

# Surge in support for Scottish socialists

Thursday 26 April 2007, by [MILLER Alex](#) (Date first published: 19 April 2007).

An authoritative opinion poll for the *Scotsman* newspaper indicates a strong increase in support for the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in the run-up to the Scottish Parliament elections on May 3. The April 6 *Scottish Socialist Voice* reported that “in both the constituency and regional list vote, 5 per cent of Scots voters plan to vote Scottish Socialist”, according to the ICM poll. This represents a 3% rise in the regional vote and a 4% increase in the constituency ballot — the biggest increase in support in the previous month for any political party in Scotland.

The SSP currently has four representatives in the Scottish Parliament, and the opinion poll suggests that the party is within striking distance of winning a parliamentary seat in all eight regions.

SSP convener Colin Fox commented in the Voice: “The SSP’s campaign is off to a flying start. For months, the party has been active on the streets. We’ve distributed over 300,000 election newspapers door-to-door, held scores of public meetings across Scotland and spoke to tens of thousands of people on the streets and doorsteps. Our call for free public transport, independence and wealth redistribution is going down a storm.”

The SSP’s election manifesto, *People Not Profit*, was launched in Glasgow on April 10. It outlines six flagship policies that would help radically transform Scotland for the benefit of ordinary working people. A key policy is the provision of a Scotland-wide free public transport network. With pollution and congestion on the increase and global warming spiralling almost out of control, “Dramatic and radical action is needed to move hundreds of thousands from private cars to public transport”. The SSP is proposing to establish a nationwide free public transport system.

The SSP has already initiated the first phase of establishing such a system, by putting a bill to the Scottish Parliament proposing to re-regulate the buses. The second phase would establish a publicly owned bus group; the third phase would remove all bus, train and ferry fares; and phase four “will transfer the Scotrail franchise, when it expires in 2011, to a new publicly owned Scottish National Rail company — and remove fares for all rail journeys within Scotland”.

In response to the accusation that the free public transport proposal is pie in the sky, the manifesto argues that the same claim was made in the 1930s and 1940s about the creation of a free National Health Service. Yet following six years of war and destruction on a massive scale, the NHS was brought into being by the Labour government three years after it was elected in 1945. The manifesto also points out that the estimated cost of the free public transport system (£500 million — A\$1.2 billion) is less than one-sixth of Scotland’s share of British military spending, and half the amount the Scottish National Party (SNP) plans to hand out to big business in proposed cuts to the Corporation Tax. Even the ruling Scottish Executive and the employers’ organisation CBI estimate that traffic congestion, road accidents and road repairs currently cost the Scottish economy over £4 billion a year. The manifesto describes the policy as “an idea whose time has come ... the biggest pro-environment and pro-social inclusion measure proposed in Scotland in generations”.

Other major policies in the manifesto include a referendum on Scottish independence within a year of the election; building 100,000 new council houses; the replacement of the Council Tax with a progressive income tax; the introduction of carbon rationing as a fair alternative to green taxes; and

free, nutritious daily meals for all schoolchildren in Scottish schools.

The Labour Party in Scotland has been trailing the SNP in the opinion polls, which suggest that the SNP will emerge from the elections as the single biggest party in the Scottish Parliament. The crisis facing the Scottish Labour Party was highlighted on April 16 when the general council of the Scottish Trade Union Council (STUC) voted by a majority of just one to call on its members to vote Labour. In a statement issued on the SSP election website, Fox commented that this “wafer thin” vote “spotlights the depth of the crisis facing New Labour’s Scottish campaign. Throughout the worst years of Thatcherism and beyond the STUC stood firmly with Labour, but I believe the vote reflects the deep concern of trade unionists at their policies.”

Fox believes the vote “reflects a rejection of New Labour’s attacks on trade unionists” and a “deep concern about the direction [New Labour] would travel if returned to power in May”. Fox said he would urge STUC delegates “to face the facts and recognise that by bankrolling New Labour they are supporting a government hostile to their aims and needs”.

Fox called on unionists to vote for the SSP, which in contrast to New Labour, “has stood alongside workers in struggle with MSPs and activists joining picket lines, raising questions in parliament and extending the hand of support to them”.

***[For more informaton visit <http://www.ssp-election-2007.org.uk>***

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