

Militant Labour goes tartan

"S COTTISH Socialist Voice", launched by Scottish Militant Labour (SML) at the close of last year, describes itself as "the first socialist newspaper for decades which is written, edited and printed in Scotland... it is written, edited and controlled by working-class people who live in places like Possil, Leith and Govan."

The production of such a paper is no small achievement for SML. After all, over the last decade membership of "Militant" in Scotland has slumped, its influence in the labour movement has disintegrated, its paper circulation has plummeted, and its politics have become unrecognisable.

Militant has traditionally enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for political conservatism. Homosexuality was a sickness which would die away under socialism. Feminism was necessarily bourgeois and diversionary. "Drugs" were part of a plot by the ruling class to sap the rebelliousness of working-class youth. Outside of the Labour Party and the trade unions, Militant believed, there was no such thing as political life — only "sects on the fringes of the labour movement." To stand against Labour in an election was the greatest crime imaginable.

Without any attempt at political accounting, all this has been unceremoniously dumped by SML and their counterparts in the South. In Scotland it has been replaced by grafting a thin veneer of leftist rhetoric onto Scottish populism.

Scottish Socialist Voice promises to "fight for democracy for the people of Scotland." Its principal demand is for "a Scottish Parliament carrying out radical socialist change in Scotland." Such a parliament "could set in motion a process which will eventually threaten the rule of big business in Scotland."

But, with the exception of the Tories, a Scottish Parliament is backed by all the bourgeois parties in Scotland. They do not regard its creation as the harbinger of the socialist dawn north of Gretna Green. SML tries to put a radical gloss on this piece of constitutional reform by calling for a Scottish Parliament which legislates socialism into existence. Militant has thus abandoned its traditional meaningless slogan of "Labour to power on a socialist programme" for the even more incoherent "A Scottish parliament into being on a programme of socialist legislation."

SML denounces the Tories for attempting to "turn Scotland into a sweat-shop, non-union colony of the multinationals."

It attributes the Tories' opposition to a Scottish Parliament to "their fear of the ingrained influence of socialism in Scotland."

But if sweat-shop conditions in certain industries plus hostility towards trade unionism are the defining characteristics of a neo-colony, then the USA must be a neo-colony as well! Only a completely new — and utterly garbled — redefinition of imperialism could lead to Scotland being defined as a neo-colony.

And what SML means by "the ingrained influence of socialism in Scotland" remains a mystery. They can hardly point to the electoral successes of Labour in Scotland — SML does not think there is any difference between Labour and the Tories!

In its search for allies to propagate this incoherent Scottish populism SML has thrown in its lot with the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA), an amorphous cocktail of demoralised left-reformists, Scottish nationalists, Stalinists, single-issue campaigners, and the remnants of Socialist Outlook in Scotland.

A few years ago Militant would have roundly described the SSA as middle-class vomit. Today, however, SML describes the SSA as "a new broader vehicle for socialism in Scotland" which will help build "socialist unity to fight for the interests of working-class people and young people."

A measure of the SSA's brand of socialism can be gleaned from the following gem, contained in the current issue of their magazine *Red*:

"The 'Jock-Brits' of the SNP will not deliver us from an antiquated political system and a discredited economic system. The cause of socialists should be Scotland, and the cause of Scots should be socialism."

In the short term, SML's embrace of Scottish nationalism, previously despised single-issue campaigns, and "sects on the fringes of the labour movement", may save it from further decline. There is an audience in Scotland for Scottish populism and liberal radicalism. But whether the abandonment of sectarian labour movement routinism for Scottish populism marks a step forward for SML must remain open to question.

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