

The issues facing Scottish workers and young people in the UK General Election

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My name is Darren Paxton, and I am standing in the Inverness, Skye and Ross-shire constituency for the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the UK general election.

My party's aim is to mobilise the working class across the UK and internationally against the genocide in Gaza, the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, the destruction of living standards and democratic rights, and environmental collapse.

Every town and city in Scotland, including here in Inverness, has seen mass opposition to the Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. But what is not understood is the connection between the mass murder and ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the turn to war by all the imperialist powers, above all NATO's war against Russia.

I will use our campaign to clarify among workers and young people the central question. We are witnessing an escalating global conflict driven by the major imperialist powers, led by the US and the UK, seeking a violent re-division of the world through war with Russia, Iran and China. And the horrors of Gaza, carried out with the active collusion of Washington and London, are the future which all the major powers are preparing for us all.

None of the big business parties, or their left-talking appendages, explain any of this. The Tories are despised in Scotland, as in the rest of the UK. But alongside the Tories, the Labour Party and the Scottish National Party (SNP) are both facilitating genocide and war.

Sir Keir Starmer and Anas Sarwar's Labour Party wants to replace Rishi Sunak's Tories only in order to continue its agenda of austerity and war. Labour would rely on their trade union allies to impose this on the working class.

The SNP called for a ceasefire in Gaza, creating a

political crisis for Starmer. But this does absolutely nothing to aid the Palestinians, let alone stop the genocide.

That would mean opposing NATO and mobilising a mass anti-war movement. But the SNP is a big-business party that has shed its radical pretensions. Once the party of "bairns, not bombs", it supports NATO and is a frothing advocate of war against Russia.

The war-mongering and austerity policies of both Labour and the SNP make it urgent to draw the lessons from the entire devolution project.

Scottish nationalism was given a major shot in the arm by nearly two decades of Tory rule that began in 1979 under Margaret Thatcher, with the SNP arguing that independence would liberate Scottish workers and business alike from the shackles of Westminster.

The Labour government of Tony Blair legislated devolution for Scotland and Wales in 1999, portraying this as a great democratic project. But devolution broke up the working class, cutting workers in Scotland and Wales off from those in England, and encouraged cut-throat regional competition for investment. The ruling class on both sides of the border and their upper-middle-class hangers-on offered the transnational banks and corporations tax breaks and a pool of highly exploited cheap and skilled labour.

What has happened over the past quarter century?

Until 2007, the Labour Party was in power in Edinburgh. Its right-wing policies enabled the SNP to fill a political vacuum created on the left. This was assisted by various pseudo-left groups, with the Scottish Socialist Party winning six seats in the Scottish parliament in 2003. All sold the snake oil of Scottish nationalism, claiming that the creation of a Scottish capitalist state would be a blow to imperialism and a step towards socialism.

On this basis, the SNP supplanted Labour across much of Scotland, winning power in 2007 and, in 2014, coming

close to winning a referendum on independence. At the 2015 UK general election, the SNP reduced Labour to a single Westminster seat.

The SNP in power has gone a long way to exposing the lies used to promote Scottish nationalism. Savage local authority cuts, sub-inflation pay rises, impossible housing conditions and low wages have pitched broad sections of workers into struggle against it. And only the efforts of the trade union apparatus to divert and suppress workers' struggles, especially by dividing Scottish workers from those in England during the recent strike wave, kept the SNP in office in Scotland and contributed to keeping the UK Tory government afloat.

The result has been a dramatic fall in SNP membership, leaving its leadership to wage bitter factional struggles amid one rotten scandal after another. With First Minister Nicola Sturgeon forced to resign in 2023 and her husband Peter Murrell charged with embezzlement, the SNP has had two leaders since then, both presiding over a further shift to the right.

Now we face the grotesque results of this political detour into a dead end. The main beneficiary of the SNP's likely collapse is Starmer's party of war, which is predicted to win as many as 30 seats back from the SNP.

Scottish nationalism never offered a way forward for workers, as a means of defending social gains and implementing progressive reforms or on other fundamental issues, opposition to war above all.

As regards the supposed opposition "from the left" to the Labour Party and SNP, the SEP rejects both the out-and-out British nationalism of George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain and the Scottish national reformism put forward by the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (STUSC) and SSP.

I am now 25 and I was shaped by these experiences. I once supported Scottish nationalism because of its portrayal as a path to socialism and it being anti-British imperialism. But it became clear to me that its advocates offered no answers to the terrible problems my generation faced—not only being forced to work in sweatshop conditions in the UK, but the appalling social suffering and wars, especially in the Middle East, and the growth of reactionary nationalism that I saw in the Brexit vote in 2016 and then the election of Donald Trump in the United States.

I met the SEP and what I read and heard completed my break from Scottish nationalism and convinced me to become a socialist and an internationalist. One article that had a major impact on my thinking was a statement on the

2014 independence referendum, which explained:

A Scottish state will be no less beholden to the banks and major corporations than the UK. Its creation would signal a mad scramble to the bottom, as the governments in Westminster and Holyrood compete to cut the corporation tax and further slash wages and working-class conditions... The entire history of the socialist movement has centred on the struggle against those tendencies—first social democracy and then Stalinism—that sought to identify the working class with the nation state.

Building a party based on these fundamental political principles is the only way forward for workers and young people.

The struggle between imperialist powers for control of the world and its markets and resources is producing a worldwide catastrophe of plunging living standards, the growth of the far right, attacks on democratic rights, genocide and war. But as the SEP election manifesto explains:

"The same capitalist crisis that produces war also produces the basis for ending war, in the form of growing struggles against inequality, poverty and the attack on wages, jobs, healthcare, education and all the social rights of the working class." Such a movement must be international, "uniting workers in every country and on every continent on the basis of their common class interests" and must be "anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of war."

If you agree with this analysis and perspective then join me in building the SEP and taking up the fight against genocide and war and for socialism.



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