

Independence for Scotland Posed, as Nationalists Prepare To Elect Leaders

by Mark Calney

To give my consels all in one,
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan;
Preserve the dignity of Man,
With soul erect:
And trust the Universal Plan
Will all protect.

—Robert Burns, “The Vision”

On July 17, Alex Salmond surprised everyone in Scotland, when he announced that he would be resigning as leader of the Scottish National Party, a position he has held for ten years. Those particularly shocked by the news were the other members of his own party, who are in the midst of preparations for a general election that U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair is expected to call by May or June of next year. Now, their energies will be concentrated on the leadership election campaigns, scheduled to occur at the SNP national conference on Sept. 20-23.

Salmond’s announcement has not only started an election battle over the leadership of the SNP, but also has sparked a public debate concerning the policy direction of the SNP, which will have implications for the future of Scotland, as well as strategic policymakers south of Hadrian’s Wall.

Scotland and the ‘New Economy’

Like every other country in the world, Scotland has suffered from looting by the international speculative financial bubble. The ravages of such con games as free trade, globalization, and privatization, under both the British Tories and Labour, continue to take their toll in Scotland. During 1997-99, Scotland lost 47,000 manufacturing jobs, as the Clyde River shipyards continue to more closely resemble a ghost town than an industrial complex. There are three times as many people living below the poverty level now in Scotland than there were in 1979. According to this year’s UNICEF study, entitled “Child Poverty in Industrialized Nations,” by Bradbury and Janetti, 329,408 children in Scotland, one-third of the adolescent population, are living on the breadline. Meanwhile, as Britain’s health care system has declined to 18th in the world (according to the World Health Organiza-

tion), the number of pensioners living in poverty has increased to 266,669. In a nation of 5.12 million people, this has had a horrific effect.

Ironically, beneath the territorial waters surrounding Scotland is the fifth-largest oil-producing reserve in the world, whose production is more than that of Kuwait. However, Scotland is experiencing some of the highest gasoline prices in the world. Currently, a gallon of gas in Scotland, exceeds £4 a gallon, meaning that to fill the average gas tank of a family car costs more than \$60. As the Labour Party has increased gasoline taxes some 40%, due to what many in Scotland and the U.K. are calling a “gasoline poll tax,” small business bankruptcies, particularly in Scotland’s rural areas, are dramatically increasing.

Where Is the Vision?

After the successful outcome of a public referendum in 1979 (due to the work of the SNP), a Scottish Parliament, with very limited powers, was reconvened, for the first time since 1707, in Edinburgh on July 1, 1999. The policy debate within the SNP, is whether to make independence again the central focus of its political and electoral campaigns, or to stick with the process of “devolution,” i.e., the doling out of a few more, limited powers. The British media, which include those outlets in Scotland that are by definition and practice invariably pro-Unionist, has characterized this faction fight as one between the “radicals” or “fundies” who are demanding independence as the key focus, and the so-called “gradualists” of devolution.

The first to announce his campaign to replace Salmond as National Convener of the SNP was Alex Neil, a member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP). He is also the SNP spokesman on Social Security, and he issued the SNP study “Poverty Amidst Plenty.” Neil is clearly the standard-bearer in this election for those who want to return the SNP to the vision of creating an independent Scottish nation. In his announcement, Neil told the press: “Independence is not a luxury we can wait 20 years for. If we are going to change Scotland and raise children out of poverty, we need it now. . . . Never forget, devolution is an invention of Unionists, to stop our march to

independence. Devolution is designed to tie down the SNP in the administration of Scotland as a region of the U.K.”

The Neil camp believes that the issue of independence should not be marketed like a product by finding a popular consensus of opinion among voters on secondary issues, a strategy made infamous by the toe-sucking U.S. architect of “triangulation,” former adviser to both Democratic and Republican candidates Dick Morris. But rather, independence should be pursued as a vision that provides a universal idea of justice and the good for all people.

In an editorial statement that appeared in *The Scotsman* newspaper on Aug. 8, Neil attacked the notion that being a nationalist is equal to being an isolationist or chauvinist. Including an appeal to end the inhumane sanctions against the people of Iraq, he stated that, if elected, “One of my priorities will be to establish a foreign affairs forum. . . . Far from being the antithesis of internationalism, nationalism is an essential component for dialogue and cooperation between nations.” This is a far cry from the public apologists for the British oligarchy who, in their fawning acclamations for “globalism,” claim that nationalism is the root of modern fascism. Any competent historian knows that modern fascism is based on empire, ruled by an oligarchical elite, organized around the central belief that man is merely a beast.

Opposing Neil for the SNP leadership position is John Swinney, also a member of the Scottish Parliament and close to Salmond, a former Royal Bank of Scotland economist. Upon his announcement to stand for election, Swinney, in an interview with the *Sunday Herald* of Scotland, gave his view for SNP policy. In his attempts to pursue popular opinion, he said, “We’ve got to begin to formulate policy in a way that a government goes about forming policy — with a wide consultation.” One of Swinney’s aims is to win fiscal autonomy for Scotland within the confines of the devolved Scottish Parliament. “I’d want to be able to control all tax revenue raised in Scotland,” he stated. Though a desirable goal, the question remains: How do you achieve such ends when it is ultimately the British Parliament in Westminster that has the last say on such fundamental matters?

As a result of Swinney choosing to run for election as leader (National Convener) of the SNP, he had to step down from his position as deputy leader (Senior Vice-Convener). This has created a situation where both leadership positions are now up for election. Currently, three people have announced their intention to stand for that position: Kenny MacAskill MSP, Rosanna Cunningham MSP, and Peter Kearney, the current National Political Education and Training officer of the SNP.

When the membership of the Scottish National Party meets to elect new party leaders at their national conference, it would not be inappropriate for them to consider the words of their national poet, Robert Burns, in his poem “The Vision,” and to recall that worthy quote from the book of Proverbs: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Interview: Peter Kearney

‘End the Union of 1707,’ Says Scottish Candidate

Peter Kearney is a candidate for the position of Senior Vice-Convener, or deputy leader, of the Scottish National Party (SNP). He lives in Glasgow, Scotland, and works as a surveyor. Kearney is the current National Political Education and Training Officer of the SNP and is the SNP Convener of Coatbridge and Chryston Constituency. The following interview with Mark Calney occurred on Aug. 8.

EIR: In July of last year, we had the formal opening of the Scottish Parliament, which had been dissolved almost 300 years ago with the Treaty of Union in 1707. Does this mean that Scotland is now independent?

Kearney: The short answer to that question really is no. Scotland is not independent. Independence, as most people in the world would understand it, means national self-determination. It means that the nation-state has its hands on all the levers of power. What that means is that you have complete fiscal autonomy, you have control over macro-economic policy, defense matters, foreign affairs, social security, and all the other domestic matters such as health, housing, and transport. The Scottish Parliament has simply created another level of administration — another authority within the British state. Scotland is still part of the United Kingdom. The Westminster Parliament in London is still the sovereign legislature, insofar as Scotland is concerned.

What happened last year, was that a number of powers that had been devolved or administered from London, were transferred to the Scottish Parliament. It is similar to, but far less, than some of the powers that a state legislature would have in the United States. For example, the Scottish Parliament can legislate on matters like health and service spending. It can also control the transport budget for roads, and the education budget for schooling. But, it cannot have any input or control over questions like energy policy, which is an enormous area for Scotland, because Scotland currently is the fifth-largest oil producer in the world and has the largest oil and gas reserve of any country in Europe. However, it is the

