**SNP - Continuity Capitalism**

**Vince Mills**

 **In the end the margin between the two front runners for the SNP leadership turned out to be very close. Humza Yousaf won with 52.1% of the vote compared to Kate Forbes 47.9%. Ash Regan scored a respectable 11% in the first round.**

 Speculation that such was the nature of the SNP membership that Forbes, perceived as being to the right of Yousaf, would not be able to mount a serious challenge was wide of the mark.

There are two reasons for this. The first that the perception of the SNP as a ‘radical’ party is inaccurate. Studies by Professor Tim Bale of Queen Mary University show that nearly three-quarters of SNP members are in the ABC1 voter bracket largely white collar middle class - like the other main political parties - less than 30% are C2, DE - in skilled and semi-skilled manual occupations. It is hardly surprising, then, that such a membership should have a strong conservative element.

The second reason is that, in reality, none of the three candidates was pushing a radical platform, especially in relation to the economy.

All three candidates argued that they had moved on from the SNP’s infamous Sustainable Growth Commission report of May 2018. That document concluded: “An independent Scotland would need tight public spending rules to bring the country’s deficit down from around 6% in 2021-22 to below 3% over a period of 10 years.” Instead, all three are now in favour of a *Wellbeing Economy*, which explicitly rejects Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the principal measure for assessing an economy, in favour of measures which depend on “… a diverse array of ideas and actions aimed at advancing social well-being through governance structures that support peaceful co-existence and meet basic human needs.” None of the candidates, including Yousaf, explained what this would mean in practice or the contradictions it creates with what the SNP say, and have been saying for some time, about the economic case for independence, as well as the SNP’s actual practice in government.

Yousaf has been at pains to argue, even in his acceptance speech, that the SNP “…want to return to the European Union.” The now abandoned Growth Commission had set a target of bringing the deficit down below 3% over a period of 10 years because all EU member states are required to have a limit on government deficit of 3% of GDP and debt of 60% of GDP. It is evident that Scotland would have great difficulty meeting a 3% deficit level without making savage reductions in its public spending. Scotland’s deficit currently stands at 12.3 per cent of GDP. In other words, for all the commitments that Yousaf made, membership of the EU would require a reduction in the very public expenditure necessary to bring about a “well-being” economy.

In reality, orthodox GDP growth has been at the heart of the SNP’s economic strategy and more to the point growth driven by the corporate sector. As the Morning Star pointed out “the Scottish government’s ScotWind project has just franchised out to the big power monopolies, those responsible for our energy crisis, much of the Scottish seabed. The Scottish government’s Transport Act, again overseen by Yousaf, has effectively franchised out Scotland’s bus services to two big monopolies.”

And then there is the current Scottish Social Care Bill which, as health minister, Yousaf was responsible for. One of Yousaf’s first acts as the new First Minister was to call for a New Deal for Local Government. This might be taken more seriously if he withdrew the Social Care Bill. For as it stands, it would take all aspects of social care out of the hands of local government and the NHS, and franchise them out to the private sector, within the framework of a “national service”.

On Independence, Yousaf, like Forbes and to a lesser extent Regan, essentially put the issue on the back burner, waiting for the cumulative effect of SNP victories at a series of Scottish and UK elections, to build up pressure for another referendum.

All of this should, of course, provide an opportunity for the Scottish Labour Party to attack the SNP from the left. But to do that Scottish Labour would need to shrug off its leader, Keir Starmer’s insistence on precisely the same pro corporate partnership proposals for growth adopted by the SNP, and even worse, proposals wrapped in a Union Jack. Instead Scottish Labour would have to offer a radical constitutional alternative designed to promote a democratically controlled, green economy. This must also be the priority for the Trade Union movement and the Scottish Left.