

Neither Westminster nor Brussels but Auchtermuchty?

By Stan Crooke

THE Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) launched its general election campaign last month. It will be contesting some 15 seats in Scotland, including all 10 seats in Glasgow.

The SSA is a coming together of Scottish Militant Labour, ex-Labour Party and ex-SNP members, one of the factions of Scottish Stalinism, animal rights campaigners, environmental activists and various other left-leaning individuals.

The rational core of the SSA's election strategy (and of the SSA as a whole) is the need to relate, on the one hand, to the widespread revulsion in Scotland at the Labour Party's shift to the right, and, on the other hand, to the consistently high level of support for Scottish self-government.

Rather less rational, however, is the SSA's election platform.

"Drive out the Tories/Back the Glasgow Ten!" declares the SSA's Glasgow broadsheet. But voting for the SSA in Scotland won't drive out the Tories — the SSA is fielding only 15 candidates. And voting SSA in Glasgow won't drive out any Tories either — the Tories don't have a single MP in Glasgow.

For whom, then, should people vote in order to "drive out the Tories"? The SSA *does not say* — probably because some of its members would call for a vote for Labour, some would call for a vote for the SNP, and some would advocate abstention.

Indeed, it is difficult to see why the SSA wants to "drive out the Tories" anyway, given that the SSA's election broadsheet explains that "the alternative on offer from Labour, the Liberals and the SNP is more Toryism."

On the key question in the forthcoming general election — who should people vote for to form the next government? — the SSA is simply silent.

The lead demand in the SSA's election platform is for "a real parliament — controlled by the

Scottish people, for the Scottish people... a parliament prepared to transform Scotland into a modern socialist democracy."

This "real parliament" demanded by the SSA is not to be confused with "a tame assembly under the thumb of Westminster" (the Labour version) nor "a puppet parliament under the thumb of Brussels" (the SNP version).

But does the SSA advocate Scottish independence, or Scottish self-government within the framework of the United Kingdom? Again, the SSA is silent on the question — and it is easy to see why.

If the SSA were to come down on one side or the other, it would split more or less down the middle.

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Another notable omission in the platform of an organisation so concerned with the relationships between the national identities of the United Kingdom is the question of Ireland. The issue is avoided for the same reason.

The SSA can spell out its policies in favour of "the re-introduction of tram services, more pedestrian areas, and more traffic-calming measures and pedestrian crossings." But it cannot find anything to say about Ireland, despite (or because of?) the significance of Irish politics in Scotland!

The SSA does not advocate withdrawal from the European Union. It "rejects the Little Englander outlook of the Tory Eurosceptics" and advocates "co-operation with the rest of Europe on progressive policies."

At the same time (and probably

under the pressure of the Stalinist faction within it), however, it regurgitates the arguments of various Eurosceptic factions.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between its Europhile and Eurosceptic factions, the SSA uses the ambiguous formulation of "a Scottish parliament which will put the interests of the Scottish people before the rules of the Maastricht Treaty."

The bulk of the SSA's election platform is largely uncontentious — renationalisation of privatised industries, scrapping all anti-union legislation, rebuilding the welfare state, restoration of all cuts in council funding, no new motorways, and "more cycle tracks and cycle lanes." What is less clear, however, is how these demands are to be achieved.

By a Westminster parliament run by the Tories or by the Blairite Tories? Or by a "real Scottish parliament" which does not yet even exist?

The incoherence of the SSA's election platform is rooted in its failure to respond politically rather than (in the manner of the SWP) emotionally to Labour's shift to the right, and to support for Scottish self-government.

Instead of mobilising against Blair's attempts to destroy Labour-union links, the SSA behaves as if those links had already been broken and postures as the socialist alternative to New Labour.

Instead of challenging all the nonsense which often accompanies the demand for Scottish self-government, the SSA adopts the demand as the lynchpin of its election platform and thereby adds yet another layer of confusion to the demand.

The SSA does not (yet) suffer from the idiocies of the SWP. It does at least attempt to relate to events and political shifts in the real world. What it lacks, however, is an adequate political programme and an effective political strategy.