

# THE UK STATE, RIGHT POPULISM AND REACTIONARY UNIONISM IN 2020

## rUK it or fUK it?

A republican communist analysis in the aftermath of December 12<sup>th</sup> general election, Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter

Allan Armstrong. 6.7.20



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Some terms used in this article.\*

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\* Most of these terms have been more fully explained in *From Pre-Brit to Ex-Brit: The Forging and the Break-up of the UK and Britishness* – Introduction section b.

<https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/from-pre-brit-to-ex-brit-1-2.pdf>

## Some terms used in this article

**rUK – the remaining United Kingdom.** We currently live in rUK1 - Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This is the territory of the UK left after the departure of 26 counties of Ireland in 1922. The SNP's 'Independence-Lite' would also still recognise the British monarch as head of the Scottish state. This leave behind an rUK2 consisting of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**fUK – the former United Kingdom.** This involves a complete break-up of the UK. This means adopting a republican socialist 'internationalism from below' strategy to set up republics in England, Scotland, Wales and a reunited Ireland.

**Liberal unionism** keeps the UK together through **political devolution**.

**Conservative unionism** keeps the UK together, primarily by **administrative devolution**. It can accept political devolutionary measures, which it once opposed, if they have already been established - a new conservative unionism.

**Reactionary unionism** is prepared to dismantle existing political **devolution**, and to use coercion, either by the state or by extra-constitutional forces if necessary, to suppress revolutionary nationalist, constitutional nationalist and liberal unionist challenges to the UK set-up.

**Constitutional nationalism** seeks greater national self-determination up to political independence but confines its methods of struggle to the what is constitutionally permissible within the existing state.

**Revolutionary nationalism** seeks politically independence using methods, which defy the constitution of the existing state, including armed struggle, if necessary.

**Left British Unionism** has viewed either the whole UK state, or Great Britain as a gain for the working class. This is often linked to an economic view, which sees constitutional issues as the concern of other classes. From this view, when such issues are raised, they are to be criticised as a political diversion for the working class. However, when significant national democratic challenges come to the fore, Left British Unionists, usually line up behind either the liberal or the conservative unionists.

Other **Left nationalisms** adopt an immediate strategy in which they line behind the proposals of the constitutional or revolutionary nationalists.

**Republicanism** - is based on **popular sovereignty**. Republicans are prepared to mount national democratic struggles, using popular democratic methods, in defiance of existing anti-democratic state constitutions.

**Republican socialism** looks to extend republican principles to working class organisations (e.g. in trade unions, sovereignty lies with the membership in their workplaces), It also pursues an '**internationalism from below**' strategy.

## **A. FROM THE DECEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup> WESTMINSTER GENERAL ELECTION THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

Before the Covid-19 pandemic swamped nearly all political developments, we had a situation where the December 19<sup>th</sup> general election had cemented Right Populism in the UK, under Johnson's Hard Right Tory government<sup>1</sup>. The government's immediate programme was to celebrate its 'Get Brexit Done' electoral victory.

### **1. The Tories' immediate programme after the December 12<sup>th</sup> general election.**

- a) Strengthening the most reactionary features of the UK state ('bring back control' fully to the British ruling class).
- b) Launching a stepped-up attack on the working class by ending the remaining EU safeguards for workers, consumers and environmental protection.
- c) Pursuing an 'America First'/'Britain Second' alliance with Trump.
- d) Promoting a City of London-led offshore economy based on low wages, poor working conditions and increasingly precarious labour. People's access to insecure and costly accommodation to remain completely subordinated to the interests of property companies and banks.
- e) Promoting new infrastructure projects in former Labour 'Red Wall' areas. Companies donating to the Tories to be the main beneficiaries with control and funding to bypass elected, devolved assemblies and local councils. The longer-term aim is to marginalise the devolved assemblies (and reduce them, as Tony Blair had jokingly said, to "parish councils"), and to have cities and towns run by elected US style mayors, tools in the hands of big business.
- f) This to be supplemented by the creation of 'special economic zones' where even the UK's limited protective legislation does not apply.
- g) Introducing a draconian new Immigration Act to remove the rights of resident EU workers, to enforce a migration regime based on the Australian points system. The 'hostile environment' to be extended and stepped up.
- h) Further restricting EU resident voting rights. This to be followed by a wider voter identity scheme to remove more people from the electoral register (following the precedent set of the US Right).
- i) Preparing for a 'No Deal' Brexit. 'Get Brexit Done' isn't an event but is designed to morph into a 'Keep Brexit on the road' political offensive designed to use anti-European/German and wider racism to provide cover for the Right Populist and reactionary unionist attacks in the UK. Dominic Cummings flagged up this approach with his attack last October on the 'Krauts'.
- j) Preparing to withdraw from the European Court of Human Rights.
- k) Using 'culture wars' on the grounds of competing identity politics to undermine any solidarity amongst the oppressed – with the transgendered the first target.

### **2. Following the general electoral victory Johnson and the Tory Hard Right had the following things going for them.**

- a) The backing of the majority of the British ruling class, now eager to use UK state powers in a stepped-up offensive following neo-Liberalism's post-2008 Crisis. Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, gave his backing to a Johnson Brexit in October 2019.<sup>2</sup>
- b) The backing of Trump's US Right Populist government.
- c) Strong backing from a Tory Party purged of dissenters – Remainers and soft Brexiteers.
- d) The successful manipulation and then political marginalisation of the independent Right Populist, Brexit Party.
- e) The DUP's influence on the Tories at UK level ended and its status as the delegated principal maintainer of the Union in the Six Counties re-established.
- f) A political breakthrough in Labour's northern English, Midland and Welsh 'Red Wall' constituencies.
- g) A divided official opposition which, under Corbyn and his immediate coterie, had helped to pave the way for Brexit, backed the defence of the UK's political set-up and new anti-migrant legislation, and bowed to British ruling class foreign and 'defence' policy (over Israel and Trident).
- h) An even more rapid retreat by the post-Corbyn Left in the Labour Party, highlighted by Rebecca Long-Bailey's UK leadership bid and her total subservience to the UK state; and by Len McCluskey's attempt to get his partner, Karie Murphy (both members of Corbyn's 4M inner coterie), promoted to the House of Lords, as compensation for his failure to get a trade union bosses' 'canapes and prosecco' relationship with a new Labour government.<sup>3</sup> The Labour Left's retreat anticipated the full reassertion of the Labour Right and bureaucracy over the party.
- i) The non-Labour Left and Labour entrust Left' hyping up of Corbyn and Left Social Democratic politics left them almost as disorientated as the traditional Labour Left. This has been further compounded by a section of the 'independent' Left's support for a 'Lexit Brexit'. This was even more delusional than the 'Left Brexit' of the 'British roaders' and the 'British jobs for British workers' union bureaucrats at the core of Corbyn's 4M coterie.
- j) The growing concerns about climate change (and wider environmental degradation) highlighted by the latest wave of protests (Extinction Rebellion) did not significantly register in the election. Neither Corbyn's nor the Green Party's neo-Social Democratic 'Green New Deal' made a breakthrough. The Hard Right Tories' earlier disdain for any political consequences of their stance on the environment was shown in their threat to criminalise Extinction Rebellion protests. This would place their participants on the official 'terrorist' spectrum. This is something with a long history in the UK, going back to the attacks on those who opposed state repression in Ireland and the state backed Islamophobia accompanying their brutal wars in the Middle East.

### **3. But Johnson and the Tories also faced some challenges.**

- a) The Tories' vote declined significantly in Scotland and the SNP cemented its majority Scottish position at Westminster (at the expense of all the Unionist parties - Tories, Labour and Lib-Dem)

- b) The DUP, the Tories' reluctant party of first choice in the Six Counties, lost their overall majority to anti-Tory, anti-Brexit parties – Sinn Fein, SDLP and Alliance.
- c) The continued growth of an extra-parliamentary independence movement in Scotland led by 'All Under One Banner'.
- d) The first hints of a similar movement emerging in Wales.
- e) The cross-border impact in Ireland of challenges to social reaction and conservatism over women, gay and trans rights.
- f) The continued reappearance of extra-parliamentary protest, particularly amongst the young. They are often in precarious jobs, insecure and costly accommodation, and/or face further and higher education with their increasing in costs. They face declining job opportunities. Although particular protests have fizzled out, without developing an adequate political programme or organisation, new and unanticipated focusses of opposition continue to emerge. The majority of the young have not been won over to the Tories' political vision and, when given the opportunity, will use a variety of issues to express their wider discontent.

#### **4. The impact of Covid-19.**

- a) Covid-19 represents another aspect of the continued environmental degradation that has marked voracious global capital's increasing threat to humanity. Covid-19's most likely origins lie on the increasingly close interface between corporate and state capital's expansion into former, more distant, exotic wildlife supporting environments. This has led to an increased opportunity for animal to human pathogen transmission leading to virulent new diseases.<sup>4</sup>
- b) Up to the December 19<sup>th</sup> general election, opposition to environmental degradation had largely focussed on the climatic changes brought about by increased carbon emissions. None of the international deals (following the Kyoto Agreement) have been able to lower these emissions. Capitalism's survival depends on continued profit-led growth and fossil fuel consumption has been central to this.
- c) The rise of Right Populism has compounded this problem with green lights given to the further destruction of rain forests, fossil fuel extraction, mining and quarrying, waste dumping, the wider use of fertilisers poisoning water supplies and to soil degradation. Even those largely cosmetic neo-Liberal agreements over environmental protection are to be ditched. The Right Populists have no time for neo-Liberal hypocrisy over the environment or other issues. They just don't give a shit.
- d) Right Populists want the undiluted rule of the strongest, with a hierarchy of 'protection' against scapegoated 'outsiders'. These stretch from gated communities for the rich to the Mexican Wall and the heavily policed, 'White Cliffs of Dover' 'walls' and English Channel 'moat' for the atomised and alienated. Any international body, which embodies even limited concessions, e.g. WHO, FAO, UNESCO and the EU is to be replaced by more limited direct one-to-one state deals, which directly reflect the relative (especially US military) power of those states involved. Corporate controlled courts will become even more central in overriding national state and other objections to super-exploitation without regard to people's lives, health or the environment.
- e) The earlier corporate-financed, tobacco/cancer, asbestos/asbestosis and carbon emission/climate change deniers, are now trying to deny the link between

environmental degradation and new diseases like Covid-19. Right Populists have been to the forefront of Covid-19 denial campaigns, led by Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Jair Bolsonaro.

- f) The rise of Right Populism has generalised anti-science thinking (originally used by particular corporations and sometimes disguised as alternative scientific views using faked experimental evidence and false data) and substituted a whole host of conspiracy theories (some disguised to appeal to a naïve Left – e.g. the use of the radical sounding ‘deep state’ as a cover for promoting a range of conspiracies).
- g) After the Hard Right Tories’ December 12<sup>th</sup> election victory, the government’s first priority has been to unleash its longer-term ‘Keep Brexit in the road’ offensive. The government delayed its response to Covid-19. Indeed, it even initially welcomed this as an opportunity to show that a post-Brexit UK would not be panicked into taking any serious measures to combat the disease, and unlike the EU, would be open for business as usual.<sup>5</sup> This delay contributed to the UK’s first post-Brexit ‘victory’ over the EU – the highest Covid-19 death rate in Europe.
- h) Despite the earlier NHS Exercise Cygnus, informed by advice from the WHO, their recommendations had been totally disregarded by successive governments.<sup>6</sup> The running of the NHS had been further handed over to private companies (many of which contribute to the Tory Party) interested only in making immediate profits from illness and with no interest in longer term preventative health care.
- i) The government just ignored the most effective methods for combatting Covid-19 – testing, contact tracing and quarantining overseas visitors. They only very reluctantly began to consider PPE. Even this was subordinated to making profits for Tory donating companies at the expense of products from the EU and the British non-profitmaking health science sector. This contributed to further delays and probably more deaths.
- j) However, the growing and very public impact of Covid-19 upon the health services of Italy and Spain did lead to a belated panic response from the UK government. An attempt was made to create NHS hospital space by decamping old people into care homes. But these were even less prepared than the NHS, having been subjected to much more extensive privatisation, often by ruthless companies, dependent on an increasingly precarious and untrained workforce. Thus, the government’s panic and unprepared resort to care homes led to a very significant increase in deaths.
- k) Even the social distancing finally adopted by the government as the cheapest option (for them) was half-hearted. Members of the royal family and Dominic Cummings could break the guidelines with impunity. However, those opposing Tory policies were targeted, whilst those from a working class or BAME background have been disproportionately penalised for breaking social distancing and travelling guidelines.

## 5. The extent of Johnson’s ability to deliver the Tories’ immediate programme after the December 19<sup>th</sup> general election and through the Covid-19 pandemic.

- a) The government has used Covid-19 to stall on negotiations with the EU to increase the chances of a ‘No Deal’ Brexit. This ‘Keep Brexit on the road’ strategy best suits their long-term plans to use Brexit for chauvinist and racist scapegoating purposes.

- b) Meantime secret negotiations continue with the US, to tear up existing consumer, environmental and worker safeguards; to open up the state sector, particularly the NHS, to US corporations; and to increase UK contributions to NATO.
- c) The government got the Northern Ireland Executive set up again on its terms in January 11<sup>th</sup>, aided by the poor general election results for the DUP and Sinn Fein. The new DUP/Sinn Fein/SDLP/Alliance /UUP Executive confirmed its backing for ‘Fresh Start’, an arrangement designed to get its participants arguing about the divvying up of Westminster subventions on Unionist/Nationalist lines. In this it has the support of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Northern Ireland Committee).
- d) The government rejected Nicola Sturgeon’s call for a Section 30 order, on January 14<sup>th</sup>, despite the increased SNP Scottish Westminster majority, won in the general election. Sir Keir Starmer, then Labour’s emerging and most likely future leader, put up no opposition to this. This confirmed a long-standing Labour unionist pattern, under both Miliband and Corbyn, when it came to the defence of the integrity of the UK state. The two other leading candidates, Rebecca Long Bailey and Lisa Nancy also declared their wholehearted support for the UK.<sup>7</sup>
- e) The government was able to get its draconian new Immigration Bill through its first reading on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Although all Labour MPs at last voted against a new immigration law, this was only after Corbyn-led Labour, aided mainly by Left and Right Brexiteers, had helped pave the way for May’s first attempt at a new Immigration Bill. This followed a pattern established by Labour under Gordon Brown (‘British jobs for British workers’) and Ed Miliband (the notorious 2015 general election immigration mug).<sup>8</sup>
- f) The government scrapped the proposed Gender Recognition Act reform on June 17<sup>th</sup>, thus undermining rights already provided for the transgendered under the 2010 Equality Act. This paves the way for vigilante attacks on the transgendered, and upon any women who do not conform to some people’s prejudiced views of acceptable gender appearances. Johnson’s move came three weeks after Right populist, Victor Orban ended any legal rights for the transgendered in Hungary.
- g) Much has been made, especially by the Labour Left, of Tory Chancellor, Rishi Sunak’s commitment to paying wages and small business owners’ incomes over the Covid-19 furlough period, claiming this to be a victory for neo-Keynesian economics. Similar claims were made when Gordon Brown and George Bush introduced the largest government spending and nationalisation programmes in history after the 2008 Crash.
- h) However, the purpose behind these measures was not to meet people’s needs but to save a crisis-ridden capitalism. The precedent for this lies in the neo-Liberals attempts to deal with the 2008 Crisis. As soon as the economy was stabilised, Austerity was imposed by the UK and City of London’s and by the Troika (ECB/EC/IMF). The costs were displaced on to the backs of workers and the more peripheral EU states, e.g. Greece and Ireland. In the USA, companies were also nationalised (e.g. GM Motors) then stripped down, with workers’ pay and conditions undermined before being handed back to the private sector. This was all part of the British Labour and the US Republican governments’, and the EU bureaucracy’s taking on responsibility for banking (and other financial sector) debts and converting them from private banking to sovereign public debt.

- i) The key thing about Sunak's measures is that the disbursement of government funds is mainly being done through private companies to employees and through the private companies now running welfare provision. As time goes on, there is a strong likelihood that many of these companies will be shown not to have distributed all of these funds to workers or to claimants, but to have pocketed them. Large numbers will not have received 'promised' welfare benefits as Universal Benefit Income malpractice has become hardwired into the system.
- j) It is more than likely that massive amounts of money have been (and will be) distributed directly to the owners of private companies, particularly Tory donors, whether or not they have paid out promised wages, or they are registered or pay taxes in the UK. Again, this follows the earlier 2008 Crisis precedent. The bailout arrangements included continued large bonus payments to tax-avoiding bankers heavily involved in paving the way for the crisis.
- k) Paying for the government's Covid-19 Crisis expenses is unlikely to come about from any major neo-Keynesian deficit spending commitments, or by significantly increasing taxes on the rich. Johnson, in his 'cock-a-snoot' ridiculing of Corbyn's 'Green New Deal', said that Tory government wants to introduce a Roosevelt-style 'New Deal'. This would target state investment at the now Tory, once Labour held, 'Red Wall' areas. The scale of major infrastructure projects once reserved for London under neo-Liberal Blair, (e.g. his vanity project, the Millennium Dome and London Crossrail) and attempted by neo-Liberal Cameron (e.g. Heathrow Airport extension), would now be extended by the Right Populist Tories to the Midlands and North. However, after the very high cost of the Covid-19 Crisis, the Tories' New Deal, they will not be accompanied by any US 'New Deal' style welfare reforms. Taxes, falling disproportionately on the lower paid, and cuts in pensions and welfare payments are going to be the main source of funding. This will also necessitate a much stepped-up scapegoating offensive targeting the 'privileged' elderly and 'welfare scroungers' supplemented by 'Keep Brexit on the road' attacks on EU and other migrants.

## 6. But Johnson and the Tories have also faced some challenges.

- a) The government, though, has been wrong-footed in its handling of Covid-19. This was perhaps best highlighted by its inept handling of the Dominic Cummings affair and its total hypocrisy when attacking non-Tory supporters who had also broken the official guidelines. This led to splits appearing even at Tory leadership level. The government's general hard-line, Right Populist approach could be continued without Cummings (just as Trump's ditching of Steve Bannon has had no effect on his continuing Hard to Far Right trajectory). The Hard Right Tories' strategy is not dependent on such 'Svengali' figures, but upon the majority backing of the British ruling class. But Johnson probably wants to hang on to Cummings because he has always been central to the long-term 'Brexit' political offensive, which he wants to restart as soon as possible.
- b) There have been indications of an increased awareness of the opportunities for taking advantage of the Tories' less than confident handling of, and their incompetence in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. At the most basic (and most easily deflected) level, a new appreciation of social responsibility has developed. Of course, this can be

manipulated by the government, e.g. the clap for the NHS Thursdays; invoking the ‘Second World War spirit’; and pushing for charity to replace or augment tax-funded public services. Nevertheless, following the Black Lives Matter protests, which have led to large numbers breaking the Covid-19 guidelines, the protesters’ use of masks and social distancing (as far as possible), highlights a more radical social responsibility.

- c) In Edinburgh, Helping Hands (Solidarity not Charity)<sup>9</sup> is one local example of such social responsibility. The Living Rent Campaign (Scotland)<sup>10</sup> is a good national example of the sort of independent organisation (i.e. not party front) that has made some impact over the plight of tenants and the homeless.
- d) Other victories have been won, e.g. stranded migrant workers have been provided with accommodation, along with the other homeless; pressure exerted to provide PPE to more key workers; the NEU/EIS/parents’ campaign to prevent school reopening without any significant safeguards; and the maintenance of free school meals over the summer holidays.
- e) The Covid-19 Crisis has focused attention upon those who are key workers (and their frequently low pay and lousy conditions) compared to those socially parasitic and unproductive owners and managers, especially in the financial and property sectors, and their media and political apologists. This provides a renewed fillip to earlier exposure by Occupy of the 99%:1% divide - despite their longer-term populist limitations.
- f) There has been a shift in public opinion away from support for the spending cuts associated with earlier New Labour, Tory and Lib-Dem Austerity, to more support for tax rises.<sup>11</sup> However, as the costs of the Covid-19 Crisis grow, the Tories may well use this to impose higher indirect taxation.
- g) At the political level, the Tories’ attempt to claim an all-UK mandate, following their large December 19<sup>th</sup> Westminster majority, was meant to allow them to ignore and ride roughshod over the UK’s devolved institutions; to roll back ‘Devolution-all-round’; and to create a new reactionary British identity, based on the celebration of empire, war, monarchy and the ‘mother of parliaments’. Opinion polls from Scotland, about Holyrood election voting intentions in 2021, have highlighted the Tories’ failure to achieve this. Even the other devolved assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland have felt confident enough, following the Tories’ inept handling of Covid-19, to use their powers to resist Tory dictation (especially since health and education are devolved matters).

## B. THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SCOTLAND

Before the outbreak of Covid-19, pressures were mounting in Scotland upon the SNP government over its lack of a strategy to get IndyRef2. The series of large ‘All Under One Banner’ demonstrations have been the most public face of this pressure. The election of a reactionary unionist Tory government, which very predictably turned down the Scottish government’s Section 30 request, exacerbated this discontent.

Whilst certainly not wishing the Covid-19 outbreak, this fortuitously gave Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP leadership the opportunity to mothball IndyRef2 (promised for 2020); and

later to neutralise the immediate political consequences of the collapse of the court case against Alex Salmond on 29<sup>th</sup> March.

## **1) The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the SNP**

- a) Following the 2014 IndyRef1, the SNP leadership, under Sturgeon, did not see the party's massive 2015 Westminster election victory as providing a new mandate for pushing for Indy Ref2. Given the referendum defeat, understandably the SNP had not campaigned on independence as an immediate objective. Instead the leadership hoped to gain liberal unionist support for 'Better Together's promised 'Devo-Max'. But, badly shaken by the unexpected closeness of the IndyRef1 result, the leading liberal unionist parties - Labour and the Lib-Dems - had become conservative unionists. They wanted no further constitutional changes. This left the SNP leaders with only 4 Plaid Cymru MPs and 1 Green MP as potential allies. The 2016 Holyrood election and the 2017 Westminster election reduced the number of SNP MSPs and MPs, giving conservative and reactionary unionists even more confidence in ignoring IndyRef2 requests. But, as in 2012, the Tories misread the situation in Scotland, seeing these SNP setbacks in Scotland as a turning of the nationalist tide. They hyped up Scottish Tory leader, Ruth Davidson (remember her!) as the next Scottish First Minister following the 2021 Holyrood election.
- b) However, the 2016 UK-wide Brexit vote provided the SNP with a politically legitimate reason for raising the issue of independence once again. The Scottish Remain vote was 62%, far higher than the overall UK Leave vote of 52%. In the lead up to IndyRef1, the official 'Better Together' campaign had promised that remaining in the UK was the only way to remain in the EU.
- c) Following the Tories' 2017 Westminster election victory an alliance of hard Brexiteers – Tory and DUP was formed. This represented a victory for those who wanted to roll-back 'Devolution-all-round'. This also undermined Gordon Brown's 'promise' of 'Devo-Max' in the Indy-Ref1 campaign. After 2017, even the pretence of liberal unionism was dead.
- d) May took no cognisance of Labour's gains under Corbyn, knowing his party was hopelessly divided. The wider liberal anti-Brexit parties were also divided and received no significant British ruling class backing to oppose Brexit. So, election results notwithstanding, far from coming to any accommodation with Labour for a less harsh Brexit, May moved the government further Right and towards a harder Brexit. She only really felt threatened by the Tory Hard Right, the DUP and Donald Trump (and later the Brexit Party) and acted accordingly.
- e) The 2019 Westminster general election result saw a significant rise in the number of SNP MPs. However, the party's hybrid, constitutional nationalist/liberal unionist strategy to get IndyRef2 was now even less plausible following the Hard Right Tories' reactionary unionist, Great Britain-wide, electoral victory. But the broader independence movement, especially 'All Under One Banner', no longer felt constrained by the SNP leadership's cautious approach. Growing support for Scottish independence was now being motivated, not by the SNP's nationalist campaigning, but more as a response to the reactionary unionists' anti-democratic behaviour. If Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Jacob Reed Mogg are now the official face of British Unionism, and

Britain First and the National Defence League are Unionism's Far Right foot soldiers, then these Unionists are doing the job of undermining Unionism, and broadening support for Scottish independence, when the SNP leadership's strategy has stalled.

- f) However, the Covid-19 Crisis has created a new situation. In line with the SNP leadership's strategy of trying to get UK government recognition for the centrality of devolutionary powers, Sturgeon cautiously bowed to the Tory government over Covid-19. She sought cooperation with the government, but also the involvement of the UK's other devolved institutions - Cardiff Bay and Stormont. But this meant tail-ending Johnson's criminally negligent response to Covid-19. That led to delays in any meaningful action, throughout the UK, followed by a panic response to create NHS beds, and an even more desperate resort to care homes, devastated by years of privatisation and use of precarious labour. This has led to high-level excess deaths, especially given the already higher morbidity levels and lower life expectancies found in Scotland.
- g) All that Sturgeon now had to distinguish her from Johnson was a difference in 'public presentation of Covid-19 policy. In this, opinion polls have shown that she has beaten the appalling Johnson and his crew hands down (possibly much assisted by Jane Godley's Glesca patois speaking 'alternative Nicola')<sup>12</sup>
- h) But in the face of growing criticism in Scotland, over the effects of this working within the UK government dictated 'guidelines', Sturgeon became keener to distance the SNP government from Johnson's mishandling of the easing of lockdown. And, unlike Johnson, she has also been prepared to sack an ally who had broken the lockdown rules – Chief Medical Officer Catherine Calderwood (although not surprisingly keeping shtum about Charles and Camilla's blatant disregard for the rules).
- i) A key factor about the SNP leadership's wider approach to politics has been its refusal to challenge the Scottish 'establishment' – not only the monarchy, but also those in control of law and the police, landed and property interests (and many Scottish universities are now as much property as educational institutions) and the Edinburgh registered banks. The fossil energy companies, after immense public pressure over fracking, especially from new SNP members, have had to be more discrete (but only the most naïve would believe that behind-the-scenes close contacts haven't been maintained at the highest levels of the party).
- j) Sturgeon and the SNP leadership's key aim, which buttresses their cautious political approach to IndyRef2, has been to fall back on the strategy originally pursued by Alex Salmond (with his Royal Bank of Scotland links). This was to woo business, with the long-term aim of creating a new Scottish ruling class. Some of the wealth in their hands would 'trickle down', allowing reforms to be introduced. This is what now passed for Social Democracy and was the model introduced and celebrated under New Labour's Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Peter Mandelson. Despite the blow delivered to this model by the 2008 Crash, it remains at the centre of SNP leadership thinking. Prioritising business concerns is their first concern.
- k) The SNP leadership set up the business-led Sustainable Economic Growth Commission (SEG), led by former SNP MSP Andrew Wilson. This has been at the centre of Sturgeon's endeavours to get back to Salmond's pre-2008 Crash, neo-Liberal economic strategy. It is based on a total acceptance of the existing corporate world order and its policing by NATO. This means the continuation of the rUK, the monarchy (and the long reach of the Crown Powers), the City of London's (and its Edinburgh banks

outlier's) direction of the economy, the British High Command, and SNP MEPs being exemplary and uncritical supporters of the EU. Their longer-term aim for Scottish 'Indy-Lite' resembles post-1923 Ireland, with its pre-1937 dominion status, pre-1938 British naval bases, its pre-1978 punt as a currency aligned to the UK's sterling. The Irish Free State also had an inherited administration, which despite having newly promoted, non-unionist, senior Irish officials, hung onto many of the UK's inherited conservative practices.

- l) The composition of the SNP government's post-Covid-19 Advisory Panel reveals its attempt to get the approach of the much-criticised pro-business SEGC approach back on the road again.<sup>13</sup> This is being done to further reassure the Scottish establishment that their interests are still being prioritised. The new commission is headed by Benny Higgins, ex-banker and current chair of the much criticised Buccleugh Estates. Despite its cosmetically adjusted language, the Advisory Panel's planned post-Covid-19 economic attacks represent a revamped version of the SEGC proposals.
- m) Wilson, the key figure in the much criticised SEGC, and now a supposedly marginalised figure in the SNP, has a central role in this Advisory Panel. He seems to be the SNP leadership's own 'Svengali' figure. He has claimed that Scotland will be the worst effected nation economically in the UK as a result of Covid-19. This uncharacteristic SNP 'talking down' of Scotland has a purpose. It is to demand now the sort of draconian attacks, that had been reserved for a post-'Indy-Lite' Scotland under his earlier SEGC proposals. Within days, Sturgeon very much speeded up her original planned slower Covid-19 lockdown relaxation measures. This time, it was done, not so much as the result of UK government pressure, but in response to Scottish businesses which call the tune for the SNP government.
- n) Back in 2015, further education lecturers soon found out that the SNP government was quite happy to have this key SNP insider, Andrew Wilson of Charlotte Street Partners, assist highly paid FE college bosses undermine a national agreement, earlier agreed by the SNP government.<sup>14</sup> In the same year, Tayside hospital porters who, in their majority, voted for Dundee's 'secession' from the Union in 2014, also found out that the initial response of the SNP leadership to their modest demand for equal pay across the Tayside Health Board area, was to back the highly paid THB bosses.<sup>15</sup> For the SNP leadership, when the issue is Union supporting bosses versus Scottish self-determination supporting workers, their first instinct is still to back the bosses. There is always an open door for Unionist bosses, whilst even SNP voting workers have to take industrial action to get their voices heard.
- o) On May 20<sup>th</sup>, the SNP joined with the Tories to vote down a series of Scottish Green amendments to a Covid-19 emergency bill at Holyrood. These amendments would have provided more protection for tenants and given trade unions greater access to workplaces to ensure that mainly health and care workers obtained a living wage and safer conditions.<sup>16</sup> Therefore the SNP government's kowtowing before business interests and dismissal of workers' concerns in 2015, was no aberration, but a reflection of the SNP leadership's desire to build up a new Scottish ruling class, ready to take its place in the existing crisis-ridden global order.
- p) The SNP leadership's strategy for developing support for a new Scottish ruling class stretches beyond private business leaders to senior management levels of the 'public' sector. Their thinking is very similar to that of private sector bosses. Those public sector bosses, whether in education or health, remain committed to market inspired

target setting, not to meet people's needs, but as a form of labour discipline. They use secretive management control methods, often in close liaison with corporate and other business interests. They work within the huge constraints imposed by the punitive PFI, PPP and Scottish Futures Trust financial liabilities. They have targeted Scottish Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman, who came to the job with a radical record. Information is either been withheld or selectively leaked to build up an impression of Freeman's incompetence, over the Sick Children's Hospital in Edinburgh and her handling of Covic-19 (which has been a direct reflection of the SNP government's Johnson-tailing strategy).

q) The key issue is that no matter how well-meaning any radical's original intentions, their policies can no more be delivered through the corporate business dominated, public sector board system, than they can through a City of London dominated Crown-in-Westminster political system (as Corbyn would soon have found if elected in 2019). The SNP government is committed to working within both hostile environments.

## 2) The Alex Salmond case

As yet, neither Salmond's promised book, nor the Holyrood inquiry into the Scottish government's role in the lead-up to the trial, are available. Therefore, the following section, with its analysis and possible political consequences, can only be tentative.

- a) The verdicts given by the court seems clear enough. Alex Salmond was found not guilty of 12 sexual assault charges, with a 'not proven' verdict for the thirteenth charge. There is plenty of evidence that both the British and the subordinate Scottish legal systems are more than capable of denying justice, e.g. the current travesty of a trial for Julian Assange in England, and the conduct of the Scottish court in the trial of Abdelbaset Al Megrahi after the Lockerbie bombing. But the Salmond Trial differed in having a jury, a woman as judge and a majority of women jurors.
- b) A judicial review found that the Scottish government had behaved illegally in its initial handling of the case against Salmond. This cost the public purse, £512,000. We won't know more about the background to this until the Scottish parliamentary enquiry takes place. So, we have no idea whether the accusers were any way involved in this particular miscarriage of justice, or whether it was solely the Scottish government's decision.
- c) The role of a Unionist dominated media has also been questioned. This media often produced very one-sided coverage, salaciously concentrating on the most lurid accusations with minimal reporting of the defence evidence. Salmond's supporters and those looking to fair reporting have grounds for concern. However, this trial was a win-win opportunity for the Unionist media. Whichever side won this could lead to a damaging split at the top of the SNP.
- d) In the trial, the court's defence of the accusers' anonymity, the appointment of a female judge, a majority female jury, and the ruling that section of the defence's evidence was inadmissible, all seem to point to a trial in which the accusers' interests were carefully defended. However, whether or not the women accusers received justice, depends on wider factors than the conduct of the judge and the composition of the jury. Defence lawyers in attempted rape and actual rape cases appeal to popular prejudices, still held

not only by many men, but by some women, when it comes to ‘consensual’ sexual behaviour. The use of this tactic by a lawyer to get the jury’s unanimous (including three women jurors) rejection the charges of rape against four rugby players in Belfast in 2018, highlights this continuing problem.<sup>17</sup> Gordon Jackson QC, Salmond’s lawyer, appears to have attempted to use a version of tactic this when it came to the attempted rape charge<sup>18</sup>. This still does not rule out the possibility that the jury was not so swayed (and this trial occurred in the aftermath of the court victory over the repugnant Harvey Weinstein in the USA).

- e) However, Salmond’s defence made no attempt to deny that his behaviour had been sexist and inappropriate. By his own defence’s evidence, Salmond has been a ‘sex pest’. To date Scottish society hasn’t got very far in dealing with ‘sex pests.’ Often, in the past, and in many workplaces today, any women raising such accusations, have often been faced with a response like, “Oh, you know what Jimmy’s like”. They have to fall back on other women at work for shared protection. This is obviously not always reliable. There have been some advances, particularly in public sector employment. In Salmond’s case, with him being the most senior public employee at the time, this should have led to a challenge to his conduct, possible disciplinary action, mandatory anti-sexist training, with either financial compensation for constructive dismissal or reinstatement for the victims, along with a public statement of support for the complainants, if they so desired.
- f) Therefore, Salmond’s acquittal hardly leaves him with an unsullied reputation. Any failure to place conditions on Salmond’s renewed party membership, such as a requirement to undergo anti-sexism counselling, would leave the SNP exposed to charges of a failure to address sexual harassment at the highest levels of the party.
- g) Within the present legal system, and with wider prejudiced attitudes about ‘consensual’ sexual behaviour still prevalent, being a ‘sex pest’ is hardly likely to form grounds for a successful prosecution. However, a case which involves linking non-physical sexual harassment with attempted or actual physical rape opens up other problems. There is a spectrum of sexist behaviour, e.g. demeaning language, inappropriate physical contact and rape, analogous say to a spectrum of violent behaviour, e.g. physical threats, punching and knifing. Any merging of such distinctions to make a case with a better chance in court can cause other problems. If these distinctions are not made clear, this could lead to some juries dismissing charges, because they think any sentencing would be over-harsh. Add to this, a view, upheld by some radical feminists, that considers that not only should women’s accusations be treated seriously, but that such accusations should themselves be automatically believed, opens up a different door to injustice.
- h) Alex Salmond had taken the SNP from its earlier National Populism and its ethnic nationalism, which had confined the party’s appeal to rural and small-town Scotland. He had successfully taken over the old social democratic mantle that Labour was shedding. This had a devastating effect, particularly in Labour’s Central Belt ‘Red Wall’ constituencies as shown in IndyRef1. There was a mass defection of Labour supporters to the cause of independence, in disgust at Labour’s alliance with the Tories in ‘Better Together’. Ironically though, Central Belt-born Salmond’s Westminster seat lay in rural and small-town Gordon. He held this seat from 2015-17, and Banff and Buchan from 1987-2010 (as well as the Holyrood seats of Banff and Buchan, Gordon and Aberdeenshire East from 1999-2016). It wasn’t until Nicola Sturgeon became party leader that the SNP was able to confirm its social democratic credentials directly in the

Central Belt. She has represented Glasgow Southside (former Glasgow Govan) from 2007, when she also became depute party leader and Depute First Minister. In the 2016 Holyrood and 2017 Westminster general elections, the SNP lost a lot of its former rural and small-town electoral support, further confirming the shift in its centre of gravity to the Central Belt.

- i) In 2014, despite Salmond's success with the economic social democratisation of the SNP, Labour still held the moral high ground over social issues. The homophobic Section 28 was abolished when the Scottish Labour/Lib-Dem coalition still controlled Holyrood. Brian Souter, a major SNP funder, financed the 'Keep the Clause' campaign. When Sturgeon became SNP leader, she clearly wanted to make a break with SNP's less than glorious past when it came to women's and gay rights. She wanted to show that the SNP has changed. Women (and gays and transgendered) could now expect something from the party better than in the past. To do this meant taking a further step in the social democratisation of the SNP. The SNP had to take over Labour's social agenda too. New Labour's social democracy amounted to neo-liberalism with a human face.
- j) This fits in well with the SNP leadership's general strategy of trying to develop a new Scottish ruling class. Sturgeon wants to extend this new ruling class by inviting women (and others) to 'break through the glass ceiling'.
- k) The rise of the SNP, now in government for 13 years, has attracted a lot of careerists. The majority are men, but they also include women. Careerism is rife in the SNP and all other parties. Individual advancement takes priority over collective advancement. As well as all those pro-leadership MPs and party functionaries, careerism also motivates the critics of Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP government and the inner party machine. This includes high-flyer, Joanna Cherry QC. Stalled careerism also motivates Kenny MacAskill. Failed careerism and vengeance motivate the egotistical Jim Sillars. The same is probably true of Alex Salmond.
- l) A related problem lies in the SNP's long-term incumbency in government. This is also true for other political parties. Politicians become targets of business attention, inevitably leading some of them to dispense favours and into corrupt practices. The earlier dropping of the SNP policy to take bus transport back into public ownership, when Sir Brian Souter was influential, and the backing for Trump's Aberdeenshire golf course, are examples of such behaviour.
- m) Joanna Cherry repeatedly failed to pay up expenses on her Westminster credit card.<sup>19</sup> Her rival, Ian Blackford, former investment banker and now the SNP's Westminster leader, has received money from David Craigen, Tory backer and head of a London hedge fund company.<sup>20</sup> Any further protracted political incumbency for the SNP government will almost certainly lead to more favours for certain businesses and to corruption. The long-term political incumbency of Catalan Convergence, the SNP's sister party in Catalunya, led to spectacular corruption at leadership level,<sup>21</sup> which stalled Catalan attempts to organise an independence referendum.
- n) As splits develop in the SNP, Socialists must avoid aligning themselves with either of the two emerging camps. Whatever differences there may be over IndyRef2 tactics and the issue of transgender rights within the SNP, both wings seek to build up a new Scottish ruling class and look to a revived neo-Liberal order. Before the outbreak of the 2008 Crisis, Alex Salmond promoted trickle-down social democratic reforms in a then triumphalist neo-Liberal world. In this he sought the cooperation of Sir George

Mathewson, chair of the Royal Bank of Scotland boss. The crisis showed that that world has gone. Yet, Sturgeon and her backers in the SEGC, led by Andrew Wilson of Charlotte Street Partners, still want Scotland to take its place within a revived neo-Liberal world order, and make the working class pay the costs.

### 3) Covid-19 contributes to widening division in the SNP.

- a) To win a wider base of support, competing careerists often dress up their personal ambitions with a political cover. When political divisions open up, this provides an opportunity for careerists and egotists to align or ingratiate themselves to those who have real political concerns. In the SNP's current infighting, this currently takes the form of who is the most pro-IndyRef2, who wants to hold the referendum most quickly, and who is offering a strategy best able to overcome Westminster intransigence.
- b) Sturgeon and her backers say they don't want to make any constitutional moves for IndyRef2 until the opinion polls show 60% support. However, even in the event of this target being reached, the current reactionary unionist UK government is not going to concede a referendum. Furthermore, there is little chance of the British Unionist 'opposition' - Labour or the Lib-Dems - questioning this.
- c) Sir Keir Starmer has indicated his strategy is to win the Unionist vote from the Tories. In this, he is backed by his new ultra-Unionist, Shadow Scottish Secretary, Ian Murray, MP for 'Red Morningside', and by the equally ultra-Unionist Scottish depute leader and ardent Trident supporter, Jackie Baillie MSP for Dumbarton. 'Left' Labour, Richard Leonard, Scottish party leader, was always more trapped by the Right in Scotland than the Left in England has been by its Right. The politics of the Scottish Labour Party has usually been to the Right of that of the British Labour Party and the Left of the Scottish Labour Party has usually been to the Right of the Labour Left in England. This is a reflection of the special role both wings of the party have in Scotland in ensuring the integrity of the Union. And just as the Left in England has retreated at a rate of knots under Starmer, so the Labour Right's stranglehold in Scotland has become even firmer.
- d) The only specific policy recommendation in Labour's nine-page, official *Key Findings and Summary Recommendations* of the *Election Review* into its 2019 general election disaster is opposition to holding any IndyRef2!<sup>22</sup> On June 6<sup>th</sup> the Scottish Labour Executive declared it would be standing in the 2021 Holyrood election on a policy opposing a second referendum.<sup>23</sup> As with Labour's disastrous decision not to push for a 'Devo-Max' independence option in IndyRef1, this places the party in the conservative unionist camp shared with the Tories (who also have the additional support of most reactionary unionists – Scottish Labour's wooing of the Orange Order in the Central Belt notwithstanding). Thus, Scottish Labour Executive's decision on June 6<sup>th</sup>, rules out any possible liberal unionist alliance with the SNP, involving an extra 'Devo-Max' option for a future IndyRef2.
- e) The wider British Labour Party faced the same problem with Brexit. This was always a battle to reassert British nationalism ('Britain First'/'Empire2' in rhetoric, but 'America First'/'Britain Second' in reality). It is politically impossible to give progressive content, with any wider political purchase, to a campaign to defend and

promote the UK state and Britishness. George Galloway, with his ‘Just Say Naw’ opposition to Scottish independence, and his joining Nigel Farage’s ‘Grassroots Out’ campaign over Brexit, is just a particularly blatant indication of where such thinking takes you. He was joined by Labour’ MP, Kate Hoey, who is also a supporter of the Countryside Alliance and the Ulster Unionists. None of the Left Brexiteer campaigns had any impact on the overwhelmingly Right trajectory of the conservative unionist led ‘No’ campaign in 2014, nor the Right Populist and reactionary unionist led Brexit campaign in 2016.

- f) However, SNP’s leadership’s other hoped for port of call for political support – the EU – is not going to give the SNP any real encouragement. The EU is a treaty organisation of existing states not of aspiring states. Although, unlike in 2014, the UK is no longer in the EU, Spain is, and opposes the precedents such recognition would give. The EU’s standing back in the face of Spanish repression in Catalonia clearly shows the centrality of the existing state nature of the EU. The EU never raised any criticism when both the UK and Spanish states resorted to violent repression, including the use of death squads, in Northern Ireland and Euskadi. The EU’s failure to uphold its Charter of Human Rights in Hungary and Poland provides another example of not challenging the policies of member states.
- g) A section of the SNP, including Joanna Cherry MP, has been using the SNP government’s delay in taking effective action over Covid-19, and its handling of the Salmond case, to criticise the SNP leadership. Salmond’s old pre-2008 Crash ‘Arc of Prosperity’ has now become an ‘arc of more effective Covid-19 action’ - Ireland, Iceland and Norway, to which New Zealand is sometimes now added. This growing opposition has also been using the SNP government’s mishandling of the Salmond trial to push a possible Plan B strategy to obtain IndyRef2.
- h) The aim of this opposition is either to force a change of SNP policy over IndyRef2 or, failing that, to make a leadership challenge (with some, e.g. the maverick populist, Jim Sillars, even flagging up the need for a new nationalist party).
- i) The Plan B alternative to Sturgeon’s Plan A, with its cautious IndyRef2 policy, is based on testing out the possibilities of a legal challenge in the UK’s Supreme Court to Johnson’s denial of a Section 30 order. Cherry was a significant figure in getting the Supreme Court to rule Johnson’s proroguing of Westminster illegal in September 2019. But this is where Cherry’s strategy today comes up against the same roadblock as Sturgeon’s. Johnson did not resign over his illegal proroguing. His plans for Brexit just went ahead anyhow. He knew he had the support of the majority of the British ruling class. With this backing, Johnson will do whatever is necessary to prevent IndyRef2. And back in September, Johnson also had his own effective Plan B – calling for a general election which paralysed the opposition. Cherry’s proposed Plan B would be no more effective than Sturgeon’s Plan A. The Crown Powers at Johnson’s disposal would soon see to that.
- j) Following the Supreme Court ruling in September 2019, both Corbyn and Cherry found that the UK’s Crown Powers do not form any effective constitutional protection, even for the very limited parliamentary ‘sovereignty’ unique to the UK. This forms just one part of the UK’s unwritten constitution. The Crown Powers are designed to give the British ruling class whatever powers they need in a crisis situation. In other words, they can make it up as they go along. This gives the Hard Right Tories an advantage even compared to other Right Populists, who show their

contempt for existing written constitutions, e.g. Donald Trump in the USA, Victor Orban in Hungary and Andrzej Duda in Poland. The liberal constitutional nationalism, which is common to both wings of the SNP, can only work with the cooperation of liberal unionists, who observe the niceties of the constitution. But the SNP is up against reactionary unionist, authoritarian populists, who feel no such constraints.

- k) Whatever their longer-term problems, any new careerist challengers to the existing SNP leadership, still need to find support within the party in the here and now. This can take the form of questioning the lack of internal democracy in the party; a tentative questioning of the SEGC, and possibly the post-Covid-19 Advisory Panel recommendations. However, this new Populism also has its Right element, pandering to those influenced previously marginalised ethnic nationalists - Scottish Resistance and Soil nan Gaidheal, and the reactionary and more influential Wings Over Scotland. The fact that Johnson's reactionary Britishness has a strong Greater English nationalist component, which the Tories are more than prepared to whip up, opens up the unwelcome prospect of a revival of Scottish ethnic nationalism in response.
- l) The SNP's civic national approach to IndyRef1 was its most progressive feature. This approach informed the overwhelming majority of the Scottish independence movement. It also formed the basis for the chosen IndyRef1 franchise which included EU residents and 16-18 year olds. This contrasted strongly with the British ethnic nationalism of 'Better Together' (with Gordon Brown and Michael Gove having long pushed for cultural criteria for state-recognised British subjecthood). This contributed to the restricted franchise used in the Brexit referendum.
- m) Up until Covid-19, the Scottish government's civic national momentum was maintained. The Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act was passed on February 20<sup>th</sup>. This extended the vote in Holyrood and local elections to foreign nationals, refugees and short-term prisoners. Meanwhile, in the increasingly reactionary political climate found at the UK political level, EU citizens entitled to vote were administratively removed from the franchise for the 2019 EU and Westminster elections. The Tory government has plans for further restrictions on the electorate.
- n) One particular arena in which Cherry has taken a lead is her support for the denial of gender self-determination. In this Cherry claims to be acting as a feminist.<sup>24</sup> But the feminism she now supports is that of its conservative and reactionary wing. Its views on the transgendered are based on the sort of prejudices and myths once dreamt up to oppose gay rights. Cherry shares this gender exclusivism with Johnson who has dropped trans self-identification under a planned Gender Recognition Act. Even the once notoriously socially reactionary Irish Republic now recognises gender self-determination. The Irish Republic, with its earlier gay marriage recognition is now on a socially progressive trajectory (albeit with a lot catching up to do on abortion rights). Johnson, however, has flagged up the beginnings of a reactionary reversal on social rights in the UK. Scotland needs to follow the progressive social trajectory found in the Irish Republic (with the changes being pushed much more strongly from below than from above). However, the Scottish government's use of the Covid-19 Lockdown to 'delay' gender self-recognition could be a worrying concession to social conservatism and reaction.

- o) The SNP MSPs' shameful Holyrood performance on May 20<sup>th</sup>, when they joined with the Tories to vote down the Scottish Greens' proposed, STUC backed (and even Scottish Labour MSP and Lib-Dem MSP supported) Covid-19 bill amendments, was supported by all its MSPs. Whatever the progressive postures sometimes adopted by the SNP's own Populist careerists to win over the Left, and to supplement its appeals to the Right on other issues, this unanimous SNP voting behaviour highlights a shared attitude by both wings of the SNP. When it comes to challenging vested interests such as housing and property, then tenants and trade unionists and their advocates are to be scornfully trampled upon.
- p) The purely constitutional road to Scottish independence has been blocked by the rise of the reactionary unionist, Right Populist Tories. The SNP IndyRef2 strategy has relied on an alliance of constitutional nationalists - the SNP, Plaid Cymru, Sinn Fein and the SDLP - and liberal unionists. unionists, who once dominated the Labour and Lib-Dem parties, and until 2012 had a presence amongst Welsh Conservatives. The liberal unionists panicked in 2014, and have mostly turned into conservative unionists, fearful of further constitutional change. Even if Labour had become the largest party at Westminster in December 2019, Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters made it clear that they were only prepared to look into the possibility of allowing IndyRef2 for expedient reasons. This was in order to take office; not because they recognised the democratic right to Scottish self-determination. Labour's new leader, the conservative unionist, Sir Keith Starmer, has never acknowledged the right to hold IndyRef2. This is specifically ruled out in Labour's *Election Review* published in June. Liberal unionism is only likely to be revived as a diversion, if the UK faces the prospect of an immediate break-up following any extra-constitutional action, as it did in Ireland after the 1918 general election.

## **C. THE STATE OF THE UNION IN THE REST OF THE UK AND THE SITUATION THROUGHOUT THESE ISLANDS**

### **1. Ireland**

- a) The constitutional nationalist road to Irish reunification has also been blocked. The Good Friday Agreement placed Partition at its centre, although no longer along the Border, but by creating two blocs at Stormont – the Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican. The ‘carrot’ of constitutional provision for a Border Poll for Nationalist/Republican bloc is over-ridden by the ‘stick’ of a veto given to the Unionist/Loyalist bloc.
- b) In the December 12<sup>th</sup> Westminster election, the reactionary and conservative Unionist/Loyalist bloc (the DUP and UUP) received 42% of the vote. This voting decline of 5% since 2017 and an opinion poll showing support for the union had slipped to 48% whilst support for Irish unity had risen to 45%,<sup>25</sup> has been overhyped by Sinn Fein, as opening up the door to a new Border Poll. However, even if an improvement in this poll result were to be reflected in the new Stormont elections in 2022, this would not provide the basis for a Stormont majority vote for a Border Poll, or even more fundamentally, even if the pro-Irish reunification

parties' vote increased, this would not overcome the Unionist/Loyalist constitutional veto, or Westminster opposition.

- c) There is also a widespread misunderstanding of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), because it does not form an official part of Stormont's Unionist/Loyalist bloc. APNI, though, remains a Unionist party (affiliated to the Lib-Dems). It seeks liberal unionist reform of Northern Ireland and the maintenance of the UK link
- d) Furthermore, the prospect of any official SDLP support for a Border Poll over Irish reunification, would likely soon evaporate in the face of increased Loyalist intimidation, and the lack of backing from the government of the Irish Republic.
- e) A rising Alliance Party is more likely to attract the attention of the SDLP than a currently stalled Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland. Attempts to reform the Union in Northern Ireland would not bring about the same political polarisation, as attempts to press for Irish reunification. But the current Stormont set-up also places considerable obstacles in the path of liberalisation. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, Stormont passed a motion opposed to the UK's abortion laws, which since June 2019 have been in operation in Northern Ireland. This motion was initiated by the DUP, but also received the backing of some Alliance Party and SDLP MLAs in a display of reactionary cross-community unity! Sinn Fein's alternative amendment called for the ending of the UK's current liberal abortion laws in Northern Ireland and replacing them with very restrictive, conservative abortion laws in the Irish Republic. Furthermore, Aontu, a socially conservative, anti-abortion breakaway from Sinn Fein (but also including former SDLP members) now has two Northern Ireland councillors.
- f) But Sinn Fein took new heart from the Irish Republic Dail election results on February 8<sup>th</sup>. It emerged with the largest % vote – 25%. The mainstream parties, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour received 22%, 21% and 4% respectively. In this election, Sinn Fein made a Leftist appeal to the electorate. This was to compensate for its very poor showing in the 2018 Irish presidential election (when its vote dropped from 10% in 2014 to 6%); in the 2019 Irish local elections where it votes dropped from 16% to 9% and its number of local councillors from 159 to 81; and in the 2019 Euro-elections when its number of MEPs fell from 3 to 1. Sinn Fein's earlier poor election results followed a period of trying to attain more 'respectability'. Sinn Fein has used its much improved 2020 Dail results to raise the possibility of Border Polls in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic (following the constitutional precedent established in the two partitionist referenda in 1998). They claim that this opens up the prospect of Irish reunification. However, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour and most other minor parties are opposed to early Irish reunification. These parties argue that Irish reunification is inevitable, but in the longer-run, maybe rather like Jacob Rees-Mogg's Brexit - good for Britain in 50 years' time!<sup>26</sup>
- g) Ireland, North and South, in contrast to Great Britain, is the one place where Socialist parties have been able to make an impact, winning seats in the Dail, Stormont and local councils. However, Socialists' (mainly standing in the cities) political fortunes have been almost the reverse of Sinn Fein's. In the 2015 Dail election, the joint electoral pact - Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA) (SPI front), People Before Profit (PBP) (SWP-Ireland front) and Independents4Change –

gained 10 TDs. But by the 2020 Dail election, a more fractured Socialist electoral pact was reduced to 6 TDs. Their number would have been further reduced if Sinn Fein, now putting on a Left face, had stood in more seats. A similar Socialist electoral pact gained 30 local councillors in the 2014 Irish local elections, but only held on to 15 of these in the 2019 local election. In contrast, in Northern Ireland, PBP increased its number of local councillors from 1 in 2014 to 5 in the 2019 local elections. Cross Community Labour Alternative (an SPI front which has attempted simultaneously revive the old Northern Irish Labour Party and be Corbyn's missing party in Northern Ireland) gained 1 councillor in 2019.

- h)** However, there was an intermediary period, when the SWP in Ireland and the SP(I) followed their British fellow sect 'International' comrades in the IST and CWI and backed Brexit and Irexit. This lined them up with reaction on both sides of the Border. In Northern Ireland, Brexit was avidly backed by the Right Populists in the DUP, TUV and the neo-Fascist Loyalists paramilitaries (now with clubs rather than guns). They want a return to a hard Border. Some dissident Republicans also welcomed this prospect, providing an opportunity to relaunch a military campaign against border posts. After PBP came out for Brexit/Irexit, its Westminster general election vote fell by 35% between 2015 and 2017, and its number of MLAs fell from 2 in the 2016 to 1 in the 2017 Stormont elections. In contrast to their comrades in the Irish Republic, neither PBP nor the CCLA in Northern Ireland stood candidates in the 2019 EU-elections, just prior to the local council elections. They were standing in constituencies that had overwhelmingly voted against Brexit. They did not want to draw too much attention to their Left Brexiteer stance. Yet, their comrades south of the Border did stand in the 2019 EU election. But here the Solidarity (former AAA) PBP electoral pact vote fell back by 30% (although other factors also contributed to this).
- i)** In the aftermath of the 2008 Crisis, Irish people suffered brutal treatment at the hands of the EU bureaucracy (as well as from Gordon Brown and the New Labour government, acting on behalf of the City of London, and its Edinburgh outlier bankers and property companies). However, like Northern Ireland, the Europhobic forces in the Irish Republic are dominated by the Right. In the 2018 Irish presidential election, Peter Casey the anti-EU (and other) migrants and anti-Traveller candidate, came second with 23% of the vote. The Right Populist, Irish Freedom Party, calls for Irexit and Brexit, because it sees the EU as being responsible for the top-down liberalisation of Irish society, which has led to the new support for abortion and gay rights.
- j)** There are longer-term prospects for Irish reunification, but these lie neither through the institutions of the Northern Irish statelet, nor those of the state of the Irish Republic. And to begin with, attempts to seek unity on a mainly economic basis, e.g. cross-border trade union solidarity, are going to face increased difficulties as Brexit is imposed. Even during most of the 'The Troubles', the UK and the Irish Republic were in a common customs zone. Clandestine cross-border economic activity resulted from the difference in local taxation regimes. Despite current attempts to minimise cross-border customs difficulties, the prospect of a hardening border will lead to a whole host of illegal activities, including cross-border migration. This will all be grist to the Loyalists, including the DUP. And over illegal migration, they will quickly get the support of the Tories. Furthermore, the

re-emergence of smuggling and quite probably, associated gangsterism, will provide the excuse for increased PSNI (former RUC) and RIR (former UDR) activity at the Border. And for the Loyalists, there is the added bonus that the Border divides Irish Nationalist communities, e.g. Derry and Letterkenny, Newry and Dundalk, Strabane and Lifford. Therefore, the DUP is going to be less concerned about the economic consequences of a hardened border, looking more and more to Great Britain and Trump's USA to maintain 'Ulster's political and economic basis. The DUP wants Brexit in order to undermine the Good Friday Agreement, and move away from the pretence of 'parity of esteem'.

- k) For Socialists an important basis for Irish reunification lies in going beyond the defence of the free movement of Irish citizens and British subjects across the Border, to defending the free movement of migrants. They will be, by far, the worst affected by Brexit and a hardened border. This will mean taking on the arguments of the longest supporters of Brexit in Ireland, the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) and its trade union official supporters. In similar fashion to the Communist Party of Britain and some British trade union leaders' (e.g. Len McCluskey) support for 'British jobs for British workers', the CPI supports 'Irish jobs for Irish workers.' This is coupled to their support for the chimera of 'non-racist' immigration controls. For Socialists cross-border migrants and asylum seekers are actually or potentially part of our class. They should form a central part of any campaign for Irish reunification.
- l) However, to date, the best examples of cross-border action have been those mainly Socialist-led social movements defying social reaction North and South of the Border, especially over gay and abortion rights. The successful referenda in the Irish Republic, approving gay marriage and overturning the Eighth Amendment to the Irish constitution banning abortion, both led to large protests in Northern Ireland, directed at its even more reactionary social legislation.
- m) We have Socialists organisations in these islands formed on the following political and organisational bases - all-Great Britain, e.g. SWP; the SP, with the addition of a Scottish branch office SPS ; all-Ireland e.g. SWP/now SWN; SPI, but organised on Partitionist lines: and we have 'party' sect Internationals. (e.g. IST and CWI). Yet they both failed to mount wider international campaigns around IndyRef1, or the EU referendum. So, it is not in their nature to do this over IndyRef2 or Irish reunification. Yet, we are up against a British ruling class and a Right Populist government that organises its reactionary unionist offensive on an all-UK basis. To challenge this effectively and break-up the UK state, Socialists need to form an 'internationalism from below' alliance, that includes Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England to break-up the UK state, with active campaigns on an all-islands basis.

## 2. Wales

- a) In Wales, the December 12<sup>th</sup> Westminster general election result has polarised politics to a greater extent than England (where reactionary unionism dominates) or Scotland (where constitutional nationalism dominates). Labour dominated liberal unionism has had a more extended lifespan in Wales than anywhere else in the UK.

- b) Liberal unionists have formed alliances with constitutional nationalists, even at governmental level. From 2007 until 2011, Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru formed the ‘One Wales’ coalition in the Welsh Assembly. In 2010, Welsh Labour, Lib Dems, Conservatives Forward Wales, and Plaid Cymru voted unanimously for a referendum to provide more powers to the Welsh Assembly. In 2011, David Cameron’s Westminster Conservative/Lib-Dem coalition, in a last fling for liberal unionism, allowed a referendum to enable the strengthening of the Welsh Assembly’s powers.
- c) The 2011 Welsh devolution referendum also represented the highpoint of Welsh national unity. Over 63% voted in favour of more powers, and every local council area, apart from Monmouth, voted in support. This was in marked contrast to the 1998 Welsh devolution referendum, when a Welsh Assembly was only approved by the narrowest of margins - 50.3% to 49.7%, with 11 local councils voting for and 12 against.
- d) Since 2011, conservative and reactionary unionism have made big headway in Wales in the Westminster, Welsh Assembly, local council and EU-elections. In the December 12<sup>th</sup> 2019 Westminster general election, Labour fell from 28 to 22 MPs, the Lib-Dems fell from 1 to 0, Plaid Cymru remained on 4, whilst the Tories rose from 8 to 14 MPs. The Brexit Party (not standing in the 8 Tory-held seats) got over 5% of the vote and was the second placed party in a number of seats. Most Tories, like the former Brexit Party are now reactionary unionists.
- e) Gareth Bennet, a Brexit Party MWA in the Welsh Assembly, has declared himself the first MP for a new party, Abolish. Abolish will stand in the 2021 Welsh Assembly elections on a platform to scrap devolution for Wales. There are already Abolish Party supporters in Scotland. Whilst the Abolish Party is unlikely to make any significant electoral breakthroughs, the Tories’ response to this pressure will be to further marginalise rather than to abolish the UK’s existing devolved assemblies. For Tory politicians, Holyrood and Cardiff Bay still provide good careerist possibilities , and the opportunity for personal gain from lobbyists. For some, absenteeism when it comes to parliamentary business, enhances their incomes from other jobs. But as things move even further Right, the Tories still have the option of taking over the Abolish Party’s agenda, or any other post-UKIP, post-Brexit Party challenge, whether over Devolution or the EU, as they did in the 2017 and 2019 general elections.
- f) The Far Right, English Democrats stand in the Monmouth constituency of the Welsh Assembly on a platform of transferring Monmouth to England. There has also been the Welsh Defence League, linked to the English and Scottish Defence Leagues and to the Loyalists.
- g) The other side of this growing polarisation can be seen amongst Welsh nationalists. In the December 12<sup>th</sup> general election, a new party, Gwlad Gwlad (Land/Land), stood candidates in the three constituencies, where Plaid Cymru had made an electoral deal with liberal unionists – the Lib-Dems and the Green Party (England and Wales). In January, Neil McEvoy, MWA., organised a new Plaid Cymru breakaway, the Welsh Nationalist Party (WNP). This opposes alliances with liberal unionist Welsh Labour. The National Populist WNP looks for support from the Right and Left. It now has 1 MWA, and 6 local councillors.

- h) There is also All Under One Banner (Cymru) (AUOB(C)), which had already held successful demonstrations in Caernarfon (North Wales) and Merthyr Tydfil (South Wales) in 2019. AUOB(C) had planned another in Wrexham (Welsh Border council) in April 2020 (postponed because of Covid-19).
- i) The advance of conservative and reactionary unionism threatens to break up the Welsh national unity achieved in 2011. The aim of the Right Populists (and the Far Right) is to end the idea of a Welsh nation, and replace this with British provincial identities, e.g. South Walian, Welsh Borderland. These provinces would be encouraged to celebrate their past role in the UK and British Empire and look to the Right Populists' 'Keep Brexit going' campaign to scapegoat the EU and former non-UK EU residents (and others) for the ongoing failures of the UK.
- j) This would leave behind a North and West Wales, where the Welsh language is still spoken by a significant proportion of the population. If reactionary unionism were to advance (assisted by some conservative unionists) the Welsh language would not be actively supported by a Welsh Assembly or by Westminster. It may be tolerated, providing a little local colour for the tourist industry and helping to sell local products. Although recognition for the Welsh language was originally passed by Westminster (indeed by a Tory government in 1993 adopting Welsh cultural nationalism as a divide-and-rule method of opposing the political demand for Welsh devolution), there are no long-term guarantees. Currently, minority languages are best supported under the EU constitution. But post-Brexit, this no longer applies. Reactionary unionist hostility to the Welsh language is likely to take on similar characteristics to reactionary unionist hostility to the Irish Gaelic language in Northern Ireland. It is worth remembering the response of James Connolly to British Left Unionists who dismissed minority languages, seeing them as reactionary - "Nations which... which abandon their language in favour of that of an oppressor do so, not because of the altruistic motives, or because of a love of brotherhood of man, but from a slavish and cringing spirit."<sup>27</sup>
- k) The issue of Welsh national unity poses a dilemma for many Socialists. Socialists should support the exercise of national self-determination on a civic national basis. Therefore, it is necessary to examine not just Welsh-British nationalism, but that nationalism found in sections of the Welsh self-determination movement. Like the SNP in the past, Plaid Cymru was once dominated by ethnic (cultural) nationalists. However, in Plaid's attempt to break out of its Welsh speaking heartland, particularly into South Wales, it became more civic national in its political approach. Mohammed Asghar, the first non-white and Muslim MWA, was elected for Plaid in 2007 (but like 'Socialist', Forward Wales MWA, John Marek, he subsequently deserted to the Tories!) As the British Right Populists and reactionary unionists pile on the pressure there is a danger of a retreat into ethnic nationalism – just as this could happen in Scotland too.
- l) It should be clear that defending a united, civic national Wales offers all its nationalities the best future. The Right Populist and reactionary unionist offensive to break-up Wales and to divide it into separate British provinces, is part of a British chauvinist and racist offensive, which celebrates the Union, Empire and the Crown. And part of any attempted provincialisation will be to undermine those broader and mixed economic and social links and the relationships brought about on an unofficial 'internationalism from below' basis through membership of the

EU. It is also targeted at EU and other migrants, who were excluded from the 2016 EU referendum, and many illegally excluded from the 2019 EU-election. Yet, industrial South Wales has been the product of immigration from its birth.

- m) Labour's liberal unionism is in retreat, and that of the Lib-Dems is nearly extinct in Wales. Liberal unionism has very few allies in England or Scotland, where different forms of conservative unionism in the Labour Party lead to the promotion of provincial thinking. Therefore, attempts by the constitutional nationalist, Plaid Cymru to defend existing Welsh national unity in alliance with liberal unionists, in the face of the Right Populist and reactionary unionist offensive backed by the UK's Crown Powers, is unlikely to be successful.
- n) There is the alternative danger of Welsh nationalists retreating and adopting a more conservative colouring. This may be one of the things that led Plaid to drop its overtly republican and Left social democratic Leanne Wood leader, who is a South Wales MWA. She was replaced by Adam Price, a more centre social democratic and US supporting, MWA, for the more Welsh speaking, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr. Another danger lies in the Neil McEvoy's National Populist, Welsh Nationalist Party. In some ways this resembles forces emerging in the SNP looking to Joanna Cherry or a post-trial Alex Salmond and making overtures to the Right and Left.
- o) And as politics continues to polarise in Wales, this presents a problem for the Left British Unionists. Do they take the side of the liberal unionist in defence of Welsh national unity; or do they, take the side of conservative unionists. As a cover they would fall back on their championing of 'bread and butter' politics, saying that the constitutional issue of Welsh self-determination is a diversion from economic and social issues.
- p) As the Tory Right Populist government and other reactionary unionists step up the pressure on the Welsh post-1998 Devolution settlement, Socialists need to adopt a republican socialist opposition, which challenges the liberal unionists and the constitutional nationalists' inability to mount any effective defence, never mind move beyond this to exercise full Welsh self-determination. Such a strategy also needs to challenge the socially divisive politics coming from the more radical sounding Welsh National Populists. A key thing Socialists can offer is the prospect of a republican socialist 'internationalism from below' alliance, involving Wales, Scotland, England and Ireland.
- q) With a growing threat to Welsh self-determination, Socialists need to have their own national organisations in Wales, and not just branch offices. There needs to a new internationalism, but not on the false basis of an all-British party branch office, or the British dominated 'party' sect 'Internationals'. Thus, instead of political organisation which reflects and duplicates the top-down relationship of the UK state; any new organisation needs to be on an 'internationalism from below' basis.

## **D. FROM COVID-19 TO BLACK LIVES MATTER**

The outbreak of the unprecedented international solidarity with Black Lives Matter (BLM) in response to the racist police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, on May

25<sup>th</sup>, is something that offers Socialists the best prospects for reversing the worldwide slide to the Hard Right's National Populism (and in some cases its links with the Far Right's neo-Fascism). It is the BLM protests, more than any other challenges that the Right Populists, led by Trump and his allies, have faced, which could most effectively challenge their global ascendancy. It could also re-energise a whole host of stalled challenges, e.g. opposition to wider racism, attacks on migrants and environmental degradation. But if other initially national-based campaigns can appreciate the need for a shared solidarity, based on 'internationalism from below', this resistance could lead to both a wider and deeper challenge. This is important for today's stalled struggle for Scottish self-determination.

## 1. The politics of BLM and solidarity

- a) The initial US BLM protests were accompanied by looting and statue toppling. This amounted to oppositional 'shock and awe' tactics. These were mainly responsible for breaking through the usual media silence and its downplaying of constitutional protests. These actions provided a signal for a massive wave of international solidarity. This solidarity with BLM very quickly made the links with wider racism and the plight of asylum seekers in society
- b) The first response of liberals throughout the world to the initial widespread anger over the killing of George Floyd, was to express their verbal support, whilst immediately trying to channel the anger into strictly constitutional channels. In the USA, this will soon take the form of trying to get backing for the Democratic Party - the graveyard of social movements and the launchpad for outsiders' careers. There will be an attempt to channel this anger into support and campaigning for Joe Biden, with his own terrible racist record. In the process, those angry spokespersons for BLM, we hear at present, will be marginalised by the media, and its more conservative spokespersons pushed forward. BLM was founded in 2013, in response to earlier police killings of black people. It includes some more traditional black Democratic Party backers and Ford Foundation funding. There are similar class divisions within the MeToo movement. Hilary Clinton, the very epitome of 'break the glass ceiling' feminism, is a leading figure in MeToo. She and some of the initial MeToo leaders have come out in support of Biden despite his record of sexual harassment.
- c) Barack Obama and his publicly prominent partner, Michelle, are neither racist nor sexist by any liberal criteria (i.e. their personal behaviour). But the Obama presidency did little for the majority of black people and women, who are also members of the wider working class. Supporting the racist and sexist Biden on the grounds that his racism and sexism are not as bad as Trump's will do nothing for the oppressed majority. Should electoral support lead to Biden becoming US president in November, the inevitable setbacks this will lead to can only pave the way for an even more rabid Right reaction, than that following the last two Obama/Biden Democratic governments.
- d) Many liberals in the UK saw the killing of George Floyd as a particular American problem, with its history of slavery and segregation and, in contrast, like to point to the liberal British abolitionists, particularly William Wilberforce. However, BLM

supporters quickly pointed out the deep-seated racism in the UK, associated with its legacy of having been the world's largest slave trading state, promoting imperial colonisation, genocide in Newfoundland and Tasmania and the ethnocide of many more peoples in the Empire. There has also been the more recent state handling of the Stephen Lawrence case, its current treatment of Windrush migrants and their families, and the arrest of two police officers who had taken Ku Klux Klan style photos of Nicola Smallman and Bibaa Henry murdered in a London park.<sup>28</sup>

- e) Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP government were amongst the many who declared their initial support for BLM. The SNP leadership likes to claim that, following its welcome civic national approach to Scottish citizenship, Scotland, unlike the USA and England, does not suffer from state racism (just from individual racists – the usual liberal view). However, the BLM solidarity demonstrations in Scotland quickly made the link with Scottish ruling class participation in British slavery, highlighted by the Henry Dundas statue in Edinburgh's St. Andrew's Square. And much more recently this has been further highlighted by the Fife police and Scottish court's involvement in the unresolved death of Sheku Bayoh in Kirkcaldy in 2015.
- f) Therefore, it was not surprising that the SNP government, using Covid-19 as an excuse, told people not to attend the BLM solidarity demonstrations on June 7<sup>th</sup>. Worldwide, millions, particularly of young people, have understood the controlling intent of those governments invoking Covid-19 restrictions over BLM protests. In defiance, they have joined large public protests. These have been very different from the Far Right's earlier 'prepared to die for Trump and corporate profits' breaches of Covid-19 rules. In contrast, the BLM protesters have tried to impose their own socially responsible Covid-19 social distancing and face masking.
- g) In Glasgow, after a series of Far Right, National Defence League provocations in George Square, a peaceful demonstration in support of asylum seekers was organised on June 21<sup>st</sup>. It had very thorough, socially responsible, social distancing. But the Scottish police pretence, to be upholding the Covid-19 lockdown, was exposed when they kettled these peaceful protesters in total disregard for social distancing.<sup>29</sup> This followed a statement, earlier in the week, by Scottish Police Federation (SF) chairman, David Hamilton, who equated the actions of Far Right, neo-Fascist and Loyalist thugs, who regularly resort to physical threats and violence, with the actions of peaceful protestors, and those taking direct action only against property.<sup>30</sup> Sturgeon criticised the racist thugs but predictably had nothing to say about the SPF statement. It took five years, until this May, and a lot pressure, to get the SNP government to open a public enquiry into the death of Sheku Bayoh.
- h) Internationally, the large numbers of BLM-inspired demonstrators have been largely made up of young people not usually attracted to traditional political parties, trade unions, professional associations and NGOs. These are more likely to be supported by those who have more secure jobs, higher pay, pensions and their own homes or secure tenancies. Instead, many BLM supporting protestors are trapped in precarious, low paid jobs, or costly higher education without decent job prospects, and live in insecure tenancies with high rents. These young people can make the immediate link with BLM protests.
- i) On May 30<sup>th</sup> Israeli police shot and killed Iyad Halaq, an autistic Palestinian, on his way to school in occupied East Jerusalem. There were immediate protests. The

case was linked to that of George Floyd with slogans the ‘Justice for Iyad, Justice for George’ and ‘Palestinian Lives Matter’.<sup>31</sup>

- j) Just as those fighting for national self-determination recognise the plight of the Palestinians as a particularly harsh case of oppression and repression and offer their solidarity, so increasingly marginalised young people see the plight of marginalised Black people in the USA as a particularly harsh case of oppression and repression demanding solidarity.
- k) However, along with the liberal’ view of racism being an individual characteristic there has also been the equally individualistic radical ‘mind our own privilege’ reaction to BLM. The radical separatists’ guilt-based reaction is the flip side of the liberals’ superior claims not to be racist or sexist. Racism and sexism are not seen as the structural problems of a capitalist society. These radical and liberal responses are a secular projection of an older Christian view, found in feudal Europe. You could only change things by recognising your ‘sins’ and the need for individual religious conversion.
- l) However, the intersectional theories which form the basis of radical separatist politics are themselves a response to an earlier form of identity politics. This was based on economicistic theories, which had a considerable purchase on the Left. They often championed a working class, usually seen as white, male, straight and involved in blue collar work and trade unions. Capitalist exploitation at work was seen to be the main problem, and various forms of oppression and alienation were given lower priority. Other workers, women, black, ethnic minority and their concerns were seen as secondary. These workers could be accepted as personal friends, even more widely tolerated, but were not seen as equals. And of course, there was always a minority who remained, racist, sexist and homophobic, attracted to the Right and Far Right.
- m) We need to see a working class united in its diversity. One of the most hopeful features of the explosion of a wider range of gendered, transgendered and non-gendered behaviour is that already many people can see the possibilities for a much more emancipated world than that enforced by a crisis-ridden capitalism. Sexual activity for the majority (as opposed to the privileged) does not need to be put in to a male/female biological straitjacket, to ensure the reproduction of enough people for society to survive. It is now capitalism itself, not the older natural disasters, which threatens humanity’s survival.

## 2. The problems and weaknesses of the current Left

- a) Up until the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the demise of the USSR and COMECON in 1991, the non-Labour Left in the UK (and elsewhere in the world) was divided between official Communist (Moscow backed) and dissident Communist (mainly Trotskyist) organisations. Once considerably larger, these organisations have often become sects claiming to be ‘parties’. The largest surviving Trotskyist ‘party’ sects in Great Britain are the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) (with its breakaways) and the Socialist Party (England & Wales) with its small Scottish branch office, the Socialist Party (Scotland) (from now on characterised in the rest of this article as the SP). There is also the non-Moscow

backed, Communist Party of Britain (CPB) (albeit still with a soft spot for ex-KGB officer, Vladimir Putin's Russia). Since the fall of the USSR, these three 'party' sects have sometimes found common cause in their various front organisations – Stop the War, No2EU, People's Assemblies, Respect and the Trade Union & Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

- b) The 'party' sects can still have big differences over particular issues, which characteristically take on the form of sectarian brawls. Many people, wanting to make their protests against injustice effective, have become thoroughly disenchanted with the behaviour of the sects, including those that puff themselves up as 'parties'. This has contributed to a wave of non-party Movementist activity, e.g. Anti-{corporate} Globalisation, Anti-War, Occupy and Extinction Rebellion. Movementist campaigns usually deny the need for party organisation.
- c) But such Movementist campaigns rise and fall, leaving behind mainly memories. This is why some Movement participants, in an attempt to get over this, have tried to create Left Populist 'parties' such as Syriza and Podemos. Here they often come up against others, once trained in 'party' sects, but no longer prepared for years in the political wilderness, who have also joined up. Tensions between these sects and the more Anarchist Movementists, creates distrust on both sides.
- d) Other 'party' sects, also wanting to get out of the political wilderness, have sometimes joined larger established parties. Here the cut-and-thrust of politics is more familiar to them - a clash between competing careerists, egotists and bureaucrats. Recent attempts at party 'colonisation' have been made by some latter day Corbynistas in the British Labour Party and the Sandernistas in the US Democratic Party.
- e) The largest 'party' sects in Great Britain, the SWP and SP, display another other type of political behaviour. They resort to abstract propaganda based on their own dogmas, and supplement this by the use of front organisations to try to win wider support. 'Party' sects want to make individual recruits (although the occasional revivalist meeting with star speakers might produce greater numbers). New 'party' members are integrated through political instruction and socialisation, until they are convinced that their particular 'party's leadership is the sole custodian of 'the Truth'. They can then be sent out into the wider world to sermonise (make 'interventions') and to do 'good works' (be seen to be involved in frenetic political activity).
- f) For its front organisations, the SWP had its Lexit campaign and still has Stand-Up to Racism. The SP had its No2EU and Trade Union & Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Both maintain wider 'party' sect 'Internationals' - the International Socialist Tendency (IST) for the SWP, and the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) for the SP.
- g) Therefore, Socialists confront a whole history of related political and organisational bad practice. To move beyond all the Anti- protests, a political, economic and social alternative is required. To counter capitalist-imposed exploitation, oppression and alienation, we need emancipation, liberation and self-determination (in its widest sense). In order to move beyond the debilitating and related Anarcho-bureaucracy of the Movementists and the sects, it is necessary to create a genuine democratic culture. To move beyond Localism and dogmatic proprietary 'Internationalism', we need a vision and organisation based on

‘Internationalism from Below’ principles. The longer a crisis-ridden capitalism is allowed to continue, the greater the prospect of barbarism or worse.

### **3. Challenging the Left Brexiteers and pushing for an immediate social republican ‘internationalism from below’ across Europe.**

- a) If there is a specific bad political decision that has also reinforced the recent failings of Socialists, it was the adoption of Brexit, be it Left Brexit or Lexit by the SWP/IST (and its breakaways) and by the SP/CWI. This helped to pave the way for the Right Populists, increased racism and stepped up attacks on migrants and others. The immediate lead up to and aftermath of the 2016 Brexit vote was not marked by joyful demonstrations, colourful street stalls and vibrant meetings as in the run-up to the Scottish Independence referendum on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Instead, in the run-up to the EU membership referendum on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, tensions increased, leading to the murder of Jo Cox MP. And in the aftermath of the Brexit vote victory there were no public celebratory events, organised by the Left, but a spike in racist attacks which led to the murder of Aneek Jozwuk in Harlow, Essex and the suicide, following racist bullying of schoolgirl, Dagmara Przybysz in Devon.
- b) The Far Right, in their rampage in George Square, the day after the ‘No’ to Scottish independence vote in 2014 and their stepped-up racist attacks after the ‘No’ to the EU vote in 2016, were confident which side had won. The British Left ‘No’ supporters were nowhere to be seen on both occasions. After the post-referendum 2016 spike in racist attacks, the SWP did mobilise its front organisation, ‘Stand Up to Racism’. But having advocated a ‘No’ vote, which contributed to the rise in racist attacks, this was like running up a down-going escalator. And soon the Far Right demos, which pushed for an ever harder Brexit, in order to provide the best opportunity to advance their racist agenda, became bigger.
- c) The Right Populists and the Far Right want to begin by restricting the movement of certain groups of people within the EU’s boundaries, as well as enforcing even more draconian restrictions upon migrants from without the Schengen Zone. They also want to end the Court of Justice for the European Union to undermine the position of non-European immigrants, national minorities, the transgendered, and for some gays and women too.
- d) Following the 2008 Crash, the leaders of the neo-Liberal EU gave up any pretence that their post-Maastricht, bureaucratic state treaty organisation could improve the lives of the many. They turned on the working class, small farmers, and the EU’s peripheral states to defend the interests of the banks and corporations. They dropped the baton of greater European unity.
- e) The EEC, EC and EU with their ‘internationalism from above’ had always prioritised the free movement of capital, investments and profits within their boundaries. The free movement of people, labour, consumer and environmental rights were subordinate to this. These were sacrificed after the 2008 Crisis.
- f) But there was always an alternative ‘internationalism from below’. This was created by the cross-EU movements of workers and students. They joined and

helped to create nationally mixed workforces, formed new cross-national personal relationships, and were at the centre of the transmission of improved rights for women, gays, lesbians and the transgendered. There was also greater cultural enrichment. e.g. in music, literature and food. And many migrants from without the EU became citizens (or sadly, in the UK, only subjects). Latin American workers in London were at the centre of the London cleaners' militant struggle against the office bosses and the attempted sabotage of their action by trade union bureaucrats.

- g) With EU leaders having dropped the baton of greater European unity, the last thing Socialists should have entertained was following the Right Populists and Far Right into Brexit. Lexit was even more delusional than the British Left 'No' advocates during the IndyRef1 campaign – the CPB/Labour Left, Red Paper Collective and George 'Just Say Naw' Galloway. But even if the latter were more consistent, and twice got their wishes for a 'No' vote, they still came out of these referenda campaigns weaker than when they went in.
- h) The Hard Right always held the leadership of the Brexit campaign. Both the official, 'Vote Leave' (backed by a significant section of the British ruling class) and the unofficial 'Grassroots Out', were much larger than all the Left Brexit campaigns combined. The political objective of the Hard Right was always clear. 'Take back control' meant further strengthening the UK state and hardening its borders. This was prior to their planned introduction of a new immigration act, to remove the rights of 2.8 million non-UK EU residents, subject them to the existing draconian 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts and introduce an even more draconian Australian points-based immigration system.
- i) A vote to Remain in 2016 should have been supported by Socialists, wider working class and democrats. Only this could offer some protection from the attacks of the rising Right Populists on the 2.8 million non-UK EU residents and challenge their planned reactionary unionist attacks on democratic self-determination.
- j) Back in 1979, the SWP, in the face of the Scottish devolution referendum called for 'Revolution not Devolution'! Well in their own small way, they contributed to the ditching of Devolution, but instead of 'Revolution' we got Thatcher. In 2016 the Lexiters called for a Brexit vote and 'Down with the Tories'. They got their Brexit vote and the end of David Cameron PM, but instead of bringing down the Tories, they first got Theresa May in 2016, then Boris Johnson, in 2019!
- k) Socialists campaigning for Remain needed to extend the campaign to the rest of the EU. But most of all, with the EU's leader having dropped the baton of greater European unity, this was time for Socialists to seize that baton, and campaign for an immediate **democratic, federal, secular, social and environmentally sustainable European Republic**, not based on existing states, but on the nations of Europe. And following Brexit, we very much need such a campaign based on **internationalism from below** principles.

## **E. HOW SOCIALISTS COULD BEST ORGANISE TO CHALLENGE THE RIGHT POPULIST AND REACTIONARY UNIONIST OFFENSIVE AND BE RELEVANT TO THE EMERGING NEW STRUGGLES**

- a) If Socialists are going to be able challenge the Right Populist and reactionary unionist offensive and create new and effective organisation, then we need to confront a whole history of related political and organisational bad practice.
- b) Perhaps the first thing which is required of a Socialist organisation is that it outlines what it means by Socialism. Since the possibility of socialism arises out of the contradictions underlying capitalism, then there needs to be some agreement on what constitutes capitalism. Many Socialists claim that capitalism is based on the private ownership of property. To this they counter state ownership (nationalisation), particularly of the ‘commanding heights of the economy’. However, private appropriation of surplus labour can also take place on the basis of state property (at whatever level). Even under private property ownership, the appropriation of surplus labour is not necessarily to individual owners but can be, for example, to a group of shareholders, or interest claiming debtors. On the basis of state ownership, privileged bureaucratic groups can amass considerable surpluses, and enjoy privileges, as much as any private owners of property, e.g. the heads of universities, education and health boards in the UK.
- c) Capitalism is based upon a linked system of **exploitation, oppression and alienation**. The central feature of exploitation is **wage slavery**. But wage slavery cannot be separated from the **chattel and bonded slavery** (which still exist today), without which capitalism would never have developed as a world system. Neither could world capitalism have developed without **domestic slavery**. This ensures that women have provided the unpaid labour necessary to reproduce capitalism’s workforce. This in turn leads to the super-exploitation of public care-workers, whose labour is often judged by capitalists to the equivalent of women’s domestic labour. And on top of this, another longstanding feature of capitalism has been **debt slavery** (sometimes called peonage). Under neo-Liberalism, personal debt slavery greatly increased. And following the 2008 Crisis, capitalist states have converted much of this into sovereign debt to be imposed disproportionately upon workers, small farmers and others.
- d) Socialists, who do not acknowledge that wage slavery forms the basis for exploitation in capitalism (buttressed by the other slaveries – domestic, chattel, bonded and debt), usually seek ‘house slave’ status within it. This means confining struggle to better pay and conditions, and improved access to health and education provision. These Socialists quite rightly fear field slave status, but because of this fear often turn against capitalism’s field slaves – those in the most precarious forms of labour, migrant workers, domestic workers and the unemployed.
- e) But capitalist exploitation cannot exist without capitalist oppression. Oppression is the denial of real democracy and political equality. Oppression needs to be enforced by a state. Oppression can take specific forms, e.g. systematic racism to enforce chattel, bonded, debt and superexploited wage slavery; and systematic patriarchy to enforce domestic slavery.
- f) And capitalism also needs individual alienation to break-up potentially united resistance. Alienation is promoted in the workplace, targeted upon homes and communities and in education and culture, including the arts. It has a strong ideological element.

- g) Socialists looking primarily for ‘house slave’ status within capitalism, and for increased state protection, are essentially Social Democrats. This version of ‘socialism’ is most strongly promoted by Left Social Democrats. However, Socialists looking to end the contradictions of capitalism’s exploitation, oppression and alienation counter these with the possibility of **emancipation, liberation and self-determination** (not only national, but in its widest sense, as in the example of the transgender call for gender self-determination). This is linked to the struggle against all the slaveries – wage, domestic, chattel, bonded and debt.
- h) However, there is a need to go beyond offering a vision of socialism as an ideal for the future, as some purely propagandist groups do. This is a secular update of an older religious view of the world. As with those Christian Pietists, who tried to win over people by their personal example of ‘godliness’, such Socialists can find their gatherings reassuring in an increasingly turbulent and violent world.
- i) Instead, Socialists need to join with others - Anarchists, Left Social Democrats, political Democrats and the wider exploited and oppressed - in immediate struggles. Anarchists, in shunning political parties, tend to be Movementists, cheering on any immediate struggle, and when any particular one drops away, wait for the next one, hoping it will be big enough for the final push against capitalism. In a sense, they look to the effect of an accumulation of immediate struggles to bring about Anarchism. Left Social Democrats tend to see any positive changes or reforms gained in immediate struggles as forming the cumulative basis for their idea of Socialism. Political Democrats believe that immediate struggle should be used to win more reforms in their particular state’s constitution, along with wider political participation. This forms the cumulative basis for a Popular Democracy. However, they all tend to downplay the need for independent class organisations needed to sustain democracy.
- j) Socialists develop a **maximum programme** based on the most advanced thinking gained from previous International Revolutionary Waves. Such a maximum programmed can only be developed internationally. A **transitional programme** is designed for revolutionary periods, outlining how power can be achieved and the international and national policies that are needed to hold and advance this power. In the absence of a revolutionary period, with independent class organisations able to make real challenges, the Trotskyist sects’ calls for tensional measures, only provide left cover for Social Democracy. An **immediate programme** although very necessary is essentially national (although recognising the wider international situation). It addresses the range of political, economic, social and cultural struggles that Socialists are involved in. Programmes need to be changed over time, or in the light of new unforeseen developments. Programmes should only be changed by the whole membership at conferences. They are a democratic tool. The link between maximum, transitional and immediate programmes is the development of independent class organisations - whether party or autonomous bodies.<sup>32</sup>
- k) Socialists do not shun economic, social and political/constitutional reforms but see that their longer-term survival depends on our ability to maintain and extend independent class organisations. We should see participation in, for example, strikes, demonstrations, occupations, popular assemblies as **schools of struggle**, in which our class can develop these class organisations, independent of the state or privileged bureaucracies (e.g. those in most political parties and trade unions).

Working with others also means rejecting ‘party’ front organisations and developing the ability to help create autonomous organisations, both externally combative and internally democratic.

## **F. WORKING IN AUTONOMOUS ORGANISATIONS – THE RADICAL INDEPENDENCE CAMPAIGN**

### **3. What can be learned from the post-2014 history of the Radical Independence Campaign?**

- a) The main political grouping in the leadership of RIC, was the Glasgow-based International Socialist Group (Scotland) - ISG(S) - (a 2011 breakaway from the SWP). The ISG(S) included some very talented young people, who had been very much influenced by their experiences in the ‘party’ sect SWP and not surprisingly become suspicious of political parties per se. In 2011 they had also witnessed the wave of anti-Movements, including the Indignados and the most radical challenge to the existing order - the Arab Spring. Whilst the Arab Spring was brutally crushed, the Indignados in Greece and Spain were temporarily contained. From these new hybrid Movemenist/ ‘party’ organisations emerged. The ‘anything goes’ methods of the Movements, allowed new Left Populist leaders, with political experience, to increase their increase political support. Alex Tsipras (former Eurocommunist) had been leader of Syriza in Greece since 2009, but it was in the 2012 general election that support for the party really took off. Pablo Iglesias (another former Eurocommunist) formed Podemos in Spain in 2015. This was the year that both Syriza and Podemos were to reach their electoral highpoint.
- b) This provided inspiration to the ISG (S) At the beginning of 2015. They initiated the Scottish Left Project,<sup>33</sup> with the aim of drawing together the Socialists who had been working in RIC. Wider support for a hybrid Movement/‘Party’ developed amongst other ex-SWP members, who had been active in RIC. This mood was highlighted by T-shirts and placards bearing such slogans as ‘Love Syriza’ and ‘Love Podemos’.
- c) Hoping to benefit from their prominence in RIC, ISG(S) approached the Scottish Socialist Party (which had formed part of the official ‘Yes’ campaign) to stand in the 2015 Westminster general election. They formed an electoral pact - Respect, Independence, Socialism and Equality (RISE).
- d) But during the election campaign, RISE came across as a pressure group on the SNP, taking on economic and social issues which SNP leadership did not want to. The important social issues raised were not linked to any political strategy, other than the hope of getting a couple of MSPs.
- e) Yet, the SNP general election strategy, which was to push a new liberal unionist led government into implementing the ‘promised’ ‘Devo-Max’, was fatally flawed. The Labour and Lib-Dems were no longer liberal but conservative unionists and the growing threat now came from the further Right. They were committed to further strengthening the UK state, both from below, by the national democratic movements, and from above by the EU Commission.
- f) But RISE refused to countenance any challenge to the SNP’s liberal unionist long term ‘Indy-Lite’ strategy challenge. It specifically rejected that the ‘R’ of RISE

should be ‘Republicanism’ in favour of the somewhat pious ‘Respect’. In this respect it was more conservative than Podemos, which had promised a referendum on the monarchy if it formed the government.

- g) Tory leader David Cameron was also preparing ‘Project Fear ‘Mark2 – a Eurosceptic conservative unionist defence of the UK’s EU membership. But in the 2015 general election, and in the consequent run-up to the 2016 EU referendum, the conservative unionist’s ‘Project Fear’ was no longer being challenged any ‘Project Hope’ but by the rising Right Populist, reactionary unionist Brexiteers’ ‘Project Hate’.
- h) But RISE was also divided over the prospect of an EU referendum. Any debate was rejected by its leaders, so that the ‘Leave’ supporting ISG could form an electoral pact with ‘Remain’ supporting SSP. Therefore, on the second major constitutional issue of the 2015 general election, RISE again had nothing independent to say.
- i) On this apolitical basis RISE performed very badly in the 2015 election. The adoption of an overtly republican electoral challenge to the SNP leadership’s constitutional nationalist/liberal unionist strategy, and to its failure to recognise the obstacle to any later IndyRef2 represented by UK state’s Crown Powers, may not have received any more, possibly even fewer votes. But it would have placed a Republican RISE in a good position when the SNP’s ‘woo the liberal unionists’ strategy began to fall apart. And a willingness to address the issue of the EU referendum, would also have placed RISE in a better position, especially given the silence which prevailed, after its decision not to have any debate over the issue.
- j) As it was, RISE soon collapsed, with the ex-ISG(S) members moving back into pure Movementism, and the SSP falling more and more into being a ‘party’ sect. The SSP duplicated the politics and methods its old Militant founders. The political space was conceded to the ‘All Under One Banner’, which organised successively larger marches. These included SNP supporting constitutional nationalists, disgruntled SNP Nationalist Populists, a much smaller number of Scottish Republicans and Socialists (with some RIC groups becoming involved from 2018), and international matchers including those from Ireland, Wales, and especially Catalunya.
- k) The collapse of RIC in Glasgow and in Dundee, the two cities that had voted ‘to secede from the Union’ in 2014, had a negative effect on the wider RIC. Aberdeen RIC had always been led by a group of Anarchist Movementists, so its RIC activity also collapsed as supporters looked to pastures new. So eventually did all the others, except for Angus and Mearns and Inverness which became more Localist, engaging in a wide range of local activities. And there was Edinburgh RIC.
- l) Edinburgh RIC,<sup>34</sup> which had emerged as the largest RIC group, after Glasgow RIC folded, has tried to keep up the best traditions of RIC – politics based on social republican, ‘internationalism from below’, ‘Another Scotland, Another Europe, Another World Are Possible’ principles. Edinburgh upholds RIC’s wider political coalition basis, with the active participation of Socialists, Left Scottish Greens, Left SNP and non-party members (and even Left Scottish Labour Party members on occasions!) It has openly discussed controversial issues e.g. Ireland, apartheid Israel-accepting IHRA definition of ‘anti-semitism’, Brexit, transgender rights. It has become very much involved in wider campaigns, e.g. support for strikers, for migrants under attack, the Living Rent campaign, international solidarity for Palestinians, Kurds and Catalans. It has also tried to avoid Localism, by co-sponsoring the 2015 national conference in Edinburgh and two Scottish Radical

History conferences our 2016 centenary celebration of James Connolly, born in our city).

m) Experience has shown is that RIC can only be sustained nationally by moving beyond the debilitating and related Anarcho-Bureaucracy of the Movementists and the sects. RIC needs to sustain a genuine democratic culture. It also needs to move beyond the Localism, which has sustained some groups. In pushing for ‘internationalism from below’ it must also avoid the dogmatic proprietary ‘Internationalism’, of the ‘party’ sects.

## **2. Locating RIC in the current political situation dominated by Right Populists and reactionary unionists**

- a) RIC has the call for a republic and internationalism in its 5 Principles. As long as Movementism and the immediate excitement of the IndyRef1 campaign dominated RIC, these were often left aside. The fact that IndyRef1 was agreed by David Cameron’s Conservative/Lib-Dem government gave it constitutional legality. The UK state’s use of its Crown Powers only took place behind the scenes (e.g. the preparations to take control of the Trident base at Faslane<sup>35</sup>). In these circumstances many RIC supporters saw a republic as a future aspiration (a bit like Labour’s old ‘Clause Four’). But republicanism is about everyday politics, based on the based on the sovereignty of the people, and a preparedness to defy the UK state with its anti-democratic Crown Powers.
- b) The voters’ rejection of Scottish independence in 2014 was not a major defeat but a setback. It represented a pyrrhic victory for the British Unionists, highlighted in the 2015 Westminster general election, where they lost all but 3 of their seats in Scotland, to the SNP’s 56.
- c) There is an overwhelming need to challenge the political dead end reached today by the SNP leadership. Its hoped-for liberal unionist allies are no longer there. Neither the one-time liberal nor the conservative unionists (who once dominated the Tories, but have now mainly turned to reactionary unionism), are likely to put up anything but verbal protests to the continuing slide to the Right, which even threatens to undermine existing ‘Devolution-all-round’.
- d) The Right Populist Tories are more likely to move under pressure from the even more reactionary unionist further Right. Ever since Theresa May took office, the Tories have been more concerned about pressure from the further Right, than from liberal unionists or constitutional nationalists.
- e) This is likely to sharpen the divisions in the SNP. But RIC should not line-up behind the current SNP leadership, nor the emerging Nationalist Populist challengers. RIC should be prepared to deal with issues as they arise and address them on their own merits. However, Left SNP members in RIC will have to become involved, particularly in the party’s internal elections. If there is one thing that RIC can do from without, it is to express support for any measures to open up the SNP’s internal democracy. Extending democracy is at the heart of any democratic republican approach to politics. The SNP has individual Socialists in it, but no publicly organised platforms. It is even less democratic internally than the

Labour Party, which does allow open Socialist platforms to exist, even if it regularly attacks, suspends or expels individual Socialists.

- f) Johnson's current large Westminster majority could fall apart in the face of future h as yet unseen problems. But the long-established British ruling class always likes to have Plan B, and even Plan C and D. Behind the scenes, it is carefully grooming Starmer. He has sacked of the hapless Rebecca Long-Baillie to demonstrate Labour's willingness to jump however high the British establishment demands.
- g) However, the main backing Johnson or any likely successor lie in the UK state's Crown Powers. Therefore, the one of the most important jobs Radical Independence Campaign has in the struggle for meaningful Scottish self-determination is to highlight these Crown Powers and the end of the constitutional road. This means openly adopting a **republican road**, and to make the case for the **sovereignty of the people**, with popular mobilisations and the extra-constitutional action needed to achieve this.
- h) The massive demonstrations organised by AUOB have been e peaceable and enjoyable events and the police have kept their distance. The majority of participants still look to the constitutional road, although one pushed considerably harder than the current SNP leadership. What is most likely to change AUOB supporters' attitudes away from fruitless calls for IndyRef2, is the fact that the Westminster government is moving in the opposite direction. Right Populists are determined to marginalise even the very limited forms of self-determination that exist under 'Devolution-all-round'. Far from getting a Section 30 order, SNP leadership, trapped by its constitutionalism, may find it hard to defend the existing devolved political arrangements.
- i) In the late 1960s, a massive Civil Rights Movement (CRM) developed in Northern Ireland. This was very much influenced by the CRM in the USA, from which today's BLM takes some of its inspiration, whether it be Martin Luther King for its liberal wing, or the Black Power Movement and Malcolm X for its radical and Left wing. The CRM in Northern Ireland was similarly divided. Its liberal wing took up not self-determination, but for Northern Ireland to enjoy the same 'British rights' (e.g. access to housing on the same non-sectarian basis, the ending of the business vote and of the constituency gerrymandering to maintain sectarian Unionist rule) which prevailed in the other parts of the UK. Its radical wing, Peoples Democracy (PD), undertook more militant action, but did not raise the political issue of Irish reunification. But the British Labour and the Tories' attempted to crush this resistance, using all the most repressive Crown Powers available to them – local 'lockdowns' (much more harshly imposed than Covid-19), internment, the Parachute Regiment, the SAS, Diplock courts.
- j) On the 'liberal 'wing of the CRM, this eventually led Gerry Fitt (SDLP) to become Lord Fitt. On the radical PD wing of the CRM, this led to a 'Republicanism for fast learners' response, highlighted by the political trajectory Bernadette Devlin/McAliskey.
- k) It is worth remembering in Scotland today that it was the actions of the UK government which led many to adopt the republican road in Ireland. Many people, remembering the grim days of 'the Troubles', equate republicanism with the military actions of the IRA. It suits British Unionists to make this link - Republicanism = Armed Action. This disguises the fact, that the wider support

which developed for republican armed resistance in Ireland was in response to Loyalist and UK state armed action (e.g. the pogrom in West Belfast in 1969 and Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972). Whilst the IRA mainly targeted the British Army, the UDR and RUC, the wider republican communities of resistance did much to prevent acceptance of state repression, by shunning the agents of the state. Northern Ireland witnessed 'No Go Areas' where women banging dustbin lids warned their communities of British troop presence. The idea and practice of genuine republicanism is not restricted to the armed struggle that was a specific response to UK state armed repression. As well as the 'boycotting' of actions of the Troubles, communities of resistance organised alternative educational (Gaelic schooling) and cultural facilities.

- l) In Scotland, a good example of a republican style resistance, in a situation where the UK state did not resort to armed repression, was the Anti-Poll Tax struggle. In this struggle, sheriff officers and others trying to enforce the hated tax were publicly opposed and the poll tax was defeated. Those involved did not believe that either the Tories at Westminster, or the Labour local council officers had a democratic mandate to enforce the poll tax, which had been tested out a year earlier in Scotland. But neither did the Scottish Anti-Poll Tax Federation confine its activities to Scotland. It took its campaign to England and Wales on an 'internationalism from below' basis.<sup>36</sup>
- m) Some on the Left, attack republicanism from a different angle. They point, for example, to the Right-wing, Republican Party in the USA. But you don't have to look very far beneath the constitutional surface to see that the USA is not based on the fundamental republican principle of the sovereignty of the people. Native Americans, Black slaves and later Southern Blacks were long excluded. The US constitution subordinates its most democratic institution, the House of Representatives, to the Presidency, the Supreme Court and the Senate. When the USA gained its independence, the UK's Crown Powers were shared amongst these three bodies. Thus republicanism, US style, was limited to having no monarchy. British imperial claims beyond the original thirteen North American states were transferred to a federal government. The USA is not a democratic republic, but a presidential imperial republic.
- n) It is only by developing the republican principle of the sovereignty of the people, in defiance of the UK state's sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster, that RIC can develop the consciousness needed to win genuine self-determination for Scotland.
- o) Furthermore, we need to recognise that in fighting for Scottish self-determination, we are up against forces that are organised not only in Scotland, but throughout the UK and beyond. The reactionary unionist and Europhobic UKIP began its own career as an all-UK party, with representation in England (at Westminster, the London Assembly, local councils and at Brussels); Wales (Cardiff Bay, local councils and at Brussels); Scotland (at Brussels) and Northern Ireland (Stormont and local councils). The Brexit Party was able to duplicate this except for Northern Ireland, which it left to the equally reactionary unionist and Europhobic DUP.
- p) Beyond the Right Populists lie Far Right Loyalist and neo-Fascists. They have taken particular inspiration from apartheid Israel. In 2018, Israel passed a new Nationality Law, which gave constitutional underpinning to something which had

long been the central feature of the Israeli state – Jewish supremacy. The British Far Right would like to see Greater English/British supremacy enshrined in British law. Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (a.k.a. ‘Tommy Robinson’) of the English Defence League and British Freedom Party, has visited and is a keen admirer of Israel.<sup>37</sup>

- q) However, you don't have to go to the Far Right to find people attracted by apartheid Israel. Tory Home Secretary, Priti Patel is a visitor to and admirer of Israel. She has such close links she was forced to resign for a short period as a government minister in 2017. It is worth remembering that it was the Likud Party, originally mainly based upon Jewish immigrants from Asia, which passed the Israeli Nationality Law. Likud's and the Tory Party's racism is based not on physical appearance but on cultural criteria – a Jewish religious background for Likud, and support for the British Crown, imperial armed forces and Westminster for the Tories. This very much goes for Priti Patel and Rishi Sunak. Likud and the Tory Party are in same international political grouping. And many Labour MPs, including former PMs, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (who tried to establish cultural criteria to define British subjecthood) have been members of the racist Labour Friends of Israel.
- r) Johnson's reactionary unionist, Tory government has no direct representation in Northern Ireland, but now has the DUP where it wants it - the local main upholder of the UK on British ruling class terms. The Tories, as fellow Right Populists, committed to ‘America First’/‘Britain Second’ in the wider world also have the backing of Donald Trump. Out of the EU, but still part the European Hard Right, the Tory Party still has some unsavoury allies there in the European Conservatives and Reformists Party. Some of these parties would be prepared, in changed political circumstances to call for the break-up of the EU.
- s) A key issue for RIC is that we are able to challenge the UK state's Crown Powers, Johnson's Right Populist and reactionary government and their ‘internationalism from above’ alliance with our ‘internationalism from below’ alliance. During the IndyRef1 campaign, RIC has campaigned and brought speakers from England, Wales and Ireland. More recently we have offered solidarity with the suppressed Catalan Republic.
- t) RIC's 5 principles also need to be updated to reflect the new situation we face. At present they read -
  - 1) For a social alternative to austerity and privatisation
  - 2) Green and environmentally sustainable
  - 3) A modern republic for real democracy
  - 4) Committed to equality and opposition to discrimination on grounds of gender, race, disability, sexuality or age
  - 4) Internationalist and opposed to war, NATO and Trident

However something along the following lines may be more appropriate for the political situation we are now in:-

- 1) Support the republican Sovereignty of the People - oppose the anti-democratic UK's Crown Powers**
- 2) Committed to equality and opposition to discrimination on grounds of gender,**

race, disability, sexuality or age

- 3) For a Democratic, Secular, Inclusive, Environmentally Sustainable, Social, Scottish Republic
- 4) For the break-up of the UK and for ‘internationalism from below’ solidarity
- 5) For Peace and opposition to Trident and NATO

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A complete break-up of the UK would not leave behind a dangerous rUK2. The Irish have lived with the consequences of rUK1 since 1922. It is time raise the banner for a fUK, which rejects the Crown Power-imposed, ‘internationalism from above’ of the UK state. It is also time to move beyond the ‘internationalism from above’ of the EU bureaucrats and raise the banner of a **democratic, federal, secular, social and environmentally sustainable European Republic**.

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