomed and supported by socialists and workers across Britain.

But while supporting independence on these grounds, there is no guarantee that, in itself, an independent Scottish state would benefit ordinary people. It will depend on whether the anti-capitalist left and trade union movement in Scotland can mount an anti-austerity and anti-poverty offensive in opposition to today's dominant neoliberal orthodoxies. Without that we will be unable to confront powerful political and business elites inside Scotland and beyond.

## **Austerity - We are not all in it together**

The independence referendum does not occur in a vacuum. We are currently going through the deepest crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The crisis is at its sharpest in Europe. From the once celebrated "Celtic Tiger" of Ireland, to Greece, millions of working people are being forced to pay a devastating price for the near collapse of the global banking system

in 2008. Unelected bankers and bosses are imposing Thatcher-on-steroids style "shock therapy". Huge public spending cuts and the erosion of social welfare systems are tearing apart the fabric of society.

The so called troika of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund continue to trot out their mantra that "there is no alternative" to yet even more austerity. "We are all in it together!" shout David Cameron and Nick Clegg. Yet we are not all making the same sacrifices. The 1% at the top continues to get richer out of the crisis.

Scotland is part of this landscape of crisis and instability. Any discussion on independence has to take account of the political and economic context facing people as they confront this devastating capitalist crisis.

## **Devolution and the New Map of Scotland**

The political map of Scotland has significantly changed in recent years. Popular demand for devolution grew during the 1980s and early 1990s because many Scots saw it as a means of protecting themselves from a repeat of the Tory regimes of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. When Labour won the 1997 general election and set up the Holyrood Parliament, Donald Dewar, Labour first minister, declared that devolution is "the settled will of the Scottish people." Devolution was designed to stem the growth of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and calls for independence.

The strategy of Labour leaders Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's was to showcase a strong partnership between a New Labour and Lib Dem coalition administration in Holyrood, and New Labour in Westminster, which would cement ties between Scotland and the rest of Britain.

After 17 years of Tory rule the mood was one of jubilant celebration. The same

hopes and rising expectations felt by millions of workers across Britain were experienced north of the border. But the harsh reality of Blair's government in office soon began to erode Labour's support.

New Labour's commitment to Tory neoliberal privatisation policies such as the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was a scandalous mortgaging of billions of pounds of public money to multinational corporations to build schools, hospitals and road bridges.

Under the guise of devolution being more democratic and allowing more local budgetary control for councils, Blair, and later Brown, cut Scotland's block grant from Westminster. The Holyrood administration passed these cuts to local authorities and what followed were severe reductions in public services and further privatisation through the "contracting out" of vital support services for groups such as elderly people. What has developed since is a "race to the bottom" as councils suffer funding cuts and they, in turn, savage the pay and conditions of the workers involved.

This strategy of **"devolving the axe"** was the thin veneer used by New Labour to avoid taking any political responsibility for pushing through the destruction of key public services.

Disillusionment with Labour was the context for the 2007 Scottish Holyrood elections. Alex Salmond led the SNP to victory and became first minister of a minority administration. Yet, perhaps the biggest change to Scottish politics came at the local level. The introduction of proportional representation to council elections destroyed the Labour Party's hegemony, leaving it in outright control of only two local authorities, including Glasgow.

In 2011, the SNP won an outright majority and gave Labour its biggest electoral hiding for over 80 years, winning 69 of the 129 Scottish parliament seats. Labour secured just 37, the Tories 15, and the Lib Dems only five. The SNP made big gains in Labour's traditional heartland of Glasgow. It was a political earthquake all the more remarkable given that the electoral system was deliberately designed to prevent any single party from gov-

erning with a majority. The SNP advance continued during 2012, if less spectacularly. In the Scottish local council elections it won the majority of local council seats: 424 against Labour's 394.

While these results represent an important breakthrough for the nationalists, Alex Salmond and his party face a persistent problem. Labour support in its traditional urban strongholds is resilient, especially in Glasgow where it increased its number of council seats by five.

Labour also secured the most seats in Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Despite a good showing, this failure to make a decisive breakthrough in Labour heartlands is a headache for SNP strategists. To write off Labourism in Scotland would be a serious miscalculation. A study of the 2012 council election results by Professor John Curtice showed that Labour's vote increased on average by 6% across Scotland's four main cities.

In the broader picture the Tories only have one MP in Scotland and their popularity in the polls is below 15%. The Tories lost further seats in the 2012 elections. The Lib Dems were wiped out. This was the price of their Faustian bargain with Cameron's government and the betrayal of their student fees promises.

## The SNP - a real alternative?

The nationalists are now seen by many as a viable alternative to both Labour and the Tories in Scotland, offering a more radical vision and set of policies. It has been a long road to reach this point.

The SNP is a nationalist party whose roots go back to the late 1920s. It did not arise, as so many nationalist movements have done, in any historic struggle against colonial oppression. Its emergence coincided with the decline of British imperialism on the world stage. The SNP is the product of a merger between the National Party, set up in 1928 and comprising mainly ex-Independent Labour Party members including poet Hugh MacDiarmid, and a split from the Scottish

Conservative Party. Disgruntled Scottish Tories reacted with revulsion to the 1931 Ramsay MacDonald National Unity government.

These bodies merged to establish the SNP in 1934. Although one of its first acts was to expel MacDiarmid for being too left wing, it has always found it useful to look both left and right at the same time with the emphasis changing depending on the political and economic circumstances of each period.

Recently the left social democratic face has been most prominent as the SNP sought to win the popular vote and control of the Scottish Parliament. In 2007, when the SNP first came to office, leader Alex Salmond presented the party as having broken with mainstream pro-market policies.



Alex Salmond: Leader of the Scottish National Party

He declared that while “independence is our idea, our politics are social democrat”. Former leader and current finance Secretary John Swinney boasted that his first budget represented a “new social contract” with the people.<sup>1</sup>

Other manifesto pledges included scrapping the council tax, increasing free nursery education for three and four year olds, introducing smaller class sizes, having no tuition fees for students in higher education and refusing permission for new nuclear power stations. On international issues Salmond was an outspoken critic of key elements of British foreign policy. In 1999 he called the bombing of Serbia “an unpardonable folly” and joined the demonstrations against Blair and Bush’s war

<sup>1</sup>*Neoliberal Scotland: Class and society in a stateless nation.* 2010 Editors Davidson, McCafferty and Miller

in Iraq. The party’s long-term commitment to keep an independent Scotland out of NATO increased its appeal as an anti-war party.

These policies were part of a strategy by the SNP to eat into Labour support in its inner city heartlands. It cloaked itself in the traditional social democratic language of “Old Labour” to connect with and win over workers disillusioned with New Labour. In office the SNP did try to implement some minor but genuine reforms, albeit at a much slower speed and not as fully as promised.

The SNP Government also refused to implement British government plans like NHS Trusts, changes to higher education funding including tuition fees and water privatisation. This refusal to implement Tory and New Labour “reforms” goes part of the way to explaining why many working class people and former labour voters vote for the SNP in elections.

This display of the nationalists’ left face over recent years has also helped them shed the label of Tartan Tories. But the SNP is not a social democratic party in the classic “Labourist” sense, like the Labour Party or the Socialist Party in France. Whilst there are some good trade union activists in its ranks, there is no serious attempt by its leaders to turn the SNP into a working class party based on the trade unions.

The SNP appears to grasp that it cannot afford to ignore the working class vote if it is to beat Labour in the main urban centres of Scotland. No one should be surprised if it keeps showing part of its left face because it must continue to appeal to workers and Labour supporters if it wants to keep winning elections.

**Still, the SNP is having increasing difficulty hiding its right face.** One pivotal and defining moment during the 2012 elections was the revelation that SNP leader Alex Salmond had personal meetings with billionaire Rupert Murdoch at which he expressed a willingness to help News Corporation gain total ownership of BskyB. This

direct and close tie to the murky world of the Murdoch Empire, as well as The Sun newspaper's subsequent support for the SNP and independence, has only served to tarnish Salmond.

## **“Project Fear” and Celebrating War**

David Cameron and Ed Miliband have both embraced a very hard line anti-independence stance.

There are two key tactics being deployed by the pro - Unionist camp. Firstly, their Better Together campaign initially tried to cash in on the London Olympics and create a positive image of “Britishness.” Scottish Labour leader, Johann Lamont argues that the Union Jack has been “detoxified” as a result of the successes of Team GB!

Yet the “no” camp's rhetoric of positive “Britishness” is wafer thin. What lies beneath the surface are imperialist values, racism and anti-immigrant hysteria. The closer we get to the referendum the more we are being subjected to the old, ugly prejudices and worst features of British nationalism.

Cameron et al are planning to use the First World War centenary and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow to push propaganda about Britain's glorious imperial past. No one should have any truck with these reactionary celebrations of war. A series of counter No Glory in War events aim to expose these cynical attempts to hijack the memory of the war dead in the interests of defending the Union today.

Secondly, “Project Fear” as the No Camp is now known, amounts to spreading hyped up scare stories about the dire consequences the Scottish people face if they dare to vote to leave Britain. Sensationalised headlines abound, claiming tens of thousands of job losses, a dramatic collapse in living standards and a “flood” of immigrants stealing jobs and ever dwindling resources.

The bosses' magazine *The Economist* has shown us how dirty things may get. It used to argue that independence would be good for the Scots because it would force them to make tough decisions about state spending and welfare. It has changed its tune since the crisis broke in 2007/8. It ran a front page with a map of Scotland with the headline SKINT-LAND.<sup>2</sup>

## **For unity of the working class NOT the British state**

There is a “left” version of the “no” campaign. This believes that defending being part of Britain is about the great struggles of the Suffragettes to win the vote for women, the fight to gain trade union rights, or how workers in Scotland and England have a long shared history of united struggles from the General Strike in 1926 to the defeat of the poll tax in the early 1990.

Gordon Brown has even invoked the spirit of Red Clydeside to distance Labour from its close links to the Tory and Lib Dems pro-union campaign<sup>3</sup>. Some sections of Labour in Scotland are worried about the potential electoral damage that lining up with the Tories can do them in Scotland. Thus, Brown appealed to trade unionists by arguing that their interests are best served by remaining part of Britain.

But it would be a grave mistake for trade unionists and socialists to give the Unionist campaign left wing cover on the grounds that voting against independence is about preserving the unity of the working class.

The unity of the British state and the unity of the working class are not the same thing. Unity between workers in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales, does not rest on the maintenance of the British state or the capitalist interests it represents. It is by supporting each other against the bosses that real, active workers' unity is achieved. The strike by 2.5 million public

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<sup>2</sup>*The Economist*, April 12th 2012

<sup>3</sup>*Daily Record* 1st Sept edition 2013

sector workers across Britain in 2011 was a brilliant example of the kind of working class unity north and south of the border we need to oppose Tory austerity. The necessity for Scottish workers to unite with their brothers and sisters in England or Wales or Ireland will not evaporate just because Scotland votes for independence. Workers from different countries can and do organise together across borders, in the same trade unions and in alliance against the same unscrupulous multinationals.

On the other hand, allying with the Tories, Lib Dems and Labour to preserve the bosses' state will damage workers' unity. Part of maintaining workers' unity is for English, Welsh and Irish workers to support Scotland's right to vote for independence. So however it is packaged, the no camp inevitably rallies forces to the Union Jack and the reactionary and backward ideas it stands for.

## For independence - reasons to support the break up of Britain

Socialists should campaign for a yes vote in the referendum to break up the British state. A brief glance at Britain's bloody and destructive role in the world shows how positive that would be, not just for the Scots, but the whole world.

John Maclean once described the Union Jack as the "butcher's Apron", "dripping in blood from head to toe". Author Mike Davis in his book *Late Victorian Holocausts* charts the catalogue of cruelty that was "the new dark age of colonial war, indentured labour, concentration camps, genocide, forced migration, famine and disease".<sup>4</sup> An avoidable famine in India in 1876 starved 6 million to death as the British Raj exported stolen grain back to England.

Closer to home there was another avoidable famine. In 1845-52 in Ireland the Great Famine killed over one million people and forced another million to emigrate, many to the West of Scotland. During An Gorta Mor

("The Great Hunger"), the British state also exported food while the population starved: the Irish population decreased by 25 percent in two years.

At its height the British Empire controlled a third of the globe and subjugated a fifth of the world's population through a mixture of divide and rule and brutal force. Even today, despite its decline, Britain remains one of the globe's major imperialist powers. Under Tony Blair alone Britain fought five foreign wars, including the illegal invasion of Iraq.

*This is not a union worthy of defending - not then, not now.*

Independence for Scotland would diminish Britain's role as junior partner to US imperialism weakening both sides of the "special relationship". The removal of Trident nuclear submarines from the Clyde would be a massive blow to Britain's position as a leading nuclear state and a real threat to the ability of the US to use Britain as a launchpad for its missiles in Europe. The Ministry of Defence, the generals sitting in the Pentagon, or at NATO's HQ, are terrified of not having Trident based in Scotland. It could seriously alter Britain's position in the world pecking order of states and call into question Britain's permanent seat on the UN Security Council. *This is a good reason in its own right for putting the issue of Trident at the heart of the 'yes' campaign.*

The whole Trident issue is closely tied up with Britain's membership of NATO. This child of the Cold War plays an important military role. It is the body that is trying to "pacify" Afghanistan and Britain has been a main player in the bloody and disastrous operation. NATO led the military intervention in Libya and is threatening military action against Iran and Syria. An independent Scotland that stood outside NATO could avoid being embroiled in illegal and immoral wars led by the US and Britain. *These are the reasons why the key demand of quitting NATO should be at the heart of the 'yes' campaign.*

**It is also inconceivable that there will be no political fallout constitution-**

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<sup>4</sup>*Late Victorian Holocausts* by Mike Davis, Dec 2000, Verso

ally at least for Ireland if Scotland votes for independence.

## Socialists, the National Question and the SNP

Many nationalist movements have a long history of resistance against foreign oppression. Examples of this include opposition to the British in India and Ireland, In Scotland the pattern is different. Scottish nationalism flowered as a reaction to the chronic decline of British capitalism from the First World War. Tom Gallacher describes how “Scotland moved from being almost a co-partner in the British Empire to being an internally divided and increasingly peripheral part of the United Kingdom.”<sup>5</sup>

The Russian revolutionary, Lenin, in the early twentieth century developed a useful compass for understanding nationalism. Lenin was grappling with how to respond to the Tsarist regime’s bloody oppression of Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, and Finns in Russia’s “prison house of nations.”

His starting point was that European imperialist nations were locked in ferocious capitalist competition with each other. The constant scramble for new markets and new sources of profits led them to seize foreign lands, with all the grotesque trappings of mass murder, suppression of national languages and cultural forms, and the total stunting of any independent path of economic or social development. In the colonies such national oppression was experienced by all classes (even though to a different degree).

It was therefore necessary to distinguish between an oppressor nation and an oppressed nation. Workers living in oppressor nations like Britain and Russia must oppose the nationalism of their own rulers. They should support national liberation movements fighting against British or Russian imperialism.

Lenin stressed that class unity between workers of different countries was only pos-

sible if workers in one nation recognised the right to self-determination of those in another.

Marx pointed out the harmful impact on workers of British nationalism directed against the Irish. Workers here would be impotent to alter their own impoverished position unless they broke from the ruling class ideology of racism: “No nation can be free that enslaves another,” wrote Marx.

In relation to the Irish worker the English worker feels himself a member of the ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country against Ireland thus strengthening their dominion over himself. The English worker cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker and in the return the Irish worker sees the English worker as the accomplice and stupid tool of English rule in Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

The great Scottish socialist and Red Clydesider, John Maclean, shared Marx’s approach to nationalism. For Maclean, it was a principle that workers in Britain should oppose their own rulers who oppressed other nations. Writing during the First World War he asked why British and German workers slaughtered each other in the trenches, in an imperialist war from which they had nothing to gain.

Maclean, like Edinburgh-born revolutionary James Connolly, also saw the cause of Irish freedom as part of the wider class struggle to overthrow imperialism internationally. His 1920 pamphlet called *The Irish Tragedy: Scotland’s Disgrace* lampoons Britain’s claim to be a democracy whilst refusing to accept the democratic wishes of Irish people in the 1918 General Election: “The vote shows that by four to one the people of Ireland wish to look after their own affairs.” He deplored “the

<sup>5</sup>Tom Gallacher, *Glasgow The Uneasy Peace:religious tension in modern Scotland*. 1987

<sup>6</sup>A letter written by Marx to Meyer. *Marx and Engels Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers 1975.

fact that Scots regiments are pouring into Ireland and others are held in readiness. It seems the Scots are being used to crush the Irish. Let Labour effectively reply.” The reply he advocated was that British trade unionists hold a general strike for the withdrawal of troops.<sup>7</sup>

National oppression and class exploitation coexist or diverge in complex ways. Where there is genuine national oppression, then both workers and bosses will benefit from independence even if they are still in conflict over other class issues. In Palestine for example, the boss will gain from ending Israeli occupation, but so will the Palestinian worker.

Where national oppression is not present the situation can vary. Depending on the circumstances, each class can have a different reason for supporting, or opposing self-determination. For example, the bosses in one area may see an advantage in working with their counterparts elsewhere inside a large unitary capitalist state. At other times it might suit them to have their own state machine, only to more effectively exploit the population free from outside interference.

Equally, there may be occasions when workers want independence to break up the capitalist state, and bosses oppose such a step for that very reason. There is another possibility: the situation can arise when the immediate issue of workers’ unity in struggle is the paramount consideration. At that moment the independence card would play into the hands of a ruling class keen to divide worker from worker.

It follows that socialists have to look at the concrete situation in every case. They should not, for example, support the calls for Scottish workers to unite with “progressive” Scottish bosses if the principal effect would be to both unite workers and their bosses and prevent Scottish workers from fighting alongside workers down south for their common interests. Therefore, while support for the

right of self-determination of the oppressed is a principle, as is the right of workers to secede if they so choose, it does not mean that this is the correct choice to make in every historical situation. Everything depends on the circumstances. It is crucial not to confuse the interests of workers with those same capitalists who plan to continue exploiting workers whether Scotland remains inside or outside of the British state.

## Is Scotland oppressed?

Some people claim Scotland has been the victim of English domination for centuries. But historical evidence does not bear this out. Far from being the victim, the Scottish ruling class joined with the English ruling class to share in the spoils of Empire. It did disproportionately well out of the arrangement, while Scottish and English workers were exploited by both camps.

Prior to the Act of Union in 1707, Scottish merchants and landowners dreamed of building their own independent empire, their own “place in the sun”. Their attempt to create an independent Scottish colony at Darien in Panama at the turn of the 18th century ended in complete disaster. This was one of the primary catalysts for total union between Scotland and England. A deal was struck between the Scottish parliament and Westminster. Scotland accepted incorporation into the Union in return for what Christopher Harvie calls “semi independence” with the kirk, the legal and education system remaining separate in Scotland. From then on the United Kingdom gained much from Scotland’s willing involvement in conquest and oppression.<sup>8</sup>

Even before the Act of Union, Scottish soldiers and colonists had been at the forefront of colonising Ulster, later becoming known as the “British Undertakers”. Ireland was the first stop on the road to conquering India, China, Canada, North America, Australasia

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<sup>7</sup> *The Irish Tragedy: Scotlands Disgrace* by John Maclean 1920. John Maclean Internet Archive. [www.marx.org](http://www.marx.org)

<sup>8</sup> *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish society and politics from 1707 to the Present* by Christopher Harvie

and large parts of Africa.

Scots owned and ran tobacco and sugar plantations using slaves. Famous Glasgow Streets take their names from such slave owners such as Lord Buchanan and the Duke of Argyle. A L Karras points out in *Sojourners In The Sun* that in 1817, ten years after the formal abolition of the slave trade, the Scots still held more slaves than the average white. In the parishes sampled, Scots comprised 23.5% of the white population, but owned 32.5% of the slaves.<sup>9</sup>

In North America, James Hunter tells us: “Most North American native Indian peoples would have been hard pressed to distinguish between the behaviour of Scottish Highlanders and any other types of Europeans they came into contact with.” With cruel irony Hunter observes “Emigrants to Cape Breton island, many of them refugees from the clearances showed not the slightest scruple about displacing the island’s traditional inhabitants, the Micmac, from territories the latter had occupied for much longer than there had been Gaelic-speaking Scots in Scotland.”<sup>10</sup> Other refugees from Scottish clearances sided with the Hanoverian monarchy against the US revolution in 1776. As eminent Scots historian Angus Calder writes: “13,000 tartan clad men mustered to the sound of the pibroch” to march to defeat by the anti-British rebel militia.<sup>11</sup> It is no surprise that Hamish Henderson’s classic song “Freedom come all ye” ponders on a future where “broken families in the land we’ve herried will curse Scotland the brave nae mair.”

Of course there were material reasons why Scotland’s rulers threw their weight behind the British Empire, but it is undeniable that choosing this course of action spared it the experience of oppression and allowed it to play the role of the oppressor.

The Highland Clearances are another example that is put forward. In fact it was fellow Scots - Highland ex-clan chiefs now

turned capitalist landlords, with their allies in Scottish police and military regiments - who forced the mass evictions from the Highlands on a grand scale from 1815 onwards. The Enclosures, which happened in England 300 years earlier, were every bit as brutal as the Clearances and it is wrong to describe either of these events as constituting national oppression. They were part of the same drive to establish capitalism by forcing people off the land to allow for commercial farming. In the towns and cities they were exploited by Scottish and English bosses alike in the new burgeoning industries of cotton, textiles, coal, iron, steel and shipbuilding.

## Is Scotland More Radical Than England?

The idea of shared ground between workers and bosses can take many forms. Even if Scotland is not oppressed, is it perhaps the case that we in Scotland are inherently more radical or left wing than England?

Rachel Ormston and John Curtice’s report on British Social Attitudes (BSA) “Is Scotland more left wing than England?” argues that “although Scotland is more social democratic in outlook than England, the differences are modest at best.” Like England, they argue, Scotland has become less social democratic since devolution. Surveys by the BSA over several years have shown Scotland to be more conservative than England on social issues. Part of the explanation for this is the greater influence that the Kirk and the Catholic Church exert on Scottish politics.<sup>12</sup>

Historically, one can point to periods where Scottish workers have been more advanced in their struggles than other workers; but equally there are many examples where English workers have been more advanced than those of Scotland, such as the Chartist movement.

It is false to counter pose Scottish, En-

<sup>9</sup> *Sojourners in the Sun Scottish migrants in Jamaica and Chesapeake, 1740 - 1800* by A.L. Karras

<sup>10</sup> *A Dance called America* by James Hunter, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Angus Calder in *Origins of Scottish Nationhood* ed Neil Davidson. Pluto Press 2000

<sup>12</sup> *British Social Attitudes 29*, 2012 Edition, Ormston and Curtice on Scottish Independence. P. 116.

glish or Irish workers' struggles because these fights are linked together and the victory of each often depends on the other. There is a rich tradition of shared struggles running from the period 1915-19 of Red Clydeside with its equivalent, if not greater, agitation in Sheffield and Belfast; through to the victorious struggle of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in the 1970s.

More recently, while Scotland led the way in the struggle against the Poll Tax by instigating the tactic of mass non-payment, it was the poll tax riot of over 200,000 people in London's Trafalgar Square that consigned the hated tax to the dustbin of history.

The myth of Scotland being more radical largely depends on the striking electoral demise of the Tory Party in Scotland, which has not been seen in England. How did this come about? After all, as late as 1955 the Tories won over half of the total vote in Scotland! But the decline of British capitalism, and in particular the collapse of traditional heavy industries which accelerated under Thatcher's Tory government, encouraged nationalism. The same process hit other parts of Britain, but in Scotland there was the option of nationalism. There is no equivalent Yorkshire or Northumbrian nationalism to channel the anger.

This has allowed the SNP to become a catch-all party of protest that attracts the votes of a wide section of the electorate who are disillusioned with all the mainstream parties - both Tories and Labour.

## Against nationalism

We argue for a vote that breaks up the British state, but preserves the unity of workers north and south against their bosses. The claim that Scottish workers share a common interest with Scottish bankers and bosses must be combated, even as we argue for Scottish independence. It is vital the left injects class politics into the referendum campaign and avoids becoming an uncritical cheerleader for the nationalist position and the SNP.

Where does a yes vote on nationalist

grounds lead? Despite SNP efforts to present itself as left-wing, there is compelling evidence that at the heart of the party leadership's strategy and politics is a commitment to neo-liberal policies and making Scotland a more successful capitalist country. As a former economist of the Royal Bank of Scotland, Alex Salmond has always been committed to a pro-business agenda. Before the 2008 financial crash, he was happy to hold up RBS as a shining example of what a Scottish-based institution could achieve.

"Independence in Europe", was championed by the SNP for many years. It advocated Scotland joining a new "Arc of Prosperity" alongside Iceland and Ireland, competing for multinational investment with the second tier economies of Europe in a "beauty contest" on the basis of a low wage economy and minimal corporation tax.

The right wing face of the SNP had showed itself as early as its first administration in 2007. Although council tax was frozen there was a reduction of business taxation levels. The SNP budget, which passed with Tory support, aimed to get rid of business rates for 120,000 enterprises and reduce them for 30,000 more, whilst the public sector, faced strict 2

Strategically, it is business tycoons like Brian Souter, the trade union busting billionaire, billionaires like Sir Tom Farmer and Jim McCall, who fund and/or support the SNP and shape its economic strategy. Salmond's trips to China and the US are reminiscent of Blair's tours across the globe to drum up business by lauding the benefits of low wages and low corporation taxes on profits in Britain Plc.

Salmond and the SNP are now walking a tight rope between pushing for some left social democratic policies, like their announcements to renationalise Royal Mail and scrap the bedroom tax in an Independent Scotland, whilst simultaneously trying to dampen down peoples' expectations and offer reassurance to big business and the British ruling class that nothing will fundamentally change.

The most recent example is Salmond call-

ing on Unite, the Union at Ineos in Grange-mouth to sign a no strike deal and give away their pensions and hard fought for terms and conditions. This should serve as a warning that the SNP are willing to sign up to a “jobs at any price” strategy in an Independent Scotland led by the SNP.

The SNP supports retaining the Queen as Scotland’s head of state. Sterling would remain the currency with the Bank of England setting interest rates. On defence and foreign affairs the SNP leadership were victorious (after a major fight) in ditching the Party’s 30-year-old commitment to quit NATO. This fundamental departure from the policy that marked the SNP out as an anti-war party is a defining issue.

By remaining in NATO the SNP are committing a future independent Scotland not only to remaining in an imperialist nuclear alliance dominated by the US, but to potential foreign intervention in yet more countries such as Syria and Iran. Despite Salmond’s promises that removing Trident is “non-negotiable”, it is naivety at best to think that there is no link between being in NATO and having nuclear weapons.

## **The Common Weal - a Scottish alternative to neoliberalism?**

A major reason for the failure of the Yes campaign (which is mainly SNP led) to win a majority to the case for independence has been its inability to present a vision of an alternative Scotland, radically different from Britain under the Coalition. By contrast, the Common Weal Project, sponsored by the left-wing think tank the Jimmy Reid Foundation, does seek to present such a vision. In the words of one of its key publications, the ‘Common Weal’ is:

A distinctively Scottish version of the type of society that has been achieved in the Nordic area. It is about pursuing a better-balanced society built on fairness, equality, inclusion and coherence.

It’s an attractive vision and one which has won widespread support across Scottish civic society. It has also created a welcome space for a public debate about the kind of society we want to see in Scotland, with or without independence. As a strategy for challenging neoliberalism and austerity, however, it suffers from some serious limitations.

Firstly, whatever the strengths of the Nordic welfare states in the past, they are hardly a model for the Left today. As one recent study of the welfare state in Norway concluded, ‘Norway along with the Nordic countries in general, is maintaining its position on the upper deck - but it is the upper deck of the Titanic!’ Denmark meanwhile may have better welfare services than Britain but only if you are white and Danish - the country has the most draconian asylum seeker legislation in Western Europe. And Sweden, for decades the Mecca for social democrats everywhere, is now the poster boy for neoliberalism.

As one recent Guardian article observed:

When it comes to privatising public services, Stockholm is way out in front of Westminster. Which is why Michael Gove adores their free school and voucher system. *The Economist* recently wrote ‘The streets of Stockholm are awash with the blood of sacred cows’.

Secondly, Common Weal publications express justified anger at the obscene levels of poverty and inequality in Scottish society, one of the most unequal societies in the world. But rather than seeing such poverty and inequality as the product of a society - capitalism - divided by class and exploitation, Common Weal writers see them simply as the result of the wrong economic policies which, it is claimed, we all - rich and poor, workers and capitalists - have an interest in changing. Quite, why people like Fred Goodwin, ex-boss of RBS or Brian Souter, millionaire owner of Stagecoach, should espouse Common Weal policies which will involve them in

paying more tax, receiving lower bonuses and sharing power with workers is far from clear.

Finally, that view that we all share a common interest in creating a more equal society also underpins and weakens Common Weal's vision for the way forward. According to two leading Common Weal writers, 'to get there, all sectors of society need to act - civil society, business and government'.

Elsewhere they outline a top-down strategy that relies on a combination of consumer power and moral appeal to persuade the rich and the powerful to change their ways. There is no reason to believe that they have any intention of doing so. Common Weal's vision of a more equal society and a properly-funded welfare state is worthy of support but

achieving it will depend on very different social forces from the ones these writers suggest. Above all, it will rely on the anger and organisation of all those in the workplaces and the communities who are struggling against low pay and against austerity.

## **Winning the Referendum**

Socialists are faced with the challenge of combining opposition to British imperialism with an opposition to the SNP leadership's neo-liberal and pro capitalist approach. A "tartan brand" of the race to the bottom over pay and conditions to "attract investment" can only increase scepticism among trade unionists and workers more generally.