

Scotland SNP landslide will lead to savage cuts

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The Scottish National Party (SNP) has gained 69 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), an increase of 23 on 2007, gaining an overall majority. This is the first time any party has been able to hold more than half the 129 seats in the Scottish parliament since its establishment in 1999.

The SNP's share of the vote was 45.4% (+12.5%) in the constituencies and 44.1% (+13%) in the regional lists. This is the biggest ever SNP vote, largely due to the collapse of Con-Dem votes. Between them the Tories (-3%) and Lib Dems (-8%) lost 11% of their constituency vote, almost all of this went to the SNP. The Lib Dems in particular were mauled, losing eleven MSPs and ending up with just five.

Although the Labour vote did not collapse, the SNP won scores of seats in former safe Labour areas. For the first time ever the SNP has won a majority of seats in Glasgow, Lanarkshire and across the central belt of Scotland. Every seat in north east Scotland, including those in Dundee and Aberdeen was won by the SNP, as were five of the six Edinburgh seats.

In the past, the nationalists were restricted to winning first-past-the-post seats in the more rural parts of Scotland. They now hold 53 of the 73 local constituencies - a huge gain of 32 seats from the 21 they won in 2007. They also picked up 16 seats on the proportional representation (PR) based regional lists.

The SNP's historic victory was a result of a number of factors. Alex Salmond's minority government postponed the bulk of the spending cuts until after the election to avoid being seen as a government of cuts. The £600 million cuts to the Scottish budget as a result of the June 2010 emergency Con-Dem budget were put off and wrapped up in the £1.3 billion cuts for 2011-12 voted through by the SNP, the Lib Dems and the Tories in February.

Passing on austerity

The SNP will now, however, pass on the Con-Dem austerity and axe £3.3 billion from jobs and public services in Scotland over the next four years. These cuts will arouse mass opposition from working class communities across Scotland.

The SNP has rebuilt a significant electoral base since the late 1980s, as a radical nationalist party positioned to the left of Labour. While the SNP has moved to the right and in a more neoliberal economic direction since then, it has still maintained the veneer of radicalism.

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analysis from England
and Wales

Much of the support for the SNP in this election was based on the carrying through of some relatively progressive policies from 2007 to 2011. This included freezing council tax, ending prescription charges, abolition of tuition fees and reversing plans to close hospital A&E services. For a layer of people, the SNP is still seen as a more radical alternative to Labour. This reflects the potential for the development of a new mass workers' party, especially as SNP cuts start to bite.

If the election was a triumph for the SNP, it was a catastrophe for Labour. Overall Labour lost seven seats, gaining 13 regional seats but losing 20 constituency seats. Particularly significant was the loss of these 20 first-past-the-post seats, leaving Labour with only 15 constituency MSPs from a possible 73 available constituency seats. It was only the top-up section of the regional vote that allowed Labour to retain a total of 37 MSPs overall.

Labour's pitiful campaign began by stealing the SNP policies of freezing council tax and opposing graduate tax or tuition fees and prescription charges. Scottish Labour was undermined by the weakness of its leader, Iain Gray, compared to the populist oratory and debating skills of SNP leader Alex Salmond.

With virtually no policy differences, except on independence, for many voters the choice came down to having Gray or Salmond as first minister. This was reinforced by Labour's incapability of exposing the SNP over cuts as, for example, in the run-up to the 2010 Westminster elections, Labour promised to make cuts even deeper than Thatcher's.

Iain Gray now plans to resign as Labour leader after the summer. Who replaces him is unclear. Labour has also lost many of its "leading" MSPs. The new crop of Labour

MSPs are totally inexperienced and devoid of any real connection with the trade unions and the working class. The election underlines that Labour is no longer seen by many as a party of the working class, especially by younger people.

SNP and big business

Following the election, Alex Salmond said: "We are now the national party of Scotland - acting in the interests of all of Scotland." But the new SNP government will be a party acting in the interests of big business and carrying out savage cuts.

Leading business figures backed and bankrolled their campaign. This included Brian Souter, head of Stagecoach, who donated £500,000 to the SNP's election funds, Tom Farmer, millionaire founder of Kwik-Fit and a long-term donor, George Mathewson, former chair of the Royal Bank of Scotland, and many others.

There was also widespread support for the SNP by the billionaire-owned press, including Murdoch's Sun and the News of the World, as well as the Scotsman, the Herald and Express groups and others.

At this stage, the SNP has said that an independence referendum will be held in the latter half of the next

five years. In the last parliament the SNP advocated a bill for a multi-option referendum, including a vote for more powers as well as full independence.

The SNP is also likely to use its election victory to wrestle concessions on the Scotland bill that is currently being debated at Westminster. This bill proposes extending, in a limited way, the powers available to the Scottish parliament. But this election outcome will apply extra pressure on the ruling class and the Con-Dem government to concede further powers, possibly over borrowing and control over corporation tax.

The SNP has been very careful not to 'antagonise' the interests of the majority of the capitalists who are opposed to independence at this stage. Opinion polls indicate a minority of people currently back full independence, but with a big majority for stronger powers. For the SNP a multi-option referendum would still be preferable as, even if the independence option was defeated, it could still deliver extra economic levers to the Scottish government.

Anti-cuts candidates

While no socialist or anti-cuts candidates were elected, the highest left vote on the regional lists was achieved by the George Galloway - Coalition Against Cuts list in Glasgow, which also involved Solidarity and Socialist Party Scotland (SPS).

This campaign, which stood on a platform of opposing all cuts, supporting the setting of 'needs' budgets and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with trade unionists and communities fighting the cuts, polled a very respectable 6,972 (3.3%) of the vote. This was 5,600 votes short of seeing George Galloway elected, although it did defeat the Lib Dems' list and came fifth out of 15 parties.

Solidarity also stood in the other seven Scottish regions. As expected,

Solidarity's votes were very low and averaged around 0.2% - a total of 2,837 votes in the seven regions.

The jailing of Solidarity leader Tommy Sheridan earlier this year after being found 'guilty' of perjury was a major factor. Many people, even those who supported Tommy, felt that it was a wasted vote to back Solidarity with Tommy in jail and unable to take part in the election.

The public standing of Solidarity has been affected by the unrelenting campaign by the Murdoch press, the police and the legal establishment against Tommy Sheridan and other members of Solidarity.

Without a presence in the parliament, the profile of Solidarity has dipped considerably since its high point in 2007. Nevertheless, Solidarity and the Coalition Against Cuts list in Glasgow gained over 9,000 votes.

The primary responsibility for having thrown away an important electoral position for socialists, with parliamentary representation from 1999 until 2007, lies with the political mistakes and actions of the leadership of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). The SSP polled 0.4% of the national vote with 8,200 votes, also reflecting support for an anti-cuts platform.

However, for the SSP leadership, who were instrumental in the state's prosecution and jailing of Tommy Sheridan, this result was a damning public verdict on their criminal role and actions. Yet the SSP boasted it would "push the Lib Dems into sixth place in Scotland". In addition, the Socialist Labour Party achieved a vote of 16,847 (0.8%).

Socialist Party Scotland will be advocating that local anti-cuts campaigns, the Scottish Anti-Cuts Alliance, socialists, trade unionists and communities work to build a fighting coalition against cuts. This includes putting forward a political alternative in the council elections next year.

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