

Former Scottish Socialist Party leader Tommy Sheridan declares for Scottish National Party

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Tommy Sheridan has publicly urged a vote for the Scottish National Party (SNP) in next May's general election. In a personal statement posted on his Facebook page, the former leader of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) called on all those who supported a Yes vote in last week's referendum on Scottish independence to set aside their party allegiances and officially endorse the big business SNP.

Scotland's separation from the UK was defeated in the September 18 referendum by 55 percent to 45 percent. But Sheridan makes clear this should be regarded only as a temporary setback for the nationalist agenda, and that the various pseudo-left groups should make separatism and the drive for a new referendum on the issue by 2020 their *raison d'être*.

Answering the question as to what way forward for those who voted Yes, Sheridan writes, "Obviously I welcome those wishing to join my own party Solidarity... However it is not enough. What I am about to say is uncomfortable for a socialist like me. I oppose the SNP position on NATO membership, cutting corporation taxes for big businesses, retaining the queen as a head of state, sharing sterling and other policies.

"But in order to maximise the pro-Independence vote in next May's General Election, all Yes supporters should vote for the SNP, and all other pro-Independence parties should not stand if the SNP candidate will commit to fight for a new referendum as soon as possible AND against all Westminster [sic] austerity cuts to welfare and public services."

Just to make clear, he adds, "In concrete terms, that means advocating an SNP vote..."

Sheridan is a liar. He is not "uncomfortable" backing

the SNP because he is not a socialist but an unreconstructed nationalist who has long functioned as a cheerleader for the right-wing SNP and its divisive anti-working class agenda.

The SSP was formed in 1998 under Sheridan as a split from the Socialist Party (formerly the Militant Tendency) in Britain. Lured by the then-Labour government's plans for Scottish devolution, including a parliament based on proportional representation, Sheridan and his ally, Alan McCombes, decided to ditch any association with the "Brit left," embrace separatism, and carve out a niche for themselves in the corridors of Holyrood.

Arguing for a specifically "Scottish" version of socialism, the SSP was able to capitalise on the Blair government's neo-liberal agenda of privatisation and aggressive war. By the time of the 2003 election, the SSP held six seats in the Scottish parliament.

Within a year, the SSP had split amid a tawdry sex scandal instigated by the Murdoch press, and by 2007 it had lost all its parliamentary seats.

In the Scottish elections that year, Sheridan made clear he favoured an SNP victory, a position he was to reiterate in the 2008 Glasgow East by-election. From then on, Sheridan positioned himself and his Solidarity movement as the more determined advocates of Scottish nationalism, whose objective was to pressure an "Independence-lite" SNP into a more assertive separatist stance.

Whether "Scotland should go it alone or not," Sheridan famously claimed that year, was not a "scientific" issue, but a matter of what was "in your heart and in your head." Internationalism, he insisted, simply meant "'inter' and 'nationalism'... a collective

of nationalisms.”

In the Scottish referendum campaign, Sheridan fronted a series of meetings under the title “Hope over Fear.”

Draping himself in the Saltire, he acted as a recruiting agent for the SNP, dismissing concerns over its support for NATO, the monarchy, and cuts in corporation tax by claiming that a Yes vote represented a progressive, left-wing alternative to “Westminster” austerity.

In his latest Facebook post, Sheridan condemns the Labour Party for supporting the official No campaign. It was “shameful,” he writes, that Labour had sided “with the bankers, bosses, billionaires and millionaires to try and crush our dream of a new and better Scotland with an avalanche of fear and lies.”

The fact that the Labour Party long ago sided with the “bankers” and “bosses”—piloting one neo-liberal policy after another during its 13 years in office and continuing to promote the same reactionary agenda ever since—is a matter of indifference to Sheridan, who is no more concerned for the fate of workers and youth in Scotland than he is for workers and youth in the rest of the UK.

Sheridan is only too happy to side with the “bankers, bosses, billionaires” in the pro-independence camp. He makes no mention of the SNP’s relations with the likes of Stagecoach boss Brian Souter, former head of the Royal Bank of Scotland Fred Goodwin, or Jim McColl, one of Scotland’s wealthiest “entrepreneurs.”

And, of course, expunged completely are the SNP’s close relations with the Murdoch media empire. SNP leader Alex Salmond, who resigned Friday after the referendum defeat, secretly backed Rupert Murdoch’s News International bid for the pay-channel broadcaster BSkyB before the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal erupted. His support did not go unrewarded. Murdoch’s Scottish *Sun* newspaper championed Salmond, and, while stopping short in the referendum of outright endorsement of the Yes campaign, made clear that it supported the independence camp’s promise of low corporate taxation.

It was Murdoch’s *News of the World* exposure of Sheridan’s sex life that set in motion events that were to culminate in 2010 with Sheridan’s imprisonment for perjury. The trial, which Sheridan at the time attributed to the “powerful reach” of the Murdoch press, saw one SSP member after another take the stand to denounce

their former leader and support his imprisonment.

No matter. The ends justify the means—in this case, the prospect of Sheridan making a return to Holyrood. “I realise some socialists will find it difficult to support SNP candidates,” Sheridan writes. “That is understandable. But the stakes are huge now.”

What are the stakes? “The Holyrood elections in 2016 allow for more socialist, green and diverse candidates to be elected,” Sheridan writes.

He continues: “If SNP candidates commit to fighting for a new referendum and against austerity cuts, let’s unite behind them.” He continues: “If successful, then we should insist all pro-Independence candidates in the 2016 Scottish election commit to a March 2020 referendum...”

This alliance is based on the shared hostility of Sheridan and the SNP to working class unity and socialism, and their common defence of capitalism.

Sheridan is not alone. His open entry into the camp of the nationalist corporate elite is only the first of many to come from the fake-left political swamp. (See: “Britain’s fake-left groups seek permanent nationalist alliance in Scotland”) One should note in this regard that Sheridan’s replacement as head of the SSP, Colin Fox, responded to Salmond’s resignation by tweeting his “surprise,” and adding: “I thought he’d be needed to ‘steady the SNP ship’ now. I admired his leadership skills & common touch.”



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