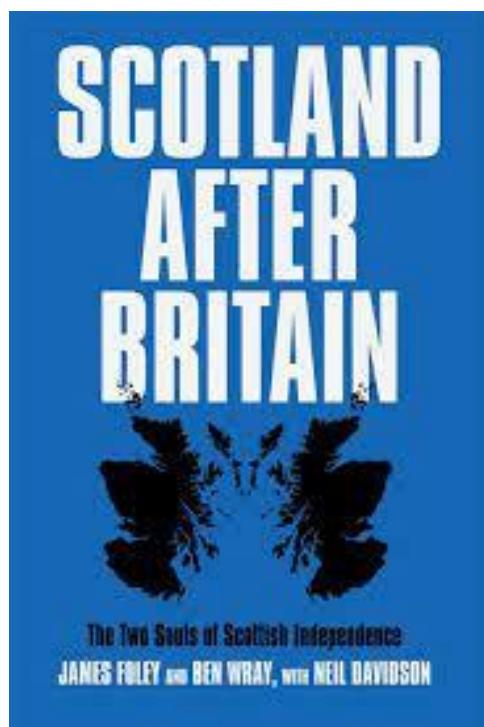


PAPERING OVER THE CRACKS COVERING UP THE TRACKS

A review of *Scotland after Britain*
by James Foley and Ben Wray with Neil Davidson



- a) Introduction
- b) A review of *Scotland After Britain* (*SaB*) compared to *Breaking up of the British State* (*ButBDS*)
- c) *SaB* – Chapter 3, *The Emergence of a Movement for Scottish Independence 2012-14*
- d) The emergence of openly Right accommodationist forces, their attempt to terminate RIC and further moves to the Right
- e) Examining the theoretical underpinnings of *SaB*'s politics
- f) 'Brexit' - papering over the cracks
- g) Republicanism - covering up the tracks
- h) Conclusion

a) Introduction

In August 2022, *Emancipation, Liberation & Self determination* posted the article, [Scottish nationalism and class politics: a longer term view](#), written by James Foley. It first appeared in the [conter newsletter](#). This article made a valid point about the role of the constitutional question, as posed by the SNP and Labour Party leaderships. This could lead to “false constitutional wrangling {which} may become an actively conservative force”. However, as a counter to this, Foley pointed to “class conflict in the offing”.

Absent here from Foley’s thinking, and his co-thinkers in *conter*, is the idea of meaningful constitutional change not merely “constitutional wrangling”. The exploited and oppressed, united in our diversity, form the basis for a democratic challenge to the UK constitution. The UK constitution is based on the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster backed by the Crown powers.

Countering Foley’s omission means championing the sovereignty of the people and the right to exercise Scotland’s self-determination, in an ‘internationalism from below’ challenge to the UK state. This is not separate from, but very much part of “class conflict”. Such a challenge is politically more advanced than the more limited economic and social struggles, which Foley seems to be referring to as “class struggle in the offing”.

In a period of profound and multifaceted crises, these struggles inevitably come up against the state, so constitutional issues cannot be avoided, however much many social democrats - Right and Left – wish they could. And given the nature of the unionist relationship of Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales to the UK state, the need for a constitutional challenge is understood more clearly than in England. Here the British Left (as well as its Scottish-British and Welsh-British components) were recently organised behind Left, British Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn. Together they still looked to a change of government within the existing constitutional order to bring about their economic and social reforms.

Two socialist republicans from Scotland, James Connolly and John Maclean, pioneered the more advanced political thinking and practice, which challenged such social democratic thought. Because they adopted socialist republican politics, both Connolly and Maclean have long been subjected to attacks including from the revolutionary Left, whether official or dissident Communist. They put Connolly's and Maclean's socialist republican politics down to working class defeats in economic and social struggles - the 1913-4 Dublin Lockout and the 1919 Red Clydeside 40 Hours Strike. Recent renewed support for socialist republican thinking in Scotland is also put down to the defeat of the mainly economic struggles of the 1970s. Today, SWP is to the forefront of such thinking.¹

The SWP had a bad 'IndyRef1', culminating in the notorious 'Comrade Delta' affair.² However, since *conter* supporters have removed themselves from the frontline of the Independence Movement (with some cheering on Corbyn supporters in Scotland for a while), space has opened up on the streets, first for All Under One Banner (AUOB) and then the more Alba-influenced, Now Scotland (NS). AUOB and NS prioritise getting Scottish political independence over everything else, often accompanied by 'Braveheart' bravado. But they have provided the SWP with an arena, beyond the influence of their former, one time, more influential, SWP breakaway competitors, now largely confined to the 'Think Tank' politics, abstract propagandism, and the ever-increasing doom mongering of *conter*.

But the SWP, which once opposed Scottish independence, now sees the Scottish Independence Movement as a permanent feature of the political landscape. (This is a bit like the SSP, which was a 'Remain' supporter in the 2016 EU referendum, but now sees 'Brexit' as a 'done job'). And being more directly engaged in the Movement today than *conter*, the SWP has published *Breaking up the British State: Scotland, Independence and Socialism (ButBS)*³ edited by Bob Fotheringham, Dave Sherry and Colm Bryce. It is here they attack the socialist republicanism of Connolly and Maclean.⁴ In effect, this

means the SWP rejects providing any challenge to the constitutional proposals the SNP and/or Alba leaderships. Instead, it gives them advice about which social democratic demands to take up to win wider support for Scottish independence. This was also very much the politics behind ISG-S and Neil Davidson during ‘IndyRef1’.

Foley’s article, though, offered a very tentative critique of such politics. To do this, it adopted an ‘on one hand this, on the other hand that’ approach, which maximises his room for political manoeuvre. Thus, without mentioning any political organisation by name, Foley concluded, “there is an underlying sense of trying to *demobilise* the energies of independence so that normal class politics can shunt back into gear {which} still starts from uncorrected assumptions that the recent mobilisations are delusions or distraction.”

But then he went on to argue for the need “to address the crisis of post-neoliberal parties of social democracy”. But Foley offered no suggestion, from which political viewpoint, other than his own semi-detached, academic position, about how this could be done. Nor did he provide any clear alternative constitutional approach which could challenge the “post-liberal parties of social democracy” - whoever they are (Sir Keir Starmer’s ‘Boris-Lite’ Labour Party?)

Nevertheless, although written after the SWP’s *ButBS*, Foley’s article preceded the publication of *Scotland after Britain: The Two Souls of Scottish Independence (SaB)*, co-written by himself, Ben Wray and the late Neil Davidson. Maybe this book would go further. The Editorial Board of *EL&SD* looked forward to its publication and promised a review, which now follows.

A review of *Scotland After Britain (SaB)* compared to *Breaking up of the British State (ButBDS)*

When making an assessment of *SaB*, there are a number of striking features. These begin with the authors' short biographies on the book's first page and what appears to be missing in them.

The key political development that brought the authors together was their prior involvement in and subsequent criticism of the SWP. This led to the departure of the International Socialist Group (Scotland) (ISG-S) in 2011. In effect, ISG-S became the Scottish wing of Counterfire (under the influence of former SWP full-timer, Chris Bambery). The authors, James Foley and Ben Wray were prominent in ISG-S. Neil Davidson, SWP dissident, was prominent in rs21, which was not formed until 2014. But in his capacity as university lecturer, Neil had also acted as mentor to the young student members of ISG-S. Later ISG-S dissolved, but former members, along with rs21, became involved in *conter*. This has become the main arena for Foley's and Wray's involvement in Scottish politics.

Conter always offered Neil a forum to express his views, but his political activity, even in Scotland, extended considerably further. This included debates with others who contested some of his views. Neil provided those who wanted to discuss and debate his arguments with a platform.⁵. He understood that through such political engagement both sides can learn, leading to a higher synthesis. This could contribute to more effective political action. Sadly, this is not the attitude of *conter*. Neither ISG-S nor *conter*, or rs21 are mentioned in the introductory biographies. But Neil, who died in 2020, is not responsible for these omissions.

Also not mentioned in these short biographies is the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC). Foley and Wray were office bearers, and Neil a prominent supporter. The authors would argue that RIC has no relevance beyond 2014/5. However, this is belied by ex-ISG-S and some rs21 members' failed attempt to terminate RIC in 2020.⁶ One of the key roles of *SaB* is to try to limit the history and activity of

RIC to 2012-15, and even then, to avoid the significant political debates which took place within it. This is why RIC, initially so central to their shared politics, also does not get a mention in their introductory biographies.

In the absence of an open declaration of their political organisations, or of RIC, the actual content of their introductory biographies appears to be an appeal to Left academia. This is highlighted by their choice of publisher, London-based *Verso*. *Verso*'s forbears in *New Left Review*, mainly Left academics, also very much thought of themselves as a Think Tank for the Left, ever ready to be called upon to show the political way forward. The politics of *NLR/Verso* have mirrored the upturns of the post-1968 revolutionary Left, Bennism in the 1980s, and after this the ambiguities of the 'New Times', Corbyn's diluted neo-Bennism, and now the retreat into Old Left nostalgia and Campism, in the face of the Right authoritarian populist offensive. The politics underpinning *SaB* stem directly from this last phase.

SaB avoids any meaningful engagement with the different political groups in RIC. In this, the ex-ISG authors retain a long-standing SWP tradition with regard to other political organisations. Their silence, stretching from beyond their introductory biographies, extends to any mention of the authors' original political home, the SWP. Failures to publicly account for changes in political direction, which can lead to a more fruitful politics, means that key aspects of the 'old' are usually retained in the 'new'. And in indeed, the methods displayed in *SaB* still share many characteristics with the SWP.

The *SaB* authors probably think that the SWP had been seen off on the Scottish Left in 2014. However, the SWP's limited revival is partly due to the *SaB* authors vacating the Independence Movement in favour of "becom{ing} more analytical."⁷ Indeed, as highlighted in this article's *Introduction*, the much-damaged SWP has been able to slip back into the wider Independence Movement on the coattails of AUOB, and Now Scotland. This has prompted SWP to publish *ButBS*⁸, a considerably more substantial book than *SaB*. This has been acknowledged by *bella caledonia*, the most open political blog

on the Scottish Left. *bella caledonia* provided space for former IS/SWP member, Murray Armstrong, to write a review.⁹ I have also reviewed this book.¹⁰

In its turn, *ButBS* makes no mention of the ISG-S and its political rise and fall from 2011-15, despite the leading part it played in RIC and the wider ‘Yes’ Movement. And similarly, *SaB* makes no mention of the SWP’s *ButBS*. This book has acted as a replacement for *Scotland – Yes to Independence, No to Nationalism*,¹¹ written in 2013 by SWP full-timer, Keir McKechnie. This was the SWP’s flimsy attempt at justifying their ‘Johnny-come-lately’ conversion to supporting Scottish independence in 2011.

This book was hastily produced and made very little impact during ‘IndyRef1’. This was because, although not yet engulfed by the Comrade Delta affair, the SWP had made a bad name for itself on the Left. It was badly politically burned due its role in two vanity ‘parties’ - Tommy Sheridan’s Solidarity and George Galloway’s Respect. Like Foley’s and Wray’s *SaB*, the SWP’s *ButBS* still glosses over its actual role in ‘IndyRef1’.

But the *ButBS* title and content show more appreciation of what they are up against – not the ‘Britain’ of *SaB* but the ‘British state of *ButBS* (although the UK state would be better). *ButBS* is also more historically grounded. Socialists would learn much from its coverage of industrial struggles, despite its economistic limitations. Needless to say, though, neither book addresses the socialist republican contributions to these vital debates, nor the new historical scholarship around John Maclean provided by Henry Bell,¹² and Gerry Cairns.¹³

But there is another aspect of SWP politics, which the ex-ISG-S authors of *SaB* retain. If the SWP authors of *ButBS* make no mention of the SWP’s earlier *Scotland, Yes to Independence, No to Nationalism* – then the ex-ISG-S authors *SaB* make no mention of then ISG-S member, Foley’s *Britain Must Break (BMB)*. This was written in 2012, as the political grounding for the ISG-S’s commitment to RIC. Other socialists, including socialist republicans, did engage with this work¹⁴ and this was then reciprocated by ISG-S

members.¹⁵ Clearly the authors want to cover up some tracks, especially in the light of their recent conversion to “Radical republicanism”¹⁶ and their public acknowledgement of “internationalism from below”.¹⁷ This is very much in the ‘Johnny-come-lately’ pattern of the SWP over Scottish independence. There is no acknowledgement of the ISG-S’s neutral and at times anti-republican past.

During the ‘IndyRefl’ campaign, 97% registered to vote, with the widest franchise ever seen in the UK, and 85% actually voted. This was the culmination of a mass ‘Yes’ campaign, which reached out far beyond the timid SNP leadership’s ‘Yes Scotland’ campaign. This amounted to a Democratic Revolution,¹⁸ which, for socialist republicans, remains unfinished business. Despite the inability to win a ‘Yes’ vote, this was a Pyrrhic victory for the ‘No’ camp. The issue of Scottish independence had become mainstreamed.

Initially still enthusiastic in their support for Scottish independence, the ISG-S thought they could move beyond RIC. The ISG-S wanted to mimic Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain. Using the Scottish Left Project as a front, the ISG-S engaged behind-the-scenes with the SSP. The SSP had hoped the official ‘Yes Scotland’ campaign (which it had been officially represented in) would continue after ‘IndyRefl’. But as soon as ‘IndyRefl’ was over, the SNP leadership unceremoniously dumped ‘Yes Scotland’ and the SSP.

So, the somewhat shoogly, RISE – Respect, Independence, Socialism and Equality – Scotland’s Left Alliance, was created to elect a recent ISG-S member as MSP in Glasgow and an SSP MSP in Edinburgh. It was hoped that Holyrood’s PR system would assist in this. Perhaps, if elected, these MSPs could hold the ‘balance of power’ (maybe along with the Scottish Greens).

As it turned out, RISE’s narrowly electoralist politics and suppression of debate pushed this supposedly more advanced ‘movement/party’ RISE down to a lower political level than RIC, a coalition around immediate demands. Republicanism and the prospect of ‘Brexit’

were taboo in RISE (or more particularly Glasgow, where they thought these might lose votes), but not in RIC.

From then on, it was all downhill for the ISG-S. It dissolved in 2015, after hoping to use its individual members' office bearer positions to dominate RISE. But RISE ceased to be active after 2017 and was formally dissolved in 2020. *conter* is what remains. The old ISG-S, claimed to be revolutionary Marxist. But such labelling displays a confessional political sectarianism to match that of Scotland's much longer established, theological sectarianism. Both have been desperate to establish orthodoxy and deal with heretics/dissidents. Then the ISG-S pushed for a new party/movement RISE, which retained 'S' for Socialism in its initials. What this Socialism amounted to was never made clear. There is a problem with a word that has been widely used by a whole host of repressive regimes. Finally, the now ex-ISG leaders formed *conter* declaring it to be merely "anti-establishment" - a vacuous term (unless properly defined) shared by populists - Left and Right.

conter has moved closer to the hybrid Left/Right Populist politics of Alba, with George Kerevan, ex-International Marxist Group (IMG), ex-Labour, and ex-SNP MP, joining the EB. Chris Bambery, ex-IMG, ex-SWP full-timer, and now Counterfire, is also on *conter*'s EB. He is the parliamentary assistant to the socially conservative SNP MP, Joanna Cherry. Foley also made overtures to Kenny MacAskill, former SNP minister, now Alba MP, claiming he was "steeped in socialist tradition."¹⁹ Foley completely ignored MacAskill's central role, along with Alex Neil and Alex Salmond, in lining the SNP up with NATO, and neo-liberal economic policies. A quite prolific author, MacAskill's legal training is not used so much for sharp analytical thinking, but more often as casuistry to justify some dubious politics.

Yet, despite all these undoubted political limitations, some of the material in *SaB*, as in the SWP's *ButBS*, could contribute to a wider Socialist discussion in Scotland. There is much in the *SaB* sections on the *Collapse of Scotland's Red Wall*, *The Faultline of the SNP Hegemony* and *Progressive Neoliberalism Confronts the Pandemic*,

which would be useful in this. But *conter*'s and the SWP's continued practice of suppressing wider debate amongst Socialists has militated against the development of such discussions. This suppression is in marked contrasts to the approach taken by the late Neil Davidson. It has also contributed to allowing a growing accommodation to the Right go uncontested in *conter*'s ranks.

c) SaB – Chapter 3, The Emergence of a Movement for Scottish Independence 2012-14

For those looking for an informed coverage of the political highpoint of the period 2012-14, Neil Davidson's contribution in Chapter 3 provides some excellent material. If a Socialist compendium, drawing on the experiences of many of the activists during the 'IndyRef1' campaign, were ever to be published, then Neil's chapter would form an important part.

But there is a significant missing element in Neil's analysis of RIC. He describes RIC as "A coalition of the left, involving members of the existing left parties (including the Scottish Greens) and the left wing of the SNP." First not all the "left parties" even those supporting Scottish independence were involved, e.g. the ex-Militant, Socialist Party of Scotland. Neither, of course, where the Left unionists in the Labour Party or the Communist Party of Britain. They joined the Red Paper Collective. So uncritical were they of the UK's existing constitutional order that two, Pauline Bryan and Katy Clark, became baronesses!

However, also unacknowledged by Neil, is that RIC's politics extended beyond his "existing left parties" to a socialist republican element, which had a considerable influence on RIC's politics. Furthermore, the way that different political organisations related organisationally to RIC was to have a considerable bearing on its politics and future development. First RIC had openly affiliated organisations. These included the Scottish Greens, Commonweal (in the process of moving out of its organiser, Robert MacAlpine's earlier New Labour orbit, to promoting Scandinavian-style social democracy,

now for Scotland and the SNP), the Republican Communist Network - RCN, a specifically socialist republican organisation. (There was also the Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers, which donated a lot of money).

Affiliated organisations were given responsibility for particular sessions at RIC conferences, where wider debates could be conducted. The RCN took part in two such sessions. This way of promoting comradely debate between different organisations without any call for majority voting did lead to a better political understanding, and indirectly contributed to RIC activities. However, when it came to putting specific motions to National Forums the RCN ensured its proposals were discussed and passed first by local RIC groups.

However other political participants were not openly affiliated. These included the ISG-S, the SSP (which had another foot in the official ‘Yes Scotland’ camp), Left members of the SNP, Labour for Independence, Socialist Resistance, the Democratic Left/*Perspectives*, SWP, Solidarity (but not Sheridan, widely seen as a self-promoter) and some Anarchists. This way of participating produced a marked tendency in some of these organisations for behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to get support for their speakers and policies. Some, particularly in the ISG-S, took on key office bearer roles, from which they tried to exert their political influence.

One of the ISG-S Glasgow organisers²⁰ (although poorly informed about RIC organisation outside of Glasgow) well described the way the ISG-S operated. He wrote that the unwillingness to organise regular (Glasgow) RIC groups was “designed to avoid members of particular other left-wing organisations.” He termed this as ISG-S “sectarian preoccupation over group-control and membership vetting”. Thus, in much of Glasgow, and often at a national level, the political agenda was decided by a “‘hidden-committee’, which essentially boils down to no more than half-a-dozen key ISG operators.” Once again, many Socialists will recognise the SWP legacy here. The failure to have a national RIC bank account also accentuated this lack of democracy, giving undue influence to

individual donators. In contrast, the best local RIC groups had much greater political diversity, were more democratic and were financed by member subscriptions and collections at meetings.

Given this more democratic organisation of Edinburgh RIC,²¹ the three ISG-S members here were non-sectarian and became heavily involved. But two also became disillusioned with ISG-S's Glasgow and national practice and resigned from this organisation. This also proved to be the case for other ISG-S members outside Glasgow.

But it wasn't only the ISG-S, in Glasgow or nationally, which did not fundamentally challenge the SWP's sectarian tradition, which they had inherited. In turn, Neil Davidson, who was personally non-sectarian and very open to discussion and debate, did not challenge this situation either. But several rs21 members also involved in Edinburgh RIC supported the local group's democratic practice and remained very committed. But with rs21 not being openly affiliated, they also tried to win support for their suggestions, through their office-bearer roles and personal commitment.

The example of personal commitment is very important, but so too is a public acknowledgement of one's political affiliation. This is best done openly. SWP members have always had a marked tendency to hide behind fronts, e.g. Stop the War or their union positions, when addressing meetings and rallies. rs21 members, coming out of this tradition, felt somewhat uncomfortable with this, but they opposed open affiliation to RIC. They hoped individual members' commitment could act as a substitute to win support for proposals that arose in rs21.

d) The emergence of openly Right accommodationist forces, their attempt to terminate RIC and further moves to the Right

Despite some very good work done in the Climate Change movement, particularly around 'A Just Transition', a Right-accommodating wing was to emerge in rs21. The origins of this lay in the majority of rs21

members signing up to ‘Brexit’. They joined with their co-thinkers in *conter* over this. This led them to join together in an attempt to terminate RIC.²² The overwhelming majority of the people the Terminators brought together at the planned RIC revival meeting had not been active in any RIC group for many years. Some were not even members where there were local RIC groups. Although, only the Aberdeen Anarchists, who had already closed down the local RIC group, went as far as preventing any new members from trying to revive the local group!

Together with *conter*, some rs21 members, the Aberdeen Anarchists went out of their way to try to terminate RIC. This was a classic case of anarcho-bureaucracy in practice. The ‘anarcho’ has more appeal to those inspired by the new Movements; the ‘bureaucratic’ has more appeal to those currently in, or once in, Marxist-Leninist organisations. Despite their apparently opposed political origins, there is a common desire to control things from behind-the-scenes.

There is no problem if Socialists choose to move on to other arenas of activity. CND has had its high and low points of activity, corresponding to particular waves, e.g. around Holy Loch, Greenham Common and Faslane. But nobody suggested that when these public actions fell away, CND should have been disbanded. And it should have been clear to all Socialists who had been involved in RIC, that as the growing reactionary unionist clampdown increased, so did the opportunities for taking public action to oppose this.

This is why a new younger group, involved in activities like Living Rent, wanted to revive RIC in 2020. But when these Revivers attended the two national RIC meetings, they were gobsmacked when *conter* and some rs21 members mobilised for the sole purpose of preventing others reorganising RIC nationally. They offered no alternative. Many of the Revivers have now constituted themselves as the Republican Socialist Platform (RSP),²³ a political affiliate to RIC Mark 2. The SNP Socialists have also affiliated, whilst there are discussions in the Scottish Greens to do so too.

However, it was only a little later that it became a bit clearer why *conter* wanted to close down RIC. RIC was seen as an obstacle to further behind-the-scenes manoeuvres, in which *conter* was involved. They were mesmerised by some key figures in the Scottish Left intelligentsia. In return for ex-ISB *conter* members being recognised as a key component of this intelligentsia, they would close down RIC, and offer *conter* as a forum, with selected individuals being offered a place on its EB. But the new generation of young people who wanted to revive RIC demanded democratic accountability. Much of the intelligentsia, with their belief in their own intellectual superiority, scorn such practice.

The Left intelligentsia has relatively shallow roots in society. It tends to quickly reflect the ups and downs of wider political and social developments. Kerevan's political career, with its shifts from Left to Right, then back to Left during 'IndyRef1' and now to the Right again in Alba, is a strong indicator of this. And the leading journalists, Ian McWhirter and Kevin McKenna, both reflected and played their part in the upswing of the 2014 Democratic Revolution. But now during the downswing, they very much reflect the forces accommodating to the Right. They also promote heavy doses of nostalgia.

Significant sections of the working class, if not so volatile, can move from Left to Right too. A major contributory factor in such moves has been the marginalisation and destruction of the autonomous organisations of the working class's and the wider oppressed. This could be seen most dramatically in what came to be known as Labour's 'Red Wall' seats in England and Wales.

Now acting as self-appointed spokespersons for this Right moving section, some members of this intelligentsia can still claim to represent the real working class – implicitly male, straight and white – with degrees of toleration for others who accept their less visible place in society. Furthermore, despite their greater intellectual pretensions, this section of the intelligentsia often becomes uncritical

towards, or provides apologetics for those closer to political power, or with marked ambitions to get there, as *conter* has demonstrated.

So, whether known or unbeknownst to the ex-ISB-S (and some rs21) members at the time, there were also plans afoot which eventually led to the creation of Alba, with its particularly embittered and ambitious leader, Alex Salmond. It is quite possible that the inner *conter* group were themselves being used. There were other politically high-profile individuals, e.g. Tommy Sheridan, who had been involved in trying to form a new party to ‘Max the Independence’ vote. Sheridan hurriedly joined Alba, along with Craig Murray. They might have expected to have been given leading Alba candidacies in the 2021 Holyrood election. But they were side lined. Alba’s list²⁴ included the transphobic, Margaret Lynch, the misogynist, Dr. Jim Walker, the anti-Romanian racist and anti-vaxxer, Alex Arthur, MBE, and the self-declared careerist, Eva Comrie.

But what were the politics that brought *conter* and some in rs21 to a growing accommodation with Alba (and the socially conservative wing of the SNP). Unlike most of those who went on to form Alba, those in *conter* and some in rs21, had been sucked down the ‘Left’ Brexit ‘rabbit hole’. They expected a ‘Leave’ vote would be a major defeat for the British ruling class, would oust the Tories and open up new prospects for Socialists. ‘Brexit Britain’ has turned out very differently, as many other Socialists, especially socialist republicans, forecast.

Those most prominent on the Right of Alba, Alex Salmond and Kenny MacAskill, and on the Left, George Kerevan (but for how long?) had opposed ‘Brexit’; but now, rather like the SSP, they see ‘Brexit’ as a ‘done job’. But for the Hard and Far Right, ‘Brexit’ is never done and is a component of a wider Hard and Far Right Populist offensive. This extends way beyond ‘Boris’s Brexit Britain’ to Trump’s ‘America (read White America) First, Putin’s ‘One and Indivisible’ Russia, Xi Jinping’s Han supremacist China, Modi’s Hindu supremacist India, Netanyahu’s Jewish supremacist Israel and Erdogan’s Turkish supremacist Turkey.

Furthermore, *conter*, longing for some recognition from the working class, like the ‘Brexiters’ populist approach. Amongst other things, the Brexiters were now to the forefront of attacks on ‘woke’ politics, – e.g. transgender, gay, lesbian and women’s rights (especially abortion) and sex education. Some *conter* members have given opposition to ‘woke’ politics a Leftist gloss calling them identity, not class, politics. Right populists use Left populists in their attempt to break-up a working class united in its diversity. In Scotland, their immediate target is the civic national and rainbow alliance of the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign. But their longer-term aim is to win over key figures from this Left populist milieu, whilst rejecting others not prepared to undergo the ‘Full Monty’ conversion. Already, some of these tensions can be seen in *conter* articles and tweets.

A competitive, capitalist-accommodating, ‘break-the-glass ceiling’ politics can emerge in any section of the exploited and oppressed. However, this had long been anticipated in a British trade union movement riddled with its own identities in the form of sectionalism. Many of its leaders have been keen to move over directly to the world of business, whilst others, both Right and ‘Left’, have sought honours and lordships.

Full-spectrum reaction (racism, misogyny, and homophobia) is still a bridge too far for some in Alba (and for those in the SNP who look to Joanna Cherry for a lead in these matters). As yet, they don’t want to be publicly associated with the virulently open transphobia of the Hard and Far Right. Instead, they have resorted to ‘gender critical’ politics.

‘Gender critical’ politics are in reality very uncritical. Such thinking starts by absolutising the chromosome differences between male (XY) and female (XX), despite there also being a small number of human beings who do not follow this pattern. Chromosome differences have evolved biologically to ensure sexual reproduction. But evolution is not a perfect process. Nor does having an XX chromosome ensure the ability to have children, determine one’s sexual preferences or one’s social behaviour.

Rigidity over sex differences can lead to further Right politics - seeing women who are unable to bear children, don't wish to have children, or don't have enough children to maintain the white population, as lesser women. At present, few 'gender critical' advocates have moved this far across the political spectrum. But the willingness of some to retweet Hard Right transphobic messages, or to go on Hard Right talk shows (e.g. Louise Perry with rape apologist, Jordan Paterson) already shows a dangerous slippage. And those who do not move further along this Right-wing trajectory still leave trans people more isolated. This division is what the Right want before they move on to overthrowing same-sex marriage, sex education and abortion rights. 'First they came for the transgendered, then they came for the.....'

The *SaB* authors sometimes understand key aspects of the SNP's transition from a hybrid Left/Right populist party, in the 1960s and 70s, to a centre social democratic party, particularly under the influence of the ex-79 group led by Jim Sillars, Alex Salmond, Alex Neil and Kenny MacAskill. And in this transition, as with most other social democrats, the SNP leadership became ever more accommodating to neo-liberalism. They paralleled and competed with 'New Labour', particularly Scottish-British, Gordon Brown. Salmond and Neil were also very keen royalists. All of these ex-79 Group members were Atlanticists. But it took until the 2012 special party conference before these ex-79 group members could sign the SNP up to NATO.

However, the *SaB* authors' understanding of the SNP leadership's accommodation to, and being representative of, economic neo-liberalism, is in no way matched by their understanding of the political nature of Alba and the socially conservative wing of the SNP (now led by Kate Forbes and Joanna Cherry). Together they are accommodating to, and are becoming representative of, an even further Right national populism, which has become a global phenomenon. In practice, economically this means 'neo-liberalism in one country', and politically this means illiberalism, with virulent attacks on a whole host of targets.

The link between the ex-ISG-S *co*authors of *SaB* and *Verso*, formerly *New Left Review*, has already been pointed out. Today, the no longer ‘New’ Left share much of the Campist politics of the Old Left in the 1960s. They provide apologetics for Putin’s kleptocratic capitalist, imperialist Russian Federation (Putin was after all a member of the old USSR’s KGB) and Xi Jinping’s turbo-charged, state capitalist, imperialist, Peoples Republic of China (Xi Jinping is after all the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party). The Right populist nature of these regimes should be evident, but Left populists can still find a home, as subordinate elements in Red/Brown alliances.

The old International Socialists/SWP were once known for their ‘Neither Washington nor Moscow’ politics. Today the SWP and many of its breakaways support Moscow and Beijing over Washington. They give no agency to, nor have any time for the people, including the working class, of Ukraine or Xinjiang. And this also goes for the people of Syria, being brutalised by both US and Russian imperialism.

e) Examining the theoretical underpinnings of *SaB*’s politics

As with the SWP’s *ButBS*, the *SaB*’s authors also feel the need to justify their arguments by resort to Lenin (and in *SaB*’s case also Marx). There is much in *SaB*’s broad stroke assessment of Marx that many Socialists could agree with; although later changes in his thinking, particularly with regard to indigenous people, are not addressed.²⁵ In Scotland, these did contribute to a different form of tributary society in early medieval times, which led to Scotland’s own particular historical development. But *SaB*’s concerns with more contemporary events makes this omission understandable. Marx’s and particularly Engels’ own changing views on Scotland in their own lifetimes are also not addressed. Compared with Neil Davidson’s extensive work, this leaves the ex-ISG-S authors’ politics with a shallow historical grounding.

What the *SaB* authors like in Marx is his “omission of moralism”,²⁶ a dubious proposition with regard to Marx and Engels’ wider politics. But this potentially opens the door to all sorts of unprincipled alliances. This becomes more evident, when they go on to state in the “particular case of Scotland”, what they see as Marx and Engels’ approach “remain the crucial strategic stakes for the left”²⁷. But this quickly becomes, “Scotland’s questions are tactical.”²⁸ Once again, we are on familiar territory, reminding us that for the SWP everything is ‘tactics, tactics, tactics.’

When strategy is reduced to tactics, then you can tail-end first the SNP leadership’s ‘Indy-Lite’ constitutional proposals, then Corbyn’s ‘Save the NHS’/‘New Green Deal’ courtesy of a Right dominated Labour government and the UK state, and end up looking for a fantasy Left in Alba. There is a link between theory, strategy and tactics, but that lies in a programmatic approach.²⁹ A programme is a democratic tool for an organisation to apply its theory (informed by recent practice) to develop first a strategy, before then deciding on tactics. Without a programme and democratic membership participation in its formulation, strategy becomes meaningless. Instead, tactics are handed down by an unaccountable leadership, whether it be the SWP’s central committee or perhaps *conter*’s EB.

A little later, the *SaB* authors once again raise their objections to any adoption of a moralist approach. They oppose “efforts to moralise the question of {Scottish} independence - to make it for example into a question of ‘oppression’”³⁰. A few pages later, they make use of the “The Leninist tradition... in drawing a distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations.”³¹ This particular distinction is problematic. It has often been used on the Left to place particular parties and other organisations in oppressed nations beyond criticism, even when they promote the oppression of others. The real distinction should be between oppressor states and oppressed peoples.

This isn’t to deny that oppressor states can often mobilise many from their ‘lower order’ majority and even from other nationalities within their state, to support their imperialism, e.g. as settlers, soldiers, missionaries, merchants and overseers of forced labour. The UK or

British union state, and the old ‘Soviet’ union state, have had a particular way of winning support for such oppression. This has involved the promotion of hybrid identities, e.g., Scottish-British, Irish-British (later ‘Ulster’-British) and e.g., Russian-Soviet, Ukrainian-Soviet, Georgian-Soviet. And it is in this capacity, as agents for an oppressor state, not their particular nation or nationality, that they in turn become oppressors.

Meanwhile, even within these oppressor states, others can still be oppressed, e.g., Irish and Highlands and Islands tenant farmers. As a consequence, some prominent leaders of both the Irish and the Highland Land Leagues, e.g., Michael Davitt and John Murdoch, showed open solidarity with the non-white oppressed in the British Empire. Even women who were part of Irish-British ruling class families, but aware of their own sexual oppression, could see the wider nature of oppression. This helped them to extend their political vision. Some gave their support to Irish Republicanism, e.g. Charlotte Despard (nee French) and Constance Markiewicz (nee Gore-Booth).

The *SaB* authors are quite right to emphasise Scotland’s prominent role in British imperialist oppression, but this would be much clarified if termed Scottish-British, unionist and imperialist oppression. There is nothing unique in this. Both upper and lower class Irish and Indians played a major military role in upholding the British Empire. This was sometimes done as hybrid Anglo-Irish/later Irish-British or as Anglo-Indians/later Indian-British. In other cases, including most Scottish Highland recruits, the ‘lower orders’ enlisted to avoid abject poverty.

But this raises the issue of why ‘oppression’ remains a very important concept, along with exploitation and alienation in understanding the workings of capitalism and its global imperialist world order.³² Oppression in a capitalist world is the denial of democratic rights. This concept of oppression does not appear to be understood either by the authors of *SaB* or *ButBS*. Oppression is often confused with repression - the violent suppression of democratic rights. When we look at today’s denial of national self-determination in Scotland, it is

in a decidedly minor league compared to the longstanding violent suppression used by the UK state in Ireland/Northern Ireland. And in turn, the oppression used today in Northern Ireland hardly compares with what is happening in Palestine, Kurdistan, Xinjiang, Kashmir or Ukraine.

The authors of *SaB* and *ButBS* both want to invoke Lenin, in their appeal to the right of self-determination. The *SaB* authors start off rather badly with their claim that this term was “First coined in 1917 with the twin declarations of Woodrow Wilson and Lenin.”³³ But the Second International recognised this right at its 1896 Congress in London. Lenin was to write quite extensively about this right from 1903, with major changes in his political conclusions following the First ‘Russian’ Revolution in 1905, the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, and the national democratic challenges to the still Russian (a continued imperial term) Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) from 1919.

Wilson’s 14 Principles were only meant to apply to nations within the defeated German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires after World War I. But accusations of hypocrisy over the implementation of the right of self-determination could also later be levelled at the Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks) formed in 1918, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, established in 1925. This was demonstrated early on in Ukraine.

But the *SaB* authors do stumble upon a major weakness in Lenin’s theory of the right to self-determination (ironically undermining their claim “it was first coined in 1917”). In 1914, “Lenin seems to imply that {the exercise} of self -determination and independence are one and the same. ‘The self determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien bodies and the formation of an independent national state.’”³⁴ And this was indeed Lenin’s theory, which he only began to question tentatively in 1921, before becoming incapacitated.

Lenin’s 1914 theory was based not on the exercise of self-determination as a counter to the broader field of national alienation

experienced by those in oppressed nations and nationalities. He used it more narrowly as counter to political oppression. If relations between the oppressor state and an oppressed nation became sufficiently strained, he posed liberation, or national separation, as a solution. Quite clearly, he saw this as undesirable. His preferred choice was not separation but national assimilation, for which one-state revolutionary social democratic parties were required. In permitting only one form of national self-determination, he hoped to undermine its actual exercise.

But there is an extensive and wider alienation found amongst the oppressed, as a result of the wide-ranging activities of oppressive states. This tends to lead first to cultures of resistance. The political potential of such resistance to alienation has been less well recognised until relatively recently. As in other cases of self-determination, in the face of alienation linked to oppression, e.g. relationships between men, women and people with an LBGTQ+ background, the exercise of self-determination can take many forms other than a choice between marriage and separation.

However, when national movements, which challenged imperial powers, did separate from their imperialist masters, Lenin could retrospectively offer his support, e.g. Norway in 1905 and Ireland from 1916. Later, the use of the term ‘liberation’ in the sense of overcoming political oppression became widely used in national movements struggling for political independence, e.g., the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the National Liberation Front in Vietnam, the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

Having faced various challenges to RCP(b) rule (e.g. in Ukraine and Georgia), Lenin and some other Bolsheviks did begin to see the need to challenge Great Russian chauvinism. The aim was to win wider support from the non-Russian nations and nationalities for the newly founded RSFSR. Although significantly it wasn’t until 1924 that the term ‘Russian’ was abandoned for the non-national, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and a year later the name of the RCP(b) was

changed to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). But the new CPSU was still dominated by Great Russians.

The liberal unionist policy of *Korenizatsiia* (or *Indigenisation*)³⁵ was implemented in the RSFSR by the RCP(b). This was based on a considerably wider notion of national self-determination than Lenin had previously entertained. This involved extensive national cultural self-determination. This policy was very similar to that the Austro-Marxists pursued in the old Hapsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire, which Lenin had previously vehemently rejected. Only now with the ‘Bolshevik revolution’ secured, *Korenizatsiia* could be used for the same purpose - to hold the ‘empire’ together, in this case the ‘Soviet’ Empire.

But the authors of both *SaB* and *ButBS* ignore all the debates, prior to 1918, on the right of self-determination amongst the International Left. These were conducted between the Radical Left (adherents of Rosa Luxemburg); Lenin’s wing of the RSDLP, then of the RCP(b); and the ‘Internationalism from Below’ adherents (e.g. Kazimierz Kelles-Kreuz, James Connolly, and Lev Turkevich).³⁶

This is because the *SaB* authors want to undermine any democratic understanding of the right of national self-determination. They use a subheading, *The Useful Myth of Self Determination*.³⁷ They argue that only power politics between imperial states can make a reality of this demand. But in line with their general approach to politics, the *SaB* authors would be prepared to resort to ‘useful myths’, if they can mobilise people in Scotland. At present this is done mainly online, but they look to a future when they might be asked to speak at public meetings or at demonstrations. In their own eyes, they could then become part of a new political leadership. But the right of national self-determination is not a “useful myth” but a potent democratic demand. It relates to real social forces amongst the working class and others amongst the exploited and oppressed.

Furthermore, despite wanting to invoke Leninist orthodoxy, the authors of both *ButBS* and *SaB* do not recognise Lenin’s most

relevant comparison, with regard to the exercise of the right to national self-determination in Scotland. It was in 1913, that Lenin gave his support to Norwegian independence achieved in 1905.³⁸ Norway was originally part of the Swedish Union. However, unlike Scotland within the British Union at the time, Norway had its own devolved parliament, and longstanding peasant proprietorship. Therefore, in the oppression stakes, Norway, under the Swedish Union, was at a lower level than Scotland under the British Union.

However, in relation to Norway, Lenin had to come up with a new theory, since he had thought that “the epoch of bourgeois- democratic revolutions in Western, continental Europe embraces a fairly definite period, approximately between 1789 and 1871... Therefore, to seek the right to self-determination in the programmes of West-European socialists at this time of day is to betray one’s ignorance of the ABC of Marxism.”³⁹ And in relation to the UK, he would have had the full support of many ‘revisionist’ and non-Marxist, Socialist organisations over this. The theory Lenin came up with was that the Swedish monarchical union was a “mixed national state”⁴⁰ - the union of Sweden and Norway. It was this ‘exceptionalism’ which now permitted Norway’s exercise of the right to national self-determination.

But the UK state was also and remains a union state. The major struggles conducted by the Land Leagues in Ireland, Scotland and Wales from the early 1880s, led Engels to conclude that the British Isles “are peopled by four nations” and that “a single Parliament {i.e. Westminster, although more accurately the UK state} presided over three different systems of legislation”⁴¹ through the UK’s system of administrative devolution. This represented a break from Marx and Engels’ earlier stance of equating Britain with England. This had also been the view taken by many Liberals, and especially Radical Liberals, who believed that a unified British Nation-state would evolve out of the Union State, with Wales, Scotland (and for some Ireland too) becoming mere British provinces, e.g. like Northern England, the West Midlands.

So, what is to be made of the *SaB* sub-heading, *New Labour's Rescue of the British Nation-State*?⁴² The state that was rescued was the UK state. This involved an official recognition for the first time that the UK is not a single British Nation State, but is based on three nations, England, Scotland and Wales, and more ambiguously the province of Northern Ireland (for which there is even constitutional provision to reunite with 26 Counties Ireland.) In the face of the prior national democratic challenges at the time, New Labour's official recognition performed a key ideological service in maintaining the Union State. But, under the UK constitution, based on the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster, backed by a host of anti-democratic Crown powers, this official recognition is so much window-dressing. It can still be undermined as we are seeing today with the rise of Right authoritarian populism and reactionary unionism.

For a long historical period, prior to the post 1998 Devolution-all-round' deal, the British ruling class, at least in England, Scotland and Wales, was able to maintain that the continued existence of the UK state represented the will of the 'British people'. This included those in its constituent units, Scotland and Wales and the truncated province, British-Ulster.

But none of these constituent units voluntarily joined the Union on any democratic basis. However, when the franchise was slowly won by the 'lower orders', religious minorities and women, they voted in their overwhelming majority for unionist parties – whether conservative, liberal or reactionary. Imperial spoils, the prime purpose behind the 1707 and 1801 Unions, although very unevenly distributed, were a major factor in this.

Thus, even at times of political crisis, although sometimes challenged by opponents of the Union in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, unionist parties (and later the subordinate constitutional nationalist, Irish Parliamentary Party) remained the main parties in the constituent units of the UK. The one exception was the revolutionary nationalist, Sinn Fein which won majority support for First Irish Republic from 1918-22.

However, following World War 2, the continuing decline of the British Empire increased the tensions in the UK's constituent units. These were first addressed by increased administrative devolution, in the late 1940s and again in the 1960s. However, as the British Empire fell back further, economic inequalities between the Union's constituent units grew. To address this, political devolution was attempted, unsuccessfully first in 1979, before, after much greater challenges in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, being implemented under the 'Devolution-all-round' deal of 1998.

British ruling class strategies to retain their control over the UK state have not been acknowledged by ISG-S, nor by the late Neil Davidson. Neil's undoubted historical strengths lay elsewhere, particularly with regard to socio-economic development. This is what he was working on when he took ill at the 'Combined and Uneven Development in the Twenty First Century' conference in Glasgow.

However, with Empire and Union in continued decline, both the conservative and liberal unionist attempts to buttress the UK were effectively challenged during Scotland's 'IndyRef1' in 2014. The result was much closer than the British ruling class and the unionist parties had anticipated. Today, they no longer have the confidence to test voluntary support for the Union by electoral means. The November 23rd, 2022, Supreme Court ruling denied the Scottish government the right to hold 'IndyRef2', despite being elected for this specific purpose. This means the Scottish people now clearly face oppression - the denial of a democratic right - in this case the exercise of the right of national self-determination.

The British ruling class's increased resort to the Crown's anti-democratic institutions was forecast by republican socialists in RIC in 2014. Indeed, following the rise of the Hard Right in the 2014 EU elections, so was the increased likelihood of the UK state rolling back its post-1998 liberal unionist, 'Devolution-all-round' settlement.⁴³

f) 'Brexit' - papering over the cracks

The ‘Brexit’ campaign in the UK anticipated so much other Right populist politics – e.g. the greatly increased promotion of national chauvinism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, Christian supremacism, and on to Covid-denial and general conspiracy theories. But, as already shown, Brexit is merely part of a wider Right populism, which in the UK gets much of its impetus from the US Alt-Right.

The trajectory of Right populist politics in today’s ‘Brexit Britain’ was forecast by Socialists who went a little deeper than the claims of the would-be Brexiteers. They tried to hide their intentions behind populist rhetoric, promoted by the Right-wing media. However, when the increasingly dominant, ‘Brexit’-supporting wing of the British ruling class talked amongst themselves, they were quite open about their intentions. Nigel Lawson argued that Brexit would give the UK the chance to complete Thatcher’s {counter} revolution.”⁴⁴

A bizarre feature of *SaB* is its refusal to acknowledge that they, as Lexiters, got it hopelessly wrong. The Lexiters consisted mainly the SWP and some of its breakaways. The more influential Left Brexiteers were led by Len McCluskey, Seamus Milne, Karie Murphy and Andrew Murray, backed by some on the Labour Left and the CPB and CPS. But the SWP and some of its spin-off organisations were pushing a lonely ‘Lexit’. So, they largely fell in behind and offered apologetics for the Len McCluskey-led, Left Brexiteers.

But even in the Labour Party, the Left Brexiteers were second fiddle to the very Right wing Labour Brexiteers, Gisela Stuart, chair of the official ‘Vote Leave’, with the racist, Tom Harris, also prominent. Kate Hoey, Labour MP and Ulster Unionist supporter, signed up to Farage’s ‘Grassroots Out’, along with then still-wannabe Labour, George Galloway. But even they were at the bottom of the heap presided over by the Hard Right, Tory Brexiteers, led by Johnson and the Hard Right UKIP, later the Brexit Party, led by Farage.

To paper over their cracks over Brexit, the *SaB* authors retreat into fantasies. “A very interesting Brexit would have begun a popular process of reshaping power *within Britain*.”⁴⁵ If, some Left unionists

had written at the time of ‘IndyRef1’ that, “A very interesting ‘No’ result would have begun a popular process of reshaping power within Britain to bring about a Left social democratic (or Old Labour) revival”, the *SaB* authors would have quite rightly been withering in their scorn.

Later, these authors go on to quote some other academics,⁴⁶ who could also project their Left fantasies, and attack the discomfited liberal intelligentsia over ‘Brexit.’ Nevertheless, both sections of this intelligentsia shared a relative detachment from the effects of looming ‘Brexit Britain’. Not for them the fates of Jo Cox MP, Arkadiusz Józwik or Dagmara Przybysz, or the countless others now facing daily stepped up racist attacks by the UK state and less frequently by the Far Right.

There is a history, amongst SWP and some of its breakaways, to attribute racism mainly to the Far and Hard Right in the UK, or to a foreign Far Right. This was shown in the name of the SWP’s most successful front organisation, the Anti-Nazi League. Fascism it’s just not British you know! The ANL offered no support to those under attack from British fascism – Loyalism - with a considerably more violent record than the National Front. (But the SWP did help to create Rock Against Racism, which was an inspired move recognising the importance of fighting culture wars, not leaving the territory to be occupied by the Right.)

In 2011, the authors of *SaB*, despite coming from the SWP’s Left unionist background, could clearly see the balance of forces in the up-and-coming independence referendum campaign. As a consequence, they took an anti-Tory and more ambiguously an anti-‘Britain’, rather than anti-UK state stance. But these authors remain in denial about the political balance of forces in the leadership of the 2016 ‘Brexit’ campaign. Yet these leaders were even further Right than those who led the opposition to the ‘IndyRef1’. They demanded an even more centralised UK state and an even greater celebration of British unionism and imperialism.

The changing balance between Right and Left Brexiteers can be seen in successive elections, showing the results for parties declaring their clear support for ‘Brexit’.

EU election results

2009

Hard Right: UKIP -18.1% and 11 MEPs and **Far Right:** BNP - 2.7% and 2 MEPs, English Democrats - 1.8%: **Total - 22.6%**

The Left: No2EU/Yes to Democracy (i.e. the UK!): **Total - 1%**

2014

Hard Right: UKIP - 26.6% and 24 MEPs and **Far Right:** An Independence from Europe -1.4%, BNP - 1.1%, English Democrats - 0.8%, Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) - 0.5% **Total – 30.4%**

The Left: No2EU/Yes to Democracy: **Total - 0.2%**

2019

Hard Right: Brexit Party – 30.5% and 29 MEPs, the **increasingly Hard Right** Conservative Party 8.8% and 4 MEPs, Democratic Unionist Party 0.7% and 1 MEP, UKIP, 3.2%, the **Far Right:** TUV- 0.4%, English Democrats. 0.2% - **Total – 43.8%**

The Left: (it didn’t stand!) **Total - 0%**

What is clear is that the Hard Right always overwhelmingly dominated Brexit, whilst the Far Right also performed better than the Left Brexiteers. Given the strength of the Hard Right, a vote to ‘Leave’ could only empower them to ‘Take Back Control’. There was a transition, though, where one-time ‘Remain’ supporter, albeit ‘hostile environment’ enforcer, Teresa May had to be initially pushed by the full-spectrum, Hard Right in the Tory party. But Jacob Rees-Mogg’s European Reform Group, the DUP and Donald Trump,

assisted by the politically hapless Jeremy Corbyn,⁴⁷ ensured that any prospect of a ‘Soft Brexit’ soon gave way to a very ‘Hard Brexit’, a key (but not the only) component of a wider authoritarian Right populist offensive.

And, since Johnson’s 2019 Westminster election victory, the further shift to the Right has accelerated in ‘Brexit Britain’. A great deal of this was anticipated by many Socialists - the attacks on existing democratic rights (e.g. reinforced borders with the consequent horrific death rates, increased evictions, detentions and deportations, draconian Universal Credit handed over to private companies lining their pockets like medieval tax farmers, limiting the right to protest or strike, increased police powers and clampdowns on the media, and the curtailing of the electoral franchise). So were the attacks on ‘red tape’ or the safeguards, (e.g. for workers’ job security, conditions and pay, consumer and environmental protection). And so too was the reinforcing of corporate power (e.g. further privatisations, corporate courts overriding elected bodies, and lucrative contracts on return for political bribes.)

But the political trajectory was made very clear from the outset, when the franchise for the EU referendum was drawn up. Cameron’s Tories had conceded a more civic national franchise for ‘IndyRef1’ giving the vote to all EU residents and 16–18-year-olds, thinking this would help them. The same Cameron government resorted to ethnic nationalist criteria in the EU referendum and removed the right to vote from most non-British EU residents and all 16–18-year-olds - those most likely to be worst affected. The Left Brexiteers remained silent in the face of this attack on democracy. If those excluded had been given the vote, it is very likely there would have been a ‘Remain’ vote throughout the UK. Anyone on the Left still claiming support for Brexit on this rigged franchise is no democrat.

The fundamental difference between the nature of the two referenda has been shown in the Scottish government’s further extension of the franchise. In the Holyrood and local council elections, citizens of all nationalities currently living in Scotland now have the vote. This was delivered under the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation)

Act (2020). But during the 2019 Euro-election, the UK state bureaucratically excluded many EU citizens entitled to vote and they remain excluded after ‘Brexit’. The Hard Right, Tory government is now making moves to exclude British subjects without specific photo ID. Such attempts to deny people the vote have been a common feature of the Hard and Far Right from the USA to India. Thus, the restricted ethnic national nature of the 2016 EU-referendum franchise anticipated the massive attacks on asylum seekers and migrants, which have become the hallmark of ‘Brexit Britain’.

The analysis of the Lexiters and Left Brexiteers revealed major flaws in their thinking. They could not see that the majority in the British ruling class was moving from Eurosceptic ‘Remain’ politics to Europhobic ‘Leave’ politics. The *SaB* authors highlight the Labour Right’s Peoples’ Vote Campaign, claiming that in “England {it was} electorally disastrous.”⁴⁸

During Corbyn’s 2017 Westminster campaign, whilst saying he would respect the {anti-democratic} EU referendum result, he also, in classic social democratic style, tried to avoid the constitutional issue. He preferred to concentrate on economic and social matters. Nearly all of Labour’s electoral gains came in areas, often university cities or constituencies with large migrant communities, which had voted ‘Remain’. These constituencies voted Labour, hoping for a ‘Soft Brexit’, or what the Hard and Far Right slagged off as BINO – ‘Brexit In Name Only’.

But in 2017, Labour still lost 7 MPs to the Tories in its ‘Red Wall’ constituencies. Many of these voters had supported UKIP in the 2014 Euro-election (and they would go on to support the Brexit Party in the 2019 Euro-election). In response to this, Corbyn argued that his ‘Brexit ‘would bring to an end to the free movement of EU citizens to the UK – a very explicit appeal to racism. This was not challenged by the Left Brexiteer leaders.

They argued that even more concessions should be made to Right ‘Leavers’ to hold on to ‘Red Wall’ constituencies. They also bowed to the Right over mandatory reselection; signed up to the apartheid-

Israel inspired International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism; supported Trident; and opposed the 2019 Labour party conference decision to close detention centres for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. They argued that this would maximise Labour Right ‘Remainer’ and ‘Leaver’ electoral support in the next Westminster election.

The Left Brexiteers’ thinking was that, since Labour ‘Remainer’ votes were already in the bag, further concessions could be made to the Right to win their votes. But ‘Remainers’, who had voted Labour in 2017, became more and more concerned by Corbyn’s increasing facilitation of a harder and harder Tory ‘Brexit’. It was this and not the Labour Right, ‘Remainer’-led, Peoples Vote campaign which cost Labour most heavily in the December 2019 Westminster election. This was already anticipated in the earlier 2019 local elections in England. However, it was demonstrated most spectacularly in the 2019 Euro-elections. Corbyn’s Right accommodating stance completely failed to prevent many Labour supporters in the ‘Red Wall’ seats from deserting to the Brexit Party. But at the same time Labour lost most of its 2017 ‘Remainer’ voters to the SNP, Lib-Dems, Greens, and Plaid Cymru.

Having pushed Corbyn back on so many fronts, the British ruling class was less worried about the prospect of a Corbyn victory. Furthermore, unlike during the Bennite era, Corbyn’s ascendancy within the Labour Party was not linked to any rise in trade union militancy. Indeed, for trade union leaders who like to talk Left, the prospect of a Corbyn victory became a substitute for industrial action. So, as Corbyn helped to facilitate an ever-harder Brexit, the ruling class began to look forward to a general election, where Corbyn could be portrayed, not as leader of an opposition, but as a useful ‘Aunt Sally’ to be mocked. And they understood quite well that, if necessary, the Labour Right, which dominated the party machine and the parliamentary party, could soon put an end to Corbyn. On the basis of such an analysis, socialist republicans forecast Corbyn-led Labour’s demise in the next general election.⁴⁹

But Lexiters continued to deny this increasing likelihood. Neil Davidson wrote that “the truth is Johnson’s base is not the working class north, south, east or west.” Taking comfort from the fact that Johnson, unlike Farage, “is too much an obvious product of the English ruling class, the very model of a bumbling public schoolboy”, he thought that not many Labour votes were likely to transfer from Farage’s Brexit Party to Johnson’s Tories. Neil was also certain that Johnson’s “persona... will be the kiss of death in... Wales.” But, on December 19th, 2019, Johnson’s Tories massively breached Labour’s ‘Red Wall’ constituencies in the deindustrialised North and Midlands. In Wales, Labour lost 6 seats leaving them with 22 on 41% of the vote, whilst the Tories gained 6 seats giving them 14 on 36% of the vote.”⁵⁰

Given Neil’s flawed prediction about the outcome of the 2019 Westminster general election,⁵¹ I suspect, if he had lived on, that he would have reassessed his Lexit support, just as he shifted in 2011 from being anti- to pro-Scottish independence. Indeed, such a switch could have had a shared political underpinning. It would now be the anti-Tory thing to do, and not just any old Tory, but Boris ‘Thatcher plus, plus, plus’, ‘Get Brexit Done’ Johnson.

The lesson to be learned from the Labour Right-led ‘Peoples Vote’ campaign is not that argued by the *SaB* authors. They claimed the British ruling class, with its particularly influential City of London component, was overwhelmingly behind ‘Remain’. The creation of Change UK was seen as a British ruling class attempt, in the style of French ruling class backing for Emmanuel Macron, to assert majority electoral support for ‘Remain’.

But no such significant ruling class backing was given, either to pro-‘Remain’ Change UK or the Lib-Dems. The very fact that the ‘Peoples Vote’ campaign had to take to the streets was a strong indicator that the majority of the British ruling class no longer backed ‘Remain’. The City of London has far more effective ways of exerting political pressure. They could have organised a major run on sterling and profited in the process through hedging.

And on October 18th, 2019, Sir Mark Carney, chair of the Bank of England, announced his public support for Johnson's proposed Brexit Deal. The majority of the British ruling class now supported Brexit. The Labour Right, ever attentive to British ruling class needs, had backed the wrong horse – the receding Eurosceptic 'Remain' runner! But as soon as Sir Keir Starmer was able to take control of British Labour Party, after the December 19th Westminster election debacle, he was quick to sign up to Brexit. He promises to continue the UK's 'hostile environment' for asylum seekers and migrants, whilst his shadow health and social care minister, Wes Streeting, wants to further privatise the NHS. Starmer's Labour leadership team is to the Right of Blairs's New Labour. If elected to office, 'Things can only get worse'!

There was another flaw in 'Lexit' and Left Brexiteer thinking and that was their failure or offer alternative trading partners to the EU. The last time Socialists, and revolutionary socialists at that, used the taking of state power 'nationally', as base to extend this internationally, was during the 1917-21 phase of the wider 1916-23 International Revolutionary Wave. In the process, they hoped to construct a new international economic socialist order with planned internal production and distribution of goods and services

But once this prospect ended, the RSFSR and infant USSR had to get involved in capitalist trade, with all the economic and political limitations that imposed. The 1921 Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement coincided with the crushing of the Kronstadt Rebellion. This ended any prospect of soviet democracy. It led to the full retreat to a one-party, bureaucratically centralised, unionist, police state, with 'Soviet' becoming a cover for a renewed Russian imperialism.

So, in 2016, with no prospect of alternative socialist trading partners to the EU, some alternative had to be offered. The Right Brexiteers, of course, had their own alternative, very decidedly, non-socialist trading partners. They hoped to become 'Britain Second' to Trump's rising Right populist, 'America First'. Others more deluded hoped to recreate the old days of the British Empire but now as 'Empire2'.

But the Left Brexiteers offered no trading alternative. Those still trapped in old Campist USSR nostalgia did not suggest joining the Russia Federation's Eurasian Economic Community. But perhaps they could have offered the prospect of signing up to the Chinese Peoples Republic's 'Belt and Road Initiative' as an alternative.

However, as Ukrainians today understand, even support for the EU's bureaucratic, rules-regulated, neo-colonialism is far preferable to Putin's direct Russian imperialist annexation, its brutal violence, kleptocratic looting and imposition of Far Right, ethnically cleansing regimes, as seen in Chechenya, Abkhazia, Crimea, eastern Donetsk and Luhansk. (Indeed, even in the UK, which has never faced EU neo-colonialism, many can now see that life in 'Brexit Britain' is considerably worse than under the EU's rules-regulated bureaucracy.) Meanwhile Xi Jinping rewards comprador regime leaders, mostly in resource-rich Africa, for depriving the 'lower orders' of their land and forcing them to work in dangerous, low paid jobs. Neither of these prospects was likely to be an attractive selling point. So, not even Left Brexit fantasies – just a blank space.

But Socialists should have offered their own alternative. Ducking behind the EU's walls, made of bails of straw, does not provide a long-term strategy, in the face of the now global Hard Right's repressive, authoritarian populist offensive.

Before the 2008 Crash, the EU bureaucrats were claiming that their policies, imposed by member state governments, would benefit workers, small farmers and the more peripheral nations and regions. This 'internationalism from above', with its cross-border movement of workers and managed access to cheaper labour from beyond its borders, was not designed to promote the assimilation or the integration of ethnically mixed hybrid Europeans. However, as long as the continuing financial sector-led boom contributed to higher living standards for many, those still losing out could largely be ignored. But after the 2008 Crash, all pretence that the majority would benefit from EU membership was abandoned. The interests of major banks, corporations and the leaders of its inner state governments were all that concerned the EU bureaucracy now.

However, the EU bureaucracy's 'internationalism from above' had led to an 'internationalism from below' response. Migrant workers, their families and students have moved from one member country to another, forming ethnically mixed personal relationships, making friends from other nationalities, joining trade unions and community organisations, participating in political organisations and creating elements of a new multinational culture. Undermining this 'internationalism from below' was central to the Right's 'Leave the EU' campaign.

But the SWP and some of its spin-off organisations were pushing a lonely Lexit. So, they largely fell in behind and offered apologetics for the Len McCluskey-led Left Brexiteers. But they never offered any real challenge either to Labour's own Right Brexiteers or the much larger Hard Right Brexiteers, whether in the Tory Party, UKIP or the Brexit Party.

Instead, two things were required. A political alternative to the Right 'Remainers' (and the Left 'Leavers') certainly did not lie with the Lexiters.⁵² They offered no constitutional (or trading) alternative at all. However, both the material base and the necessary social agency already exists for a **federal, democratic, secular, and environmentally sustainable, social European Republic.**⁵³

Neil Davidson conceded Edinburgh RIC's role in giving support to the vibrant 500 strong Migrant Workers Network demonstration outside St. Giles cathedral on the High Street. It was called at only a few hours' notice after the 'Leave' result had been announced.⁵⁴ The 'Leave' vote was a significant setback for these migrant workers. However, surely, given all their 'Leave' cheering, it represented a victory for the Lexiters and Left Brexiteers. But where was their celebration in Glasgow's George Square? Just like the 'Left' unionist, 'No' supporters in 2014, they declined to publicly celebrate - worried at who might turn up!

g) Republicanism - covering up the tracks

There is considerable dishonesty in the author's *Conclusion: The Two Souls of Nationalism*.⁵⁵ Using Hal Draper's, *The Two Souls of Socialism* as a basis, the authors announce their support for Popular Sovereignty.⁵⁶ Now this concept was first introduced to the November 30th, 2012, RIC conference by socialist republicans. A debate was organised between myself (from the affiliated RCN), a member of Republic, and Neil Davison, then a dissident SWP member. He was chosen by ISG-S to promote their viewpoint.

I argued for republicanism as the sovereignty of the people up against the UK's sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster and all its anti-democratic Crown powers. This was widely publicised on the Left by *bella caledonia*.⁵⁷ The Republic speaker argued for a much more limited concept of republicanism as opposition to the monarchy in favour of an elected head of state (whether that be the UK or Britain, a distinction he and many others on the Left often do not appreciate).

Neil however, argued that promoting republicanism was a diversion from the need to build support for a socialist revolution, following which the queen would be removed. Like Republic his view of republicanism was anti-monarchist. Although unwilling to raise or mobilise around any immediate political - republican democratic - challenge to the UK state, Neil and those from the SWP tradition have been quite happy to promote support for immediate demands and struggles on the economic front. They do not argue that these are a diversion from the struggle to end wage slavery. In effect they see economic battles as schools of struggle. This is good as far as it goes. Only when the ruling class fights its class struggles, they also include constitutional battles and 'culture wars' - not confining themselves to the economic arena.

However, in true SWP style, 'Down with the Royalty' can be raised at particular royal jamborees, to emphasise the monarchy's highly privileged lifestyles, compared to the working class facing austerity. But after that, on to the next, preferably economic, campaign.

In 2012, the republican socialist concept of the ‘sovereignty of the people’ was largely that - a concept. However, as the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign took off, with RIC and other autonomous ‘Yes’ campaigns organising the length and breadth of Scotland and beyond, the sovereignty of the people became a reality counterposed not only to the sovereignty of the UK, but the SNP leadership of ‘Yes Scotland’. This practical exercise of the sovereignty of the people contributed to the Edinburgh RIC motion which was overwhelmingly passed at the well-attended National Forum held in Glasgow on May 17th, 2014.

AFTER A ‘YES’ VOTE ON SEPTEMBER 18th

Organisation after September 18th

- 1. A ‘Yes’ vote on September 18th represents an expression of ‘the sovereignty of the people’. Political arrangements based under the Westminster principle of the sovereignty of the Crown in Parliament are no longer valid.**
- 2. The official ‘Yes’ campaign will be ended after September 18th. RIC should aim to bring people together soon as possible after this date. The aim would be a bigger convention than the last two RIC conferences.**
- 3. Suggested organisations to be involved could include existing local ‘Yes’ groups, other ‘Yes’ campaigning organisations, organisations which had not been able to take a ‘Yes’ position but may now want to become involved in the making of a new Scotland, e.g. trade unions, community organisations, specific campaigns, e.g. disability.**
- 4. On this basis regular wider forums (people’s assemblies) would be held in as many areas as possible to influence the negotiating and constitution-making processes.⁵⁸**

From then on, republicanism, as the sovereignty of the Scottish people, overtook the rather milk-and-water, anti-royalist RIC principle, which had been conceded by the ISG-S to bring the SSP on board – **A modern republic for real democracy**. Both the ISG-S

and SSP had been quite happy to have this relegated to a third principle, behind the first principle:- **For a social alternative to austerity and privatization.** This was seen to be the heart of the Left social democratic approach, which inspired those from an SWP or ex-SWP background or an old Militant background (but now in the SSP). The second principle, **Green and environmentally sustainable**, was designed to win the support of the Scottish Greens.

However, as more and more RIC members, and indeed many others in the wider ‘Yes’ movement, became increasingly aware of the dirty tricks of the UK state, then the need to prioritise a constitutional challenge became much more widely appreciated. And after May 17th, 2014, National Forum, this was no longer the thinking of just one RIC affiliated organisation, the RCN, or indeed other republican socialists in RIC, but of the RIC nationally.

But it appears as if ISG-S members were just carried along on the wave of Scotland’s rising Democratic Revolution. This was shown when they side-lined RIC to make their own electoral challenge in the form of RISE in 2016. At a preparatory Scottish Left Project meeting, the RCN argued for the ‘R’ in the proposed new organisation’s name, RISE, to stand for Republicanism. Instead, the ISG members argued that it should stand for Respect (a name with an inauspicious background in Galloway’s vanity party). The SSP delegate said he thought ‘R’ should stand for Republicanism too. But he wasn’t prepared to push it, since his role at the meeting was to ensure that Colin Fox became RISE’s lead candidate for Holyrood’s Lothian list.

So, with regard to republicanism, ISG-S had retreated back not only from the May 14th RIC’ National Forum ‘sovereignty of the people’ principle, but even from the SSP’s milk-and water, anti-monarchist principle. This was a return to Neil Davidson’s ‘abolish the monarchy after the socialist revolution’. But ISG-S clearly understood the revolution was not going to happen anytime soon. In effect, their thinking acted as a Left cover for a constitutional tailing of the SNP in the here and now.

Following ‘Brexit,’ the Tory government completely refused to make any concessions acknowledging Scotland’s decisive rejection, as they initially made for Northern Ireland with a lower ‘Remain’ vote. This, along with ‘Better Together’s promise, during ‘the IndyRef1’ campaign, that only a ‘No’ vote could guarantee continued EU membership, led to a clamour for ‘IndyRef2’. Massive AUOB demonstrations were organised throughout Scotland. AUOB marches gave expression to this pent-up feeling.

As has already been shown, many people, including a younger generation, wanted to provide this with a political focus by reviving RIC. When RIC was eventually reformed on January 29th, 2022,⁵⁹ its first two linked principles were based on the May 14th, 2014, National Forum decision - **For a democratic, secular, socially just and environmentally sustainable, Scottish Republic and Action based on the sovereignty of the people not the UK Crown, leading to the setting up of a Constituent Assembly.**

Another of RIC’s new Six Principles is worth considering. Principle 4 is **Equality and opposition to discrimination on grounds of sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, disability or age.** The issue of discrimination against transgendered people hardly arose in the rainbow alliance of ‘IndyRef1’. And when ISG-S opted to set up RISE, the opportunity existed to be ahead of the game over trans rights. Even Cameron’s Conservative government was prepared to consider moves in this direction, so it wasn’t seen as too controversial for the forthcoming election. Furthermore, the SNP hadn’t yet openly adopted such a position.

So, at RISE’s pre-election conference, Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) was invited to propose support for transgender rights in the Holyrood 2016 manifesto. This was seconded by a transgender RCN member. However, later the SNP government was to take TIE on board. But as politics slipped to the Right, some of the original ISG-S became critical of what they now termed ‘identity politics.’ They refused to fight ‘culture wars’, leaving this arena of struggle to the Hard and Far Right. They also adopted ‘anti-woke’ language, with its

origins on the US AltRight. Thus, with 20 European (including the Republic of Ireland), Asian and Latin American states having adopted gender recognition reform, *conter* decided instead to adapt to the political trajectory of Johnson/Sunaks' 'Brexit Britain', Trump's USA and Putin's Russian Federal Republic.

The SaB authors are willing to invoke what they see as Lenin's ambiguous, but nevertheless 'useful myth' approach to national self-determination. However, in relation to campaigning for trans rights, when these could no longer act as an easy mobilising 'useful myth', in practice, they rejected his approach to self-determination. in its widest sense. "The {revolutionary} Social-Democrat's ideal should... {be} *the tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects."⁶⁰

The fifth new RIC principle is **Solidarity with the struggles for workers' rights, democracy and self-determination, based on internationalism from below**. This acknowledges the need for 'internationalism from below', also something that had become deeply embedded in RIC during 'IndyRef1'. The RCN has been given responsibility for organising the '4 nations under the UK' session at the 2013 RIC conference.⁶¹ But RIC's 'internationalism from below' solidarity organisation very much involved the ISG-S, Neil Davidson as well as the RCN. Speakers were sent to, or invited from, England,⁶² Wales,⁶³ Ireland ('North' and 'South')⁶⁴, Catalunya, Euskadi, Quebec and Greece. Edinburgh RIC hosted a Welsh delegation in the last days of the 'IndyRef1' campaign. Local RIC groups also provided solidarity to Palestine, Kurdistan and Catalunya.⁶⁵ Indeed, RIC made such an impact, that the STUC joined its rally in Glasgow on July 2nd, 2015, in solidarity with Greece facing the draconian EU imposed Austerity.⁶⁶ This was the largest demo in the UK over this issue.

The *SaB* authors' approach to 'Internationalism from below'⁶⁷ is similar to their attempt to appropriate 'Popular Sovereignty'. They write as if they alone had suddenly come up with the concept. This is particularly sad, since (unlike the republican sovereignty of the people) ISG-S members did very much contribute to RIC's

‘internationalism from below’ practice. So, although ‘internationalism from below’ began as an RCN concept, it was taken up by others, including the ISG-S. It became the shared practice of RIC. But this wider history is ignored in *SaB*.

SaB makes some supportable economic proposals in *Popular economic sovereignty*⁶⁸ Commonweal has also done a lot of work and has produced *Sorted*. Adam Ramsay (*openDemocracy*) has made some good policy proposals in a recent article for *bella caledonia*.⁶⁹ The real issue here, though, is the question of agency. Are these proposals directed at the SNP or Alba leaderships to take up and implement in their own bureaucratic fashion, or does their implementation involve and give power to wider democratic forces?

Back in 2015, when the public face of the Scottish Left Project encouraged wider debate, the RCN too made some economic, social and political proposals.⁷⁰ But these economic and social proposals were just that, a contribution to a wider debate. Furthermore, other widely based organisations, which had developed considerable experience in particular fields, e.g. over land reform and environmental degradation, were seen to be vital in policy formation. However, a linked RCN contribution also emphasised the centrality of democratic involvement in economic and social reforms, but just as important, within the campaigning organisations and parties promoting them⁷¹

So, what are we to make of *SaB*’s proposal of “establishing a republican constitution... maximising citizen involvement in the construction of the state through a democratic constitutional convention”? - a constituent assembly - RIC’s May 17th, 2014, proposal. Once again, the overriding thing is that the organisations (e.g. RIC) and principal political organisations involved must themselves be models of democratic practice. But in this, as we have seen, the old ISG-S, RISE and now *conter* have been glaringly lacking.

SaB's attempt to rewrite history amounts to 'covering up the tracks.' This is just part of a wider attempt to roll back Scotland's 2014 Democratic Revolution. However, with the authors still young enough to advance their careers, and looking to political forces from above, rather than from below, they could well become the latest wave of 'young fogeys'. However, it is not Jacob Reese-Mogg's earlier 'new fogey' dress style and nostalgia for the 'great days of Empire' they want to take on. That is passe. Adopting the edgy Alt-Right use of language and a nostalgia for the post-1945 Social democracy and Campist politics are for today's 'young fogeys'.

But such a makeover means airbrushing from history, the ISG-S's own earlier positive contributions, as well as those of many others in RIC. An upturn in class struggle, beyond the control of social democracy (the Labour Party and the SNP) and trade union bureaucracy, could still pull some back, just as Scotland's Democratic Revolution did. But for that to be consolidated, this will mean looking again at the past record of parties, autonomous organisations and international organisation. Any renewal needs to be on a very different basis, based on genuinely democratic methods.⁷² But, just as important is the creation of a wider democratic culture.

This will mean assessing our struggles, as they develop, not by how they measure up to some externally imposed 'internationalism', whether that be British Labourism, the official Communist Third International, or the various sect-internationals. And it also means challenging Scottish nationalism. Scotland has its own deeply rooted 'Internationalism from Below' traditions, shown by the United Scotsmen in the 1790s, the 1820 general strike and insurrection, the Highland Land League/Scottish Land Restoration League in the 1880s, John Maclean's Scottish workers' republicanism from 1920, and indeed the 'IndyRef1' campaign, which could be seen as part of wider international challenge, with its focus in the Arab Spring, the Indignados in Greece and Spain, and the demands for the exercise of national self-determination in Catalunya and Euskadi.

Such resistance goes along with an accompanying vibrant cultural expression. And this can also become a significant arena for retaining and retrieving the memory of struggles, which get marginalised after political setbacks and defeats. Artists and creatives have contributed to the revived RIC's new sixth principle. **Support for Scotland's artistic and cultural revival and all its languages.** This builds on the National Collective and its 'Yestival' tour during 'IndyRef1' and on such cultural figures such as Hamish Henderson (OBE declined).

h) Conclusion

This review has not been shoehorned into something acceptable to Left academia and is unlikely to be acknowledged there. But it is hoped that others outside academia's closed walls, and some who, needing a job there, know they are trapped but seek a life and politics beyond, could engage with the arguments raised in this review. Neil Davidson provided a good example of this method of working. The other *SaB* authors invoke his name but not his practice.

Meanwhile, as well as providing solidarity to all those resisting every aspect of exploitation and oppression, we can also challenge our alienation. Taking part in cultural celebration is part of the wider struggle for our self-determination in its wider sense. This also challenges the doom mongers on the Left, including the ex-ISG-authors of *SaB*.

Freedom Come All Ye!

Allan Armstrong, 19.4.23 updated on 21.4.23, following comments from Connor Beaton, Bob Gouillot, Craig Lundie and George Mackin.

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also see:

[The SWP and Scottish independence - Part 1, “Breakin up is so hard to do”](#)

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