

COMPLETING SCOTLAND'S UNFINISHED DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION AND THE 2023 DECLARATION OF CALTON HILL



The Democracy Cairn, Calton Hill, Edinburgh

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a) September 18th, 2014, and Scotland's unfinished Democratic Revolution

On September 18th, November 2014, something truly remarkable in politics happened. By the time of the Scottish independence referendum, held on that day, 97% of Scotland's potential electorate had registered to vote and 85% took part. This level of democracy is something unprecedented anywhere in the UK's history. This was a Democratic Revolution.¹ We still live with its consequences. Conservatives and reactionaries want to overthrow its legacy. Many liberals have become paralysed as their 'Devolution-all-round' UK has given way to a toxic 'Brexit Britain'. In the face of all this, growing numbers of people in Scotland want to complete that unfinished Democratic Revolution.

In 2012, the Tory/Lib-Dem government, supported by the British Labour and its Scottish branch office, conceded an independence referendum. They looked at the polls for support for independence, which showed only 28-32% in favour. They equated any support for Scottish independence with support for the SNP. They saw the referendum as an opportunity to humiliate the SNP leadership,

which had had the temerity to lead the party to the 2011 Holyrood victory, despite an electoral system designed to ensure that never happened. For Labour, in particular, this cut off many patronage opportunities and the spoils of office to which they felt entitled. The constitutional status quo buttressed their position.

From then on, the Unionists' 'Better Together' campaign, self-styled 'Project Fear', looked to conservative and reactionary leaders in the UK and across the world to help defeat the growing 'Project Hope'. So, as well as the official backing of the Tories, Lib-Dems and Labour, 'Project Fear' gained the support of UKIP and the BNP, the DUP and UUP in Northern Ireland, the Orange Order, other Loyalists and Fascists. US President Obama, Spanish, EU president, Jose Barroso and the Belgian, European Council president, Herman von Rumpoy, the Chinese premier, Li Keqiang, were all opposed. Cameron asked Vladimir Putin to sign up too (before his 2014 seizure of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine).

Pope Francis warned against Scottish independence, whilst the Free Presbyterian Church called it "a provocation to god"! The British Broadcasting Corporation very much lived up to its first name in its partisan coverage. All the British and Scottish mainstream media campaigned against (with only the exception of the *Sunday Herald*, in the last couple of weeks). In 2014, the Edinburgh Festival refused to allow any official events which might cover independence.

In the face of this, the SNP leadership under Alex Salmond, and heavily backed by MSPs, Kenny Macaskill and Alex Neil, tried to make Scottish independence palatable to the US State Department and the British establishment. They called a special party conference on October 19th, 2012, to drop opposition to NATO. SNP politicians, who had learned how to talk 'Left', showed that they could walk Right. Dissident Jim Sillars thought they hadn't gone far enough, though, in supporting NATO and argued the SNP should accept Faslane too.

The SNP leaders had expected its special conference to be a walkover. Behind the scenes, its formidable bureaucratic machine, controlled by Alex Salmond, in league with Peter Murrell, exerted pressure on the delegates, many carefully selected. The future political careers of those who did not knuckle under were questioned. At the same time, Scotland's membership of the British High Command, subordination to the City of London (and its Edinburgh outliers – the Royal Bank and Bank of Scotland) and to the UK state's anti-democratic Crown powers, were all just accepted.

The SNP leaders set up 'Yes Scotland' as a front organisation, to be closed down as soon as the referendum was over - whether 'Yes' or 'No'. Instead of a 'Yes' vote being seen as an assertion of the democratic sovereignty of the Scottish people, SNP leaders continued to see their mandate coming from the UK's

devolved Holyrood. The Unionists were to be further appeased by Scottish Labour, Tory and Lib-Dem politicians being drawn into the SNP leaders' 'independence' negotiating team. Better together, they would then haggle with Cameron's UK government. Any demands from all those who had campaigned for very different vision of Scotland's future were to be firmly shut out. Any new 'Scottish Free State' would be decidedly 'IndyLite'.

a) The Radical Independence Campaign demands the sovereignty of the people and a Constituent Assembly

If 'IndyRef1' had been left in the hands of the SNP leaders, the final 45% 'Yes' vote, which mainstreamed Scottish independence as a political issue, would have been considerably smaller. So how was this formidable opposition, stretching from liberal, conservatives and reactionary unionists, to the ever so constitutional nationalists, challenged with such effect?

The SNP's 2012 special conference decision proved too much, not only for many SNP members, but for two of its MSPs, including Jean Urquhart, who resigned. Within a couple of weeks, on November 30th, 2012, 800 people, including many SNP members, along with Scottish Greens, Labour for Independence, the SSP, social democrats, socialist republicans, some anarchists and many in no political organisation, founded the Radical Independence Campaign. RIC's 2013 conference was to be attended by 1300, whilst its 2014 conference, held after IndyRef1, was attended by 3000.

RIC initiated the voter registration drive and mass canvassing in areas that mainstream parties, especially Labour, had abandoned. These activities were also eagerly taken up by many local 'Yes Scotland' groups. They acted quite independently of the SNP leadership. Together this registration and canvassing drive very much contributed to Scotland's Democratic Revolution.

RIC also became a very active centre for all those promoting a different vision of Scotland - economically, socially, culturally and internationally. The wider 'Yes' campaign drew in thousands and discussions and debates took place in homes, streets, community centres shops and elsewhere. Many more organisations were created, during the two-year period of heady democratic political discussion and debate, which marked IndyRef1. In the process, a **rainbow coalition of women, LBGT+, migrants, local community activists and artists** was developed. Women for Independence, Pensioners for Independence, Africans for an Independent Scotland, English People for Independence, Scots Asians for Independence and the National Collective (Imagine a Better Scotland), were just

some of these. In a demonstration of ‘internationalism from below’ solidarity rallies and meetings were held in England, Wales and Ireland.

‘Project Hope’ extended way beyond the SNP. Meetings were held in community and social centres, town and village halls across Scotland. These brought many back into active politics after a long absence and for others this was the very first time they participated in politics. Vibrant online campaigning undermined ‘Project Fear’s misinformation. A new pro-independence media was created e.g. the *National* and *bella caledonia* (self determination, autonomy, independence), as well as the wonderful *Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom*, run by “an unsavoury cabal of queers, feminists and trolls”². In contrast to the Edinburgh Festival’s attempted to close down debate. The National Collective organised well attended ‘Yestival’ events throughout Scotland with many artists performing.

All this further politicised RIC and gave it the confidence at its May 17th, 2014, National Forum in Glasgow to declare that it would not accept the SNP’s intended closing down of the Independence movement.³ In the event of a ‘Yes’ vote, RIC would organise all the active autonomous ‘Yes’ groups, other campaigning organisations, trade unionists and cultural bodies that had become involved during IndyRef1. The 3000 who attended RIC’s post-referendum conference showed it had the ability to do that. Meetings would continue to be organised the length and breadth of Scotland. These would recognise the sovereignty of the Scottish people and the need for a Constituent Assembly where their voice could be heard.

When the ‘No’ result was announced on September 19th, it wasn’t met by the cheerful, good-natured celebrations of its supporters. George ‘Just Say Naw’ Galloway and the Red Paper Collective (consisting of Left Labour and Communist Party of Britain members) stood aside. Glasgow’s George Square was left to Loyalists and Fascists who went on a rampage. George Square had been the ‘Tahrir Square’ of the ‘Yes’ Movement and Glasgow had just voted to secede from the Union. Following this, both Labour and Tory politicians, horrified at the unanticipated closeness of the vote, began to make overtures to the Orange Order. ‘Better Together’ became ‘Bitter Together’.

Independence supporters, much closer to a referendum victory than was originally anticipated, have since used a variety of means to advance Scotland’s unfinished Democratic Revolution. In the 2015 Westminster general election, over 51% voted for the independence-supporting SNP and Scottish Greens, whilst the SNP won 56 out of Westminster’s 59 seats, a proportion never seen before in elections in any of the UK’s 52 constituent units. And once ‘Project Fear’s ‘IndyRef1’ promise that only a ‘No’ vote could guarantee Scotland’s continued EU membership was exposed as a con, then ‘All Under One Banner’

organised major demonstrations. These took place in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee, Dumfries and Inverness. Others became involved in Living Rent, rural land and urban community garden campaigns, solidarity with Palestine, Kurdistan and Catalunya, and soon the burgeoning new environmental movement.

b) The reactionary unionist counter-offensive and the creation of ‘Brexit Britain’

After 2014, growing sections of the British ruling class, chastened by the challenges of increasing democratic demands in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and concerned about the regulatory threat posed by the EU bureaucracy to the City of London’s tax dodging island havens, seriously began to consider Brexit. (The EU bureaucracy’s draconian action against Greece and Ireland, certainly didn’t bother them. In Ireland, The City joined with the EU bureaucrats to impose the harshest austerity.)

Scotland’s 2014 referendum franchise had been based on **civic national** principles. It was open to all over 16, whether they were UK subjects or EU citizens. The 2016 Brexit referendum, though, was primarily based on **ethnic national** grounds. It denied the vote to most non-British EU residents and to 16–18-year-olds, i.e. those most affected. If they had been included, it is very likely the vote would have been to ‘Remain’.

This ethnic national franchise heralded the real nature of ‘Brexit Britain’, with migrants and asylum seekers always on the frontline of attacks. This has been highlighted by Teresa May’s attempted Immigration bill (facilitated by Labour Leavers)⁴, Boris Johnson’s and Priti Patel’s Nationality and Borders Act, and Rishi Sunak’s and Suella Braverman’s Illegal Immigration Bill. This offensive has led to deaths of many hundreds of asylum seekers and other unregistered migrants, who have drowned or been asphyxiated. It has also led to the expulsion of non-white British subjects who have lived and worked in the UK nearly all their lives. These and the unresolved Grenfell Towers disaster and recent Windrush scandals are the hallmarks of ‘Brexit Britain’s ‘hostile environment’.

The different political trajectories of ethnic nationalist ‘Brexit Britain’ and civic national Scotland can be seen at Westminster and Holyrood. The Tories are proposing to limit voting by the ‘lower orders’ and to further extend the vote to non-resident British tax dodgers. But Holyrood has extended the franchise to others, including those with refugee status and the right to asylum, under the 2020 Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act.

And under ‘Brexit Britain’ we are seeing the Tories further attacking democracy through the 2022 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act. This is designed to strengthen both the institutionally racist and sexist police force and the many class-biased judges. The Tories’ new anti-strike bill is designed to undermine already highly restricted trade union rights, because recent strikes have been too widely supported by union members and the public alike.

d) The abandonment of socially progressive legislation by the reactionary and conservative unionists and the paralysis of growing numbers of liberal unionists and constitutional nationalists

Back in 2013, Cameron’s Conservatives, following growing socially liberal developments, particularly in the EU, had been prepared to consider gender recognition reform without medical requirements. But under ‘Brexit Britain’, this has been dramatically curtailed, following pressure from the Hard and Far Right. ‘Dark money’ has been channelled to religious supremacists, including the US-based CARE (which has sponsored the SNP’s Kate Forbes) and the World Congress of Families, also supported by Putin-supporting Russian billionaire kleptocrats and politicians. Their prejudices and arguments are the same as those once directed against gays and women. These are a prelude to further attacks on same sex marriage, pro-abortion feminists, progressive teachers and social workers.

The Scottish government, in contrast, declined to follow the road of Trumpite USA, Putinite Russia or Johnsonite ‘Brexit Britain’. 20 states in Europe, Asia and South America passed laws recognising gender self-determination, without any of the drastic consequences prophesised by those opposed. This includes the Republic of Ireland, which approved same-sex marriage and gender self-determination in 2015. Gender recognition reform was in the SNP’s 2021 Holyrood manifesto but opposed by the socially conservative Alba Party. Alba gained no MSPs. On December 22nd, 2022, Holyrood gave its recognition to Gender Recognition Reform (GRR). This was backed by all the Scottish Greens and Lib-Dems, a large majority Scottish Labour Party and SNP MSPs and even 4 Tory MSPs. On January 16th, 2023, Sunak overturned Holyrood’s GRR, a simultaneous attack on trans rights and Scottish devolution.

And when this a vote was taken in Westminster, Starmer called on Labour to abstain. Thus, he undermined the position taken by Scottish Labour at Holyrood over the GRR. Support for socially liberal legislation once distinguished New Labour from the pre-Cameron Conservatives. And just as ‘Brexit Britain’ has paralysed ‘liberal’ Starmer, so Trumpite ‘Amerikkka’ has paralysed ‘liberal’

Biden. This has been shown by the Hard Right's overthrow of the Roe v. Wade amendment in June 2022 under his presidency.

Under Starmer, Labour is retreating backwards so fast that 'New' no longer seems appropriate. Under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, New Labour fully accepted Thatcher's neo-liberal economic legacy, and subordination to the City of London (something she acknowledged and welcomed). But over the previous decade, trade union bureaucrats had become increasingly tamed, after the defeat of the Miners (and many New Realist trade union leaders had given up long before that). For these leaders, increasing their own pay, pensions and perks was their first priority. Union mergers were arranged, not to create 'One Big Fighting Union', but to build up 'one big fat pay cheque' for their leaders.

At this time, any vibrant opposition to Thatcher's Tories came from other sectors. Gay activists led the campaign to overthrow of homophobic Section 28 (Section 2 in Scotland). Women activists led the successful defence of abortion rights. Their actions provided an inspiration which drew in others. Under this pressure, New Labour began to distinguish itself from the Tories by adopting a social neo-liberalism extending to women's, gay and lesbian rights. But there was so little pressure from trade union leaders that Blair could confidently boast that under New Labour "British law {was} the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world."⁵

Some on the Left sneer at movements challenging oppression. They often adopt the Right's language, writing off women's, LBGT+ and BAME demands as 'woke' or 'identity politics.' They do understand the link between 'break-the-glass-ceiling' wing of feminist and LBGT+ politics and the politics of accommodation to neo-liberalism promoted by New Labour. However, they write off the significance of the very different militant gay, feminist and anti-racist politics which preceded this. And when this particular Left's working class is shorn of its identities, it begins to look very white, male, straight and confined to trade unions. And nowhere has 'identity politics' been more dominant than in the trade unions riven with sectionalism. Such divisions can only be countered by uniting our class through **solidarity in our diversity**.

But today, Starmer, having accepted the Tories' Brexit Britain economic 'neo-liberalism in one country', is ditching New Labour's social neo-liberalism and signing up to the Tories' authoritarian illiberalism. He also attacks Labour MPs joining picket lines, but welcomes them cosying up to The City, big pharma, and the Jewish supremacist, Friends of Israel. He has tried to outbid the Tories on law and order, attacking asylum seekers and migrants, plans for the further privatisation of the NHS, and has threatened and expelled party members. He has prevaricated over LBGT+ rights. As the increasingly dysfunctional Tories

stumble from one crisis and leader to another, Starmer seeks the endorsement of The City, the CBI and *The Sun* for his own ‘Boris-Lite’ project.

e) Labour’s post-1998 ‘Devolution-all-round’ deal undermined by reactionary and unionists and increasingly abandoned by liberal unionists and constitutional nationalists

In the 1990s, under New Labour, and in the face of increasing democratic demands in Ireland and Scotland and to a lesser extent Wales, Blair had to concede ‘Devolution-all-round’. His underlying thinking was revealed when he compared the new Scottish parliament with a parish council. Today, Scottish independence is now mainstreamed as an issue. So Starmer is facing even greater challenges. This is why he is calling for a Constitutional Commission. Back in April 1969, Labour resorted to a Royal Commission under Lord Crowther to address the growing national challenges in Scotland and Wales. The intention was to kick the issue into the long grass. By the time the commission reported four years later in October 1973, the Conservatives were in office and Lord Crowther was dead.

However, Starmer’s call for Constitutional Commission is supplemented, for Scottish ears only, by a promise of ‘federalism’. This is a repeat of Gordon Brown’s infamous 2014 ‘Vow’. There is no interest in this amongst Labour politicians in England. There is probably more support at this level for Jack Straw’s call for all-UK votes when it comes to any constitutional reforms - a cross between Franco and Farage. But federalism is impossible under the sovereignty of Crown in Westminster, now being more forcibly asserted by the Supreme Court as the supremacy of the Crown. Whatever is devolved can be taken back. We saw this on November 23rd, 2023, with the UK Supreme Court’s ruling against any Section 30 order. Such an order would recognise Holyrood’s right to organise a Scottish independence referendum, albeit under the UK undemocratic regulations, as in ‘Britain waives the rules’. (A Section 30 Order had been conceded by the unionists in 2012, albeit with opposite intention of extending democracy in Scotland.) We saw it in Sunak’s overthrow of Holyrood’s GRR.

The Supreme Court’s ruling against a legal ‘IndyRef2’ means there is no constitutional road to Scottish independence. The Union will be maintained by any means necessary under the UK’s s anti-democratic Crown Powers. Such a subservient attitude to the Crown will be maintained by any likely future Tory, Lib-Dem or Labour government (or any combination of the three), unless they are faced with massive extra-constitutional action. In the 2021 Holyrood elections, the majority of Scottish voters backed parties calling for ‘IndyRef2’.

This was nearly 8 years after ‘IndyRef1’. Stormont has the constitutional right to call a referendum on Irish unification every 7 years.

But the UK Government Hub, just off Edinburgh’s Royal Mile is **BOSS**. **This represents British Occupied Subject Scotland.** Its power will increasingly marginalise that of that other British institution, the devolved Holyrood parliament, just down the Royal Mile. Unlike BOSS though, ta devolved Scottish parliament won the democratic approval of 74% of the Scottish people. Sunak has used Westminster to suppress Holyrood’s GRR, whilst his Scottish gauleiter, Alister Jack, says he will block Holyrood’s Bottle Recycling Bill. Just as the Tories think that private water companies in England and Wales should have the freedom to pollute rivers (with derisory fines even when they are enforced), so they think the costs of bottle pollution should be borne by the public to maximise private profits.

‘Liberal’ unionists and constitutional nationalists, who connive at letting Sunak and Jack override Holyrood, think their particular opposition to trans self-determination will fend off further reactionary attacks by the Hard Right. But this provides just another example of their paralysis in the face of ‘Brexit Britain’. Sunak and Jack have shown that every concession just encourages full-spectrum reaction. Under the Tories, Holyrood could well come to resemble Tony Blair’s parish council, albeit with high pay, pensions and other perks retained. Then people like the ridiculous Tory leader sycophant, Douglas Ross, can pick up another pay and expenses cheque, whilst moonlighting on his two other day jobs.

f) The competition between the SNP’s constitutional nationalist liberalism and Labour’s British unionist constitutional conservatism, whilst both come up against the UK constitutional brick wall

From 2012-14, the SNP leadership of the official ‘Yes’ campaign was clearly in the hands of politicians wedded to neo-liberalism. Throughout the UK, and increasingly the Republic of Ireland, neo-liberal economics had been fully accepted by Right social democrats and more apologetically by Centre social democrats. In the UK, ‘Blatcherism’ was the name of the game. In Scotland, Alex Salmond competed with Gordon Brown, over who could make the most deregulation concessions to The City, or in Salmond’s case the Royal Bank of Scotland. Salmond’s Scottish social democracy was to be funded by profits trickling down from Scotland’s mega-banks. Just how all these funds were to be obtained from The City’s Scottish banks, tied into tax evasion through the UK’s tax havens, was not made clear. Salmond also courted Rupert Murdoch and Donald Trump.

But the 2008 Crash gutted Salmond's 'Celtic Lion'. Gordon Brown converted private banksters' debts into sovereign public state debts, whilst leaving their profits private. If the penalties applied to those deemed to have misappropriated welfare benefits had been applied to the banksters, the prisons would have long crumbled before their long-dead body remains were dug up. But instead of 'trickle down', the reality has been an upward torrent of public money into the hands of banksters. After 1833, slaveowners were paid compensation for their slaves (who received nothing) and were only finally paid off in 2015. The banksters, whose activities led to the Crash, will receive high interest payments and obscene bonuses for decades to come, unless ousted from power.

But in the lead up to 'IndyRef1', Scottish Labour handed the SNP leaders a political gift. Under the aptly named Midwinter Report, then party leader, Johann Lamont proposed a bonfire of Labour's welfare state reforms. As a result, the SNP did not have to put forward any Left social democratic manifesto. They just had to say they wouldn't go so far down Labour's neo-liberal road. They also offered some cosmetic name changes, e.g. the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) became the Private Public Partnership (PPP). But it wasn't until 2016 that the SNP leaders publicly adopted their own midwinter report for workers' pay, conditions and welfare benefit, the Sustainable Growth Commission (SGC).

During the 'IndyRef1' campaign, with Labour so publicly attacking their own welfare state legacy, the SNP was able to win over the majority of the male working class to a 'Yes' vote. There were few alive who had directly experienced Labour's reforming zeal from 1945-51. However, winning over women to vote 'Yes' proved to be harder. Many women were alive when Labour introduced the 1970 Equal Pay and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Acts. Furthermore, unlike Labour's earlier welfare legislation, New Labour had not directly attacked these.

Labour still had many sexist dinosaurs. But sexist and homophobic dinosaurs appeared to be even more rampant in the SNP. Their Dunfermline MSP, Bill Walker, was convicted of 23 cases of sexual abuse in 2013. The party organisation had long ignored all the warning signs. Salmond, as an MP, had booked a flight to Westminster in 2008 solely to vote for a Tory MP's amendment to limit abortion rights (fortunately unsuccessfully). The SNP's biggest financial backer, Sir Brian Souter, owner of the global Stagecoach, campaigned to retain the Tories' homophobic Section 2A amendment in Scotland.

Yet, despite the proportion of 'Nos' amongst women being greater than amongst men, the rainbow alliance nature of the wider 'Yes' campaign, made its impact felt in the SNP. There was Women for Independence and also the popular and openly gay journalist Paul Kavanagh - the Wee Ginger Dug. Following 'St. Nicola's anointment as SNP leader at the 12,000 strong rally on November 14th

2014 (next door to the 3000 strong RIC rally), the SNP's Holyrood leaders became committed to a 50:50 ministerial team. They were keen to overtake Labour for women's support. And just as the SNP replaced Alex Salmond with Nicola Sturgeon, Labour replaced Johann Lamont with Jim Murphy!

But there was a definite ambiguity in the SNP's approach to promoting social equality. The SNP, just like Labour, had attracted opportunist and careerist women and men. The SNP leaders unquestioning acceptance of neo-liberal economics meant that they also promoted 'break the glass ceiling' politics. These are designed to advance the careers of individual women and those from an LBGT+ background within the existing socio-economic order. This leaves the majority in both these groups economically little better off.

After being elected as an MP in 2015, Nicola McGarry had to be suspended from the SNP, for financial embezzlement, for which she eventually sentenced to 20 months imprisonment. A growing sense of entitlement and not being accountable for their behaviour developed amongst SNP politicians, just as it had long done amongst Tory, Labour and Lib-Dem politicians. Derek Mackay, MSP and SNP leader hopeful, had the whip withdrawn in February 2022. Patrick Grady MP had to resign from the party in October 2022. Jordan Linden, their former North Lanarkshire council leader, had to resign in July 2022.

Furthermore, whether plotted by the SNP leadership or not, the case against 'sex pest' Salmond (his defence lawyer's term) was conducted through Scotland's highly flawed legal system.⁶ Significantly, this has the backing of the Crown Office. The SNP's subservience before the UK state's existing devolved political, administrative and legal institutions is revealing. Scotland's legal system is subordinate to the Crown.

The Crown Office's blatant manipulation of the Salmond case, and the collusion with the country's top civil servant, should have led to the overlapping role of enquirer and prosecutor being scrapped, as Salmond argued. And as he also argued, this should have led to the dismissal of Crown Office's Lord Advocate, James Wolff QC and Leslie Evans, Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Office. Instead, the public had to pay a substantial amount of money to pay for their partisan behaviour.

But just as revealing was Salmond's insistence that it was only the present incumbents (backed by the Scottish government) who were to blame, not the Crown's legal system itself. Salmond still wants to maintain this class and racially biased legal system. Its role was highlighted by Wolff's mishandling of Sheku Bayoh's death in police custody in Kirkcaldy on May 3rd, 2015. In the Scottish legal sphere, private privilege overrides public justice, just as in the

economic sphere, company profits remain private, whilst their social costs and debts are passed on to the public.

Meanwhile the UK's Supreme Court still presides over the Scottish legal system as the final court of appeal. This can only be overridden by even more powerful ruling class forces. This was shown when the US State Department ignored its 2008 ruling to return the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean back to their deported inhabitants. It was shown when Joanna Cherry, the SNP's Westminster Spokesperson for Justice got a September 25th, 2019, Supreme Court ruling against Johnson's proroguing of Westminster. But this was effectively negated when the Supreme Court took no effective action against Johnson, the perpetrator of this major constitutional breach. And to this day, neither the SNP leadership, Cherry, nor Salmond's Alba Party have any answer to the Supreme Court's ability to block Scottish independence.

In the run-up to the December 18th, 2019, Westminster general election, an increasingly hapless Corbyn-led, British Labour 'opposition', had facilitated May with ever harder 'Brexit's', including anti-migrant policies.⁷ He also buckled before the Right over other issues, e.g. over bogus anti-Semitic challenges. With the backing of the arch-bureaucrats, the 4Ms, Len McCluskey, Karie Murphy, Andrew Murray and Seamus Milne (the latter two ex-CPBers) – Corbyn also suppressed the Labour Left's longstanding demand for Labour candidate reselection, ensuring that unpopular incumbent Right wing MPs remained in place.

Seeing the opinion polls, the British ruling class felt little threat from Corbyn. Despite their official reprimand, the Supreme Court, reflecting the wishes of a now Hard Right dominated British ruling class, allowed a still-in-office Johnson to proceed to his Plan B. He organised a Westminster general election on a date that suited him best - December 18th, 2019. The now Hard Right, British ruling class majority talked up a non-existent Marxist threat. The vast majority of incumbent Labour MPs and other candidates were on the Right. Yet Corbyn supporters inside and outside the Labour Party asked people to vote for them. In the unlikely event of Corbyn about to become prime minister, he would have been promptly ousted by Labour's Right dominated, parliamentary party.

The UK has an unwritten constitution. This means the British ruling class can make it up as they go along. This massively favours this class. Yet ever since Scotland's Democratic Revolution, and the mounting pressure in Northern Ireland, they have been deeply aware of the UK's ongoing constitutional crisis. 'Get Brexit Done' was the slogan for them taking back even more control. The Tories clearly indicated to business leaders that donations to the party would be rewarded by seats in the House of Lords, lucrative contracts (even if companies

could not fulfil them) and most of all by a bonfire of protective EU laws on workers', consumer and environmental rights.

Those one-time Labour voters in the 'Red Wall' constituencies had had their trade unions shackled, tenant associations broken up and their local public welfare provision decimated, often as much by New Labour as the Tories. Johnson's Tories were able to focus on this, and laughably played up his 'anti-Westminster elite' posturing, much aided by the Right wing dominated media. They provided scapegoats – 'welfare scroungers' and immigrants.

In contrast, to Johnson's constitutionally focussed, 'Get Brexit Done' and in typical social democrat fashion, Corbyn hoped to ignore the constitutional issue. He offered a Labour manifesto, *Its Time for Real Change*, with a Green New Deal and support for the NHS. Delivering this depended, not only on the support of the Labour Right, but on using the existing reactionary UK constitutional set-up. Indeed, so unquestioning were Corbyn supporters, the manifesto just duplicated Johnson's constitutional proposals for Scotland (no 'IndyRef2'), for Northern Ireland (a restoration of the bi-sectarian Stormont) and for local government (with more city mayors taking their lead from big business). He accepted the UK's subordination to NATO and Trident renewal (pushed by Right GMB, general secretary, Tim Roache and 'Left' UNITE general secretary, Len McCluskey - 'British jobs for British workers').

However, although going down to inglorious defeat, there were still some in Left Labour who had benefitted from the party's support for the constitutional status quo. Corbyn made Red Paper Collective editor, Pauline Bryan the Baroness of Partick in 2018. Left Labour, ex-MP, Katy Clark became Baroness of Kilwinning in 2020. However, Corbyn's campaign organiser, Karie Murphy, with a somewhat chequered trade union official career in Unison and UNITE, failed in her own post-2019 bid to join the House of Lords. But with her partner, McCluskey's large pension, she won't need to visit any food banks!

g) The rise of the Hard Right and reactionary unionism leads to a growing crisis in the SNP, highlighted by the post-Sturgeon leadership election

The SNP leadership's strategy to get independence, both under Salmond and Sturgeon, has been to court and build-up a wannabe Scottish ruling class. Hence their emphasis on a neo-liberal economic approach. But positioning themselves as social democrats to eat into the Scottish Labour vote, also meant defending some of Labour's own abandoned social democratic reforms, e.g. SNP opposition to university fees, private hospitals and the decomprensification of schooling.

But none of these fundamentally breach the dominant neo-liberalism, nor prevent creeping privatisation within the public sector.

However, since 2015, the SNP leadership's approach to achieving Scottish independence has developed in two stages. After the defeat of the 'Yes' vote, they depended on David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband honouring their 'IndyRef1', liberal unionist, 'Devo-Plus' pledge. This did not happen, and enthusiasm for the SNP fell away, with many previously SNP voters abstaining in the 2016 Holyrood and 2017 Westminster general elections and a few turning to Corbyn's Labour Party in Scotland. The Scottish Labour Party was now led by former GMB official Richard Leonard. He did win majority support in the trade union vote for leader but, unlike Corbyn, he enjoyed little support in the constituencies. The constituency equivalent of the Left (which formed Momentum in England and Wales) had already joined the SNP in Scotland.

Seeing the disappearance of liberal unionist support among the British ruling class, and hence the Tories, Lib-Dems and Labour, the SNP looked increasingly to EU leaders for political support after the 2016 Brexit vote. But given that the EU is made up of existing states, including the still semi-Francoist, Castilian supremacist Spain, strongly opposed to any existing state's break-up, this has also proved to be illusory. (This is nothing new. Earlier, the EU's predecessor, the EC, turned a blind eye to the UK and Spanish states' resort to repression, including death squads, in both Northern Ireland and Euskadi).

The last attempt to look to the now very reluctant British liberal unionists occurred in the 2019 Westminster election. Boris Johnson, new Lib-Dem leader, Jo Swinson, and Jeremy Corbyn all had opposition to 'IndyRef2' in their manifestoes. But the SNP leadership hoped for a Corbyn-led minority government which would have to concede 'IndyRef2' as the price of support. Furthermore, the SNP MPs had a better record of opposing Tory laws at Westminster than Labour MPs (and over migration that included the Labour Left too). So, any SNP MPs would be more reliable Corbyn UK government supporters than most Scottish Labour MPs. In the election, the SNP vote advanced with a gain of 13 MPs, but Labour's all-Britain wide party fell back badly, losing 60 MPs. In Scotland, Labour lost 6 MPs leaving only their Right wing MP, Ian Murray. He mainly courted unionist votes from the Tories and Lib-Dems in 'Red Morningside'!

After Johnson's electoral triumph there was not even the slightest political opening for the SNP's constitutional nationalist road to Scottish independence. But things were to get worse. The British ruling class took renewed confidence from Johnson's victory. They looked to the UK's state bodies, not only to block further constitutional reform, but to substantially roll back the post-1998

‘Devolution-all-round’ settlement. The SNP had skilfully used Holyrood to take patronage opportunities out of the hands of the unionists, hoping to win Scottish business support. The UK government began to bypass these politically devolved institutions, putting more control into the hands of BOSS.

Like Corbyn-led, Labour’s 2017 Westminster electoral surge, the SNP and Scottish Greens in the 2021 Holyrood elections, pushed up their support. But they also gained a clear majority. This majority was won in the basis of support for ‘IndyRef2’. But the Tories did not make the slightest concession. Corbyn had been used by May to help advance her Brexit agenda, before Johnson unceremoniously dumped Corbyn’s Brexit posturing, and lined him up as an ‘Aunt Sally’, to further Hard Right politics. Sturgeon has since been used by Sunak and Jack to help advance their ultra neo-liberal, greenwashed ‘free’ ports agenda. But it was the failure of the Supreme Court to concede a Section 30 order, which proved to be the dead-end for Sturgeon’s ‘IndyRef2’ strategy.

Following the SNP’s significant advance in the 2019 Westminster general elections, unacknowledged by the Tories, voices began to be raised in the party for a Plan B. Suggestions included a Catalan style DIY referendum, and a new Holyrood election with a majority favouring Scottish independence leading to UDI. The SNP’s bureaucratic machine blocked any such discussion at its 2020 conference. Cherry became an open dissident, but eager to maintain her career, remained in the SNP. Others though plotted behind the scenes to create a new party - Alba. You don’t get the impression though, that if the boot had been on the other foot, this growing band of SNP dissidents would have shown the slightest interest in internal party democracy. Alba’s own openly racist, transphobic, sexist and careerist candidates in the 2021 Holyrood election looked like Salmond’s personal choice. Whereas one might have expected well-known Salmond supporters, Tommy Sheridan and Craig Murray to have been awarded Alba candidacies, Salmond wanted nobody who might upstage him. So, he promoted political lightweights, who would just do his bidding.

Alba looked to socially reactionary forces for support. ‘Braveheart’ style rhetoric has been used to hide Alba’s own lack of any real strategy to challenge the Tory Right, reactionary unionist UK government. Voices expressing a Scottish ethnic (and anti-English) approach appeared online. But Alba’s candidates in the 2021 Holyrood elections, failed to make an impression.

Since then, though, the SNP leadership’s desperate and failed appeal to the Supreme Court for a Section 30 Order, has left Sturgeon politically stranded. And after the SNP/Scottish Green government’s patient and successful management of GRR legislation in Holyrood, both Alba and the few socially conservative internal SNP critics, were able to find new allies. These come from the US

religious Hard Right, Christian financed and staffed organisations in Scotland, from the vitriolic Right wing British unionist media and from Sunak's Hard Right, socially reactionary UK government.

Fast forward to the current SNP leadership election and despite the obvious divisions, we can see all three candidates have supported the SNP's longstanding neo-liberal agenda. Sturgeon wouldn't have put them in the Scottish cabinet if they hadn't.

Kate Forbes, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, since February 2020, is the candidate most closely associated with the SNP's 2018 Sustainable Growth Commission. This was widely slated for recommending continued subordination to the City, a 4% drop in public spending, and as the Institute of Fiscal Studies pointed out, "a continuation of austerity".⁸ Forbes' more recent 2022 National Strategy for Economic Transformation was welcomed by Scottish Financial Enterprise because "entrepreneurialism {is} at the core of the strategy."⁹ And in her leadership campaign, Forbes has flagged up her complete subordination to big business. She has said she would scrap the Scottish government's Bottle Recycling bill. Private companies right to profit from environmental degradation goes along with the public paying the financial and environmental costs.

Forbes has little intention of following even the limited green agenda of the present SNP/Scottish Green coalition. She is probably keen to ditch this coalition, knowing that a minority SNP government would be even more dependent on the economic constraints imposed by the Scottish Tories, Labour and Lib-Dems (as between 2007-2011) and by Sunak and Jack continuing to override Holyrood – a perfect situation for Scottish business.

Ash Regan's main purpose in standing as leader is to compete with Forbes for the leadership of a socially reactionary agenda, centred on attacking trans rights and hoping to reopen the SNP to departed social conservatives. Sheridan has indicated he could join the SNP if Regan is elected leader.¹⁰ Since his misogynistic behaviour in his 2006 defamation and 2010 perjury trials, Sheridan linked up with ex-SNP MSP, David Thompson, who opposed same-sex marriage.¹¹ They formed Action for Independence. They both went on to join Alba. Regan announced she would work with Sheridan.¹²

But Regan's Community Safety Minister was a junior post. Although also accepting the government's neo-liberal agenda, Regan did not enjoy Forbes' fortuitous senior-level Cabinet promotion or her longer-standing close links with big business. To compensate for this, Regan has announced that if she gets to lead the SNP, Holyrood would back-peddle on its environmental concerns and

call on the fossil fuel companies to step up production. Clearly, like Forbes, she wants to break the SNP/Scottish Green coalition links.

But to cover this up, Regan is the loudest of the candidates in calling herself the 'Braveheart' candidate, ready for early Scottish independence. Unlike the horrific fate of William Wallace, even the current reactionary unionist UK government is unlikely to go ahead with hanging, drawing and quartering Regan. But the idea that any likely British government will just cave into any new Regan-led SNP majority government, after a future election, shows that she is the candidate who least appreciates the reactionary unionist nature of the UK state and the entitled self-interest of the British ruling class.

The other two candidates, Kate Forbes and Humza Youssef understand this but have no plans to challenge this. They are prepared to play a longer-term waiting game. Like British Labour leader Starmer, they are awaiting the further unwinding of the Sunak's ever-divided government. They want to get enough big business backing, to which any progressive social economic agenda will be sacrificed. For Starmer this means promoting 'Boris-Lite'. For Forbes and Yousef this means prompting 'Indy-very-Lite'. They want major tax cuts for business and will accept major welfare cuts for the rest of us.

Yousef has been closer to the centre of SNP government policy than Regan. However, in having responsibility for a particular social service – health – Yousef has accepted the government running this service through pseudo-market, top-down, imposed target setting. This means not only downplaying social needs but diverting large amounts of public money from the workers who deliver the services to the of highly paid, pensioned and privileged chief executives. They are constantly looking for closer personal links with the private sector. They often use private education or health facilities for themselves or their families and pursue lifestyles comparable with middle level business leaders.

Meanwhile, chief executives attack the job security, pay, conditions and pensions of their workforces. These are the sort of managers who have presided over scandalous PFI or PPP contracts such as the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. At Local Council level, similarly motivated managers have pushed no-penalty clause or final completion date contracts for Edinburgh trams. These are the sort of managers who turned on the socially concerned, SNP Health minister Jean Freeman. She was trying to handle their woeful record over Edinburgh's Sick Children's Hospital. They forced her out of national politics. The SNP government, wedded to such managements, could provide her with no effective backing.

The SNP government also stood back whilst largely unionist supporting Tayside Health Board leaders attacked largely SNP supporting hospital porters looking for pay parity across the Region. The SNP leadership also rewarded former MSP, Andrew Wilson, with chairmanship of their SGC, after he used his private management consultancy company to undermine the SNP government/trade union (EIS) deal over further education lecturers' contacts pay and conditions.

On becoming elected SNP leader, Sturgeon announced that she should be judged on the narrowing of the education attainment gap. However, with her continued support for a neo-liberal approach in public sector management, this gap has widened. Yousef, committed to the same approach, will just lead further retreats in social provision, and workers' pay and conditions. The SNP leaders' fall-back excuse, that at least things aren't so bad as in England, provides little succour for the parents of students in understaffed schools, or patients facing longer waiting times for medical consultations and operations.

Yousef represents the Sturgeon continuity candidate, pledged to maintain the SNP/Scottish Green governmental coalition. As minister responsible for health, he is at a disadvantage compared with Forbes, who has been one-step removed from the frontline of service management in her role as a finance minister. She has put herself forward as the "competent" candidate - competent at devolving Westminster cuts on public services and prioritising business profits over social needs. So, if Yousef is elected leader, he is likely to be a short-term replacement as disappointment, resentment and anger continues to mount.

A Forbes-leadership, though, would lead to an even more business accommodating SNP. Along with others on the party's Right, like Peter Wishart MSP, prioritisation is given to winning over and creating a new business-led Scottish ruling class and imposing whatever conditions they demand - hence her National Strategy for Economic Transformation. She is prepared to wait until Scottish business gives up on a continually declining all-UK economy. Meanwhile for the SNP's Right being an MSP or MP, even if temporarily in opposition, provides a good income, perks and pension, and an avenue to lucrative positions as consultants or directors in private businesses and NGOs.

But in Forbes' case it goes beyond this. She is the British Right wing media's favoured candidate. Currently there is a divergence between a more socially progressive Scottish government and a socially regressive UK government. But a Forbes-led SNP government could become the vehicle for imposing a shared socially reactionary agenda, backed by the Hard Right in the USA. And in sharing the US and UK's imperialist agenda, the SNP resembles the old Irish Home Rule Party. It hoped for share in the running of the British empire. This was never granted, although the Irish Home Rulers signed up to serve British

imperialism in the First World War. In today's ever-declining British empire, there is no room for any sharing of the shrinking spoils. But Scottish military forces could still be sacrificed for British imperial wars, as they were under Blair and Brown in Iraq. And Forbes' Free Church of Scotland has a historical record of backing British imperial wars, and even of backing chattel slavery in pre-emancipation USA.

Regan is also out to court big business, particularly the fossil fuel corporations. She is Alba's favoured candidate. Alba's Neil Handley can currently be seen attending workers' picket lines, claiming the party's full support. Salmond probably still wants to maintain his behind-the-scenes contacts with the Royal Bank, so is unlikely to join them. So far it seems that Handley hasn't persuaded Regan to join these picket lines for a photo opportunity. Regan certainly won't be challenging Sunak's anti-democratic overthrow of GRR. So, in this respect she joins Forbes. But Regan tries to cover up her shared Forbes and Sunak/Jack business accommodating and socially regressive policies.

If defeated will Regan join Alba? She is the candidate calling for an Independence Convention stretching beyond the SNP. This is code mainly for bringing Alba on board. Don't expect the wider Rainbow Alliance of 'IndyRef1' to be invited. Regan shares Alba's 'Braveheart' nationalism. But since this is very unlikely to shift the current Tory or a future Starmer-led government, Alba too could face the split currently looming in the SNP. Will a section of Alba then move to the Far Right, following in the footsteps of anti-English Soil nan Gaidheal, cheered on by Stuart Campbell?

What all this depends upon is whether an independent Left can mount a republican, 'internationalism from below' challenge for the leadership of the Scottish independence movement. The problems doing this arise not only from the wider impact of political retreat after the highpoint of Scotland's Democratic Republic. The Left in Scotland also carries a whole lot of political baggage, which needs questioned.

h) The further encroachment of the Right on Scottish politics, assisted by political retreat and the Left's political baggage

The 2012-14 'IndyRef' campaign provided an opportunity, taken up by many, to push for an economic, social, political and international agenda, which went far beyond that of the SNP government's 'Yes Scotland' front. The wider autonomous 'Yes' campaign was able to extend from below the civic national and socially inclusive approach of the SNP government, creating an internationalist, rainbow alliance.

But some key people drawn into the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign since have buckled under the US and UK Right-led reactionary counter-offensive. Perhaps the most spectacular volte-face has been Stuart Campbell. As the possibility of a Scottish independence referendum grew from 2011, he had changed course from being a Liberal supporter. His *Wee Blue Book* played a significant role in countering Project Fear’s misinformation. But since the failure to win a ‘Yes’ vote, Campbell ‘s *Wings over Scotland* has followed the blog style of the Alt-Right. In Ellon Musk, Campbell has found a Twitter account owner, who is keen to promote his politics.

Even before 2014, Campbell had attacked the victims of the Hillsborough disaster and had belittled Gaelic speakers. But since then, his hate-filled politics have risen to a crescendo with his personalised attacks on Nicola Sturgeon to ever more vitriolic anti-trans diatribes. He has written that he would now vote Tory in his Bath constituency, because he has a trans Lib-Dem MP. In the unlikely event of Scotland becoming independent through adopting Campbell’s politics, it would just be a tartan version of a Kate Hopkins-led England. But the strange thing is Campbell is a self-proclaimed ‘Reverend’ (for god’s sake, which church!). Despite being able to make large sums of undisclosed money through crowd-funding, he still chooses to remain in posh Bath in England!

Two journalists, Kevin McKenna and Ian MacWhirter, also recent converts to and prominent supporters of Scottish independence during ‘IndyRef1’, have now adopted the anti-woke language used by the Alt-Right. They claim to speak-up for women and to defend their ‘safe spaces’, attacking those who criticise transphobic and ‘gender critical’ feminists. The latter are in reality very gender uncritical, reducing all women to a sexual childbearing role which so many Feminists have tried to break free from. Anti-trans thinking soon leads 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 human beings.

Neither McKenna nor MacWhirter are averse to making their own personalised male chauvinist attacks on women they disagree with. But McKenna still adheres to some social democratic ideas. MacWhirter, though, now looks to the private fossil fuel companies, which have blocked moves at every stage, to deliver a reduced carbon economy. Presumably they are to be awarded massive bribes with public funds to do so. And from his own comfortable private education background, MacWhirter attacks public sector workers taking action to defend their pensions.

But to understand the current wider impact of socially conservative and reactionary thinking, it is also necessary to appreciate the history of a section of

the Left in Scotland who have organised outside the dominant British Labour Party in Scotland. Historically, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), its breakaway Communist Party of Scotland (CPS), Scottish Militant Labour (SML) and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) have all had either a Westminster MP (CPGB), MSPs (SSP), or local councillors (CPGB, CPS, SML, SSP, and very briefly the SSP breakaway Solidarity). Along with the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the ex-Militant) Socialist Party of England and Wales SPE&W, they have also had a presence in trade union leaderships.

During ‘IndyRef1’ the main successor party of the CPGB, the Communist Party of (the no longer so Great) Britain (CPB), joined with the Labour Left unionists in the Red Paper Collective, to urge a ‘No’ vote. So did Ceausescu admirer, George Galloway, then still a supporter of Scottish devolution and the EU.

However, the SSP and its breakaways – Solidarity (the Tommy Sheridan vanity party), the SWP (with merely British regional organisation in Scotland), and the Socialist Party of Scotland, (a branch office of SPE&W) and the SWP breakaway, the International Socialist Group - Scotland (ISG-S), joined the wider ‘Yes’ movement. All these organisations (with the exception of the newly-founded ISG-S) had shrunk in size since their earlier highpoints. All (including the ISG-S) inherited many of the sectarian, anti-democratic practices of the ‘revolutionary’ Left. These were the flip side of the deeply bureaucratic, anti-democratic and careerist practices of the Right and Left in the Labour Party and trade union machinery.¹³

However, the sheer size of the wider ‘Yes’ movement and of the main Left organisation within it, the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), meant that local exceptions aside, none of these organisations were able to take overall control. This was very different from the various front organisations of the SWP or SPE&W. RIC played a significant part in Scotland’s Democratic Revolution.

One political problem within RIC was Movementism. This was a feature of both the ISG-S (an SWP breakaway from which they inherited this) and many Anarchists. Whenever the vibrant activity associated with a particular movement or campaign ebbs, they move on looking for pastures new.

The ISG-S, mainly (like the SWP) saw the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign as a surrogate movement for social democratic-style economic and social reforms, e.g. over precarious labour and housing. However, this approach left the SNP’s constitutional strategy largely uncontested. Instead, Movementists organised to pressurise the SNP government to make immediate concessions or to become overtly Left social democratic. This is analogous to the way that trade unionists take industrial action to improve pay and conditions, and some Socialists call on

Labour to adopt a Left social democratic programme or at least electoral manifesto.

The Movementists ignore or downplay Scotland's Democratic Revolution. At a time of almost permanent UK constitutional crisis, they leave constitutional issues to others. Along with sects claiming to be parties or proto-parties, they argue over whether the constitutional options offered by the SNP leadership, the Labour Party or Alba provides the best framework to advance their social democratic policies. They offer advice to these parties, claiming how much better they would do electorally, if they took up their particular social democratic demands, programmes or manifestoes.

Not seeing the significance of the constitutional issue also explains the ISG-S's flip from supporting the SNP government's constitutional proposals in 'IndyRef1', to several of them backing Corbynite Left Labour figures in Scotland, whilst later some helped, wittingly or unwittingly, to pave the way for Alba. This last lurch to the Right led to their attempt to close down RIC¹⁴.

'IndyRef1' had mainstreamed Scottish independence as an issue. However, in the run-up to and the aftermath of the 2015 Westminster general election, the SNP was able to hoover up a majority of those active in the wider 'Yes' movement. With the majority on the Left seeing themselves as a pressure group on the SNP, this followed an understandable logic when the SNP emerged as the dominant political force in Scotland.

But this is linked to something deeper in the Left's politics. They have little understanding of the nature of the UK state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, often terming it Britain. They do not appreciate the significance of the UK's sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster, nor the anti-democratic Crown powers. They cannot see the role of various hybrid-identities – Scottish-, Welsh- and 'Ulster'-British in bolstering Union and Empire, or the different conservative, reactionary and liberal unionist strategies the British ruling class had adopted to maintain its rule. And in times of great constitutional crisis this ruling class has also called upon constitutional nationalists too to help bail them out.

Thus, whilst confident in their superior appreciation of economic and social issues, they could not see that the SNP leaders needed challenged in the arena in which it seemed so politically dominant – Scottish independence. A now authoritarian Hard Right and a reactionary unionist-controlled UK state acted as a block to a constitutional nationalist road to independence. An understanding of this, allows the longer-term political alternative contesting the SNP leadership of

the Independence Movement on a republican, ‘internationalism from below’ basis.

But for much of the Left, it wasn’t so much the nature of the UK state, which was the problem. It was the Tories, the British ruling class’s party of first choice. Those from the Movementist (ISG-S) and the sectarian tradition (as the SSP had increasingly become) formed Respect, Independence, Socialism and Equality - Scotland’s Left Alliance (RISE). This was an opportunist electoral stitch-up for the 2016 Holyrood election. It hoped to play its part in the creation of a Tory-free Scotland, holding the balance of power alongside the SNP and Scottish Greens. RISE had nothing to say on Scotland’s constitutional future, or the looming issue of Brexit/Scoxit, because it saw these as too contentious. It hoped, by avoiding these constitutional issues, to win support purely on economic and social issues. In an election where constitutional issues were to the fore, this approach, the election result and subsequent political disorientation, just confirmed RISE’s political irrelevancy.

But the need to recognise trans rights had become more prominent during ‘IndyRef1’, and the SNP hadn’t yet openly adopted such a position. At that time, even Cameron’s Conservative government was prepared to consider moves in this direction. RISE, trying to be ahead of the game, gave a voice to the pro-trans rights, Time for Inclusive Education (TIE). Later, the SNP government was to take TIE on board. But some amongst the original ISG members then went in the other direction. They became critical of ‘identity politics’ and adopted ‘anti-woke’ language, with its origins on the US AltRight.

For many, a “Tory-free” (not a UK-free) Scotland has been their clarion call during the ‘Yes’ campaign. As if New Labour, under Blair and Gordon, had not pushed The City’s neo-liberal agenda and the British High Command and NATO’s wars even further. In Scotland, Labour provided the prime support for the UK state. Cameron, pushed by the Far and Hard Right (which should have been a big clue), agreed to hold an EU membership referendum, following his 2015 general election promise.

Unable, on constitutional issues, to distinguish between Right and Left, the emerging Left Brexiteers saw ‘Take Back Control’ as much the same as Independence for Scotland. And since the Tories were officially advocating ‘Remain’, these Left Brexiteers would advocate ‘Leave’. But the real divide between the official ‘Remain’ and ‘Leave’ campaigns was a reflection of that between two wings of the British ruling class. The Eurosceptic wing saw ‘Remain’ as the best tactic to undermine the EU’s remnant social democratic legacy from within, in alliance with the US Democrats. The Europhobic wing saw ‘Leave’ as the best way to break up the EU and any other mildly ameliorative

transnational institutions, to pursue ‘America First’/‘Britain Second’, in alliance with the emerging Hard Right Republicans led by Trump.

The Red Paper Collective and George Galloway had proved to be a marginal force in the Right-led, ‘No’ to Scottish independence campaign. However, the Left Brexiteers, the CPB, Left Labour and Galloway, were now being augmented by SWP, its breakaways, SPE&W and Solidarity (in Scotland). But, despite this ‘Worse Together’, they proved to be even more marginal in the ‘Leave’ campaign, particularly as growing sections of the British ruling class provided their backing for ‘Leave’. This was highlighted when Bank of England governor, Sir Mark Carney announced his support for Johnson’s Brexit Deal on 19th October, two months before the ‘Get Brexit Done’ general election. And there was a clear reactionary unionist aspect to this. The British ruling class was getting ready to undermine its previous liberal unionist, ‘Devolution-all-round’ deal. Loyalists saw Brexit as an opportunity to undermine the GFA and its successors and, particularly for them, the much hated ‘parity of esteem’.

‘Bring back control’ always meant giving the fullest control to the British ruling class, the UK state, and the City of London. The ethnic nationalist franchise and the exclusion of 16–18-year-olds was largely ignored by Left Brexiteers. And this was only the start. To any but the most politically deluded, it was always clear that the Brexiters’ “bonfire of EU regulations” meant scrapping existing workers’, consumers’ and environmental protections. These are to be ended under the Retained EU Law Bill of January 18th, 2023.

But for the Tories (and now Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour) Brexit will never be done – it is too good a cover for reactionary forces. So, even an organisation like the SSP, which had supported ‘Remain’, understanding the reactionary economic and social consequences, and increased national chauvinism and racism ‘Leave’ would lead to, thought that Brexit was now done. For the SSP, like so much of the Left in the UK, including Scotland, this means ignoring constitutional issues and concentrating on economic and social issues.

h) RIC reconstituted and the 2023 Declaration of Calton Hill

After the attempted shutdown on 17.1.21, RIC was reconstituted on January 29th, 2022.¹⁵ Delegates and individuals attended from the Borders, Clydebank, Dundee, East Kilbride, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, North Lanarkshire and Stirling. Aberdeen was cut off by Storm Malik! Angus & Mearns, whilst unable to attend, sent in their support for the proposals, which had been circulated beforehand. Two new affiliated organisations, the Republican Socialist Platform – RSP (a successor to the Republican Communist Network which had been

affiliated to RCN mark 1), and the SNP Socialists, also attended. Individual Scottish Green members were looking to the party's reaffiliation. The Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers continued its affiliation. Others in particular political organisations, including anarchists, joined RIC as individual members. Many are active in organisations such as Living Rent and international solidarity campaigns,

RIC went on to organise a very successful conference on June 12th, 2021, with guest speakers, Blair Anderson, Graham Campbell, Brenda Eadie, Janet Fenton, Katie Gallogly-Swan and Annie Lane. RIC also formed part of the Cop-26 Coalition in November 2021. RIC's activities were favourably reported by Nan Spowart in the *Sunday National*¹⁶. This article covered RIC's special emphasis on the role of stateless nations and indigenous peoples.

However, the key difference between the old RIC and the new RIC was the need to go beyond the old third principle:- 'A modern republic for real democracy.' In effect, this meant that a republic is seen as state without a monarchy. But republicanism is a democratic political principle, championing the sovereignty of the people. The old principle acted as a kind of Labour Party Clause 4 - the abolition of the monarchy - could be left until after 'Indy Ref1'. The debate over republicanism began at the very first RIC conference.¹⁷ But it was only at the National Forum on May 17th, in Glasgow, that RIC agreed to recognise **the sovereignty of the Scottish people and the need for a Constituent Assembly where their voice could be heard.**¹⁸

However, this was never tested because of the 'No' vote on September 19th, 2014. And by the time of the 2016 Holyrood election, the ex-ISG-S Movementists, having committed themselves to RISE, retreated once more to the old RIC third principle. However, it had already become quite clear that the unionists were not going to allow 'IndyRef2'. And by the time of Johnson's reactionary unionist government in 2019, the British ruling class was quite prepared to resort to the full panoply of the UK state's anti-democratic Crown Powers, not only to prevent 'IndyRef2', but even to roll back the limited democracy conceded under the 1998 'Devolution-all-round' 'deal.

This should have been the main issue at the RIC conference on 17.1.21. But with the SNP government floundering, those ex-ISG-S Movementists now organised in *conter* were looking for other Independence Movement leaders – Kenny Macaskill was mentioned. *Conter* rather easily fell into the still secret Alba plans to kill off RIC. They certainly damaged RIC, but with a new keen younger membership, RIC has been revived.

And central to this was the unanimous decision to adopt Six Principles:-

- 1) For a democratic, secular, socially just and environmentally sustainable, Scottish Republic**
- 2) Action based on the sovereignty of the people not the UK Crown, leading to the setting up of a Constituent Assembly**
- 3) Action to establish universal health, care, education, housing, income, pensions, and trade union rights; and to win land reform and challenge environmental degradation**
- 4) Equality and opposition to discrimination on grounds of sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion/belief, disability or age**
- 5) Solidarity with the struggles for workers' rights, democracy and self-determination, based on internationalism from below**
- 6) Support for Scotland's artistic and cultural revival in all its languages**

With the British ruling class facing constant constitutional crisis, they have turned to the royal family to front their Crown Powers. Given that the Windsors are one of most dysfunctional families in the world, this requires massive media promotion. But the BBC, once again fully living up to its first name, leads the way, using royal births, death and jubilees to push all other programmes, and even mildly critical news, to the margins, for days at a time.

But most of all, events like royal jubilees, deaths, and royal proclamations allow the armed and security forces to create conditions resembling a military coup. They organise massive displays of military force. Highly armed soldiers are placed on prominent towers and churches. There are major clampdowns on people's movement. For all those royalists, or even just the curious (e.g. overseas tourists), who line the routes of royal processions., there are countless subjects trying to go about their daily business who have their lives seriously disrupted. Indeed, this is the intention, as roads are blocked for hours, not only to others wanting to drive along them, but to prevent people trying to cross them (e.g. parents trying to collect their children from nurseries or schools – who can be diverted for miles). The many hours these clampdowns are imposed are completely unnecessary, since the actual position of royal corteges at any particular time is known down to the last imperial inch.

To counter this, and to demonstrate that RIC will not be intimidated by state attempts to suppress Scotland's self-determination, RIC has taken part in some events, and initiated others. Our Republic organised a protest against the queen's Platinum Jubilee on Edinburgh's Calton Hill on 3.6.22. This was joined by RIC, RSP, Tommy Sheppard MP and Maggie Chapman, Scottish Greens. MSP. RIC, along with Our Republic protested on 11.9.22 at the royal proclamation¹⁹ outside

St. Giles Cathedral (with heavily armed soldiers looking down), the Church of Scotland, being the official upholder of Protestant ascendancy north of the border.

RIC organised the ‘Let the People Decide’ protest outside the Supreme Court in London on 23.11.23, when it ruled that there is no constitutional way, based on the democratic right of national self-determination, to achieve Scotland’s independence.²⁰ RIC also provided a speaker at the large ‘Time for Scotland’ protest rally that evening outside Holyrood, organised by Lesley Riddoch.²¹ Here the RIC speaker announced the Our Republic rally organised for the royal coronation on May 6th, 2023.

This rally is being organised on Calton Hill a place with a long tradition of democratic dissent. More recently this has included the Vigil from 1992 to 1997 to establish a Scottish parliament.²² When a Scottish parliament was agreed in the 1997 referendum. Donald Dewar ensured the new building it would be sited, well away from Calton Hill, and as near to Holyrood Palace as possible, to emphasise Scottish-British subjecthood under the Crown. But following the first Declaration of Calton Hill in 2004, the royal opening was challenged by a well-attended and entertaining rally.²³ This was sympathetically reported by award-winning Scottish journalist, the late Ian Bell, great-nephew of James Connolly.

Today, in anticipation of king Charlie’s coronation on May 6th, a new Declaration of Calton Hill has been drawn up - www.caltonhill.scot. This defends and advances this earlier Declaration. But it also turns to Scotland’s 2014 Democratic Revolution. The aim is to bring together once more that rainbow alliance which achieved so much in 2014.

We have no constitutional means to achieve Scottish independence. Our protest on May 6th anticipates the withdrawal of participation in the UK state’s directly imposed institutions and extra-constitutional, non-violent, direct action until we complete Scotland’s Democratic Revolution.

**Nae tae BOSS – British Occupied Subject Scotland
Aye tae a Scottish Democratic Republic
Freedom Come All Ye**

Allan Armstrong, 22.3.23

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