

Alex Salmond resigns from Scottish National Party

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Alex Salmond, the former Scottish National Party (SNP) leader, resigned from the party Wednesday evening, having just begun legal proceedings against the Scottish government for its conduct over an investigation into claims of sexual harassment against him.

In a statement, Salmond flatly rejected the allegations. Referring to the publication of some of the claims by the *Daily Record*, the former Scotland first minister said it had breached confidentiality. “It urgently needs to be established who breached that duty of confidence and why.”

SNP leader and current First Minister Nicola Sturgeon had “come under pressure to suspend me” from party membership, Salmond went on, even though “Innocent until proven guilty is central to our concept of justice.”

“I did not come into politics to facilitate opposition attacks on the SNP,” he continued, and had decided to resign to “clear my name” and prevent “substantial internal division” within the SNP in the event it was forced to suspend him.

The allegations against Salmond and his decision to fight them legally placed him on a collision course with Sturgeon, his former ally, and the SNP-led Scottish government.

The two allegations of sexual harassment date from December 2013, when Salmond was first minister. But they were only lodged with the Scottish government in January this year and Salmond—who stood down as first minister in 2014—was notified of them in March.

The Scottish government’s investigations concluded last week, at which point police were informed with a view to a formal criminal investigation. In a statement, the Scottish government’s permanent secretary, Leslie Evans, said she had informed Salmond on August 22 of the conclusions of her investigation and gave him notice that she would make a “statement referring to the fact of the complaints.”

The *Daily Record* then ran what it said was a leaked account of one alleged incident in 2013 in Bute House—the first minister’s grace-and-favour residence—in which Salmond was accused of “touching [a] woman’s breasts and bum” in a “boozy” encounter.

Salmond’s application for a judicial review describes the

Scottish government’s investigation as “grossly unfair.” Not only was he denied access to the full details of the complaints or to interview civil servants, but he had been assured that the investigation would be “totally confidential.” Evans’ decision to make the claims public, and the *Record*’s leak, showed this to be untrue.

In a statement issued before his resignation, Salmond said, “I have made many mistakes in my life—political and personal,” but rejected the allegations of sexual harassment, “all of which I refute and some of which were patently ridiculous.”

For months, he had attempted to persuade the permanent secretary “that she is behaving unlawfully in the application of a complaints procedure, introduced by her more than three years after I left office,” and had sought “conciliation, mediation and legal arbitration to resolve these matters both properly and amicably,” which had been rejected.

“... [F]or whatever reason the permanent secretary has decided to mount a process against me using an unlawful procedure which she herself introduced,” he said, warning that if the court found in his favour, as he expected, “the Scottish Government will have the most serious questions to answer.”

The complaints procedure was introduced by Evans in 2017, supposedly in response to “wider concerns about harassment in Westminster and the Scottish Parliament.” It followed the publication of the so-called “dirty dossier” of 40 Tory MPs leaked to Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun* newspaper.

Based on largely contrived allegations, the dossier led to a witch-hunt that had all the hallmarks of political engineering. It claimed the scalps of then Conservative Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and First Secretary of State Damien Green who, as the WSWs explained, were trying to mediate bitter infighting between the pro- and anti-Brexit wings of the Tory Party. Their removal saw the consolidation of the hard-line pro-Brexit faction within the government.

Political scheming cannot be ruled out in this instance either.

Salmond, who led the SNP for more than 20 years, from 1990, is identified as the key figure in the push for Scotland's independence from the UK. It was under his tenure that the SNP capitalised on the rightward lurch of the Labour Party to successfully and falsely associate its nationalist agenda with opposition to austerity and war.

A former oil economist, Salmond led the Scottish government from 2007 until 2014, by which time the SNP had positioned itself as the majority party in the devolved administration—enabling it to successfully push for a referendum on independence in September that year.

Salmond resigned as SNP leader after the referendum rejected independence by 55 percent to 45 percent, with Sturgeon taking his place. He was elected to the UK Parliament in 2015, but lost the seat last year.

Since then, he has retained a high public profile through his talk show on Russia Today (RT). Vowing to “battle the mainstream narrative,” it focuses on the conflict between the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish administrations with central government over the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU). It has also promoted the Catalan independence struggle, which was violently repressed by the EU and the Spanish government, leading to the imprisonment and forced exile of leading Catalan politicians.

For this, Salmond has been denounced as a “Kremlin stooge” against the backdrop of a vociferous anti-Russian campaign by the official media. Only in July, the UK broadcast regulator Ofcom ruled that RT's “Alex Salmond Show” had breached broadcasting rules.

The ruling, which was reportedly made in response to just one complaint, was with regards to the first broadcast, which aired in November 2017. While Ofcom rejected the complaint that it had manufactured several tweets and emails, it said the communications were sent by people “connected either directly or indirectly to the production of the programme or to the presenter in some way.”

In response, RT accused Ofcom of “media orchestration” by publicising the decision without notifying it of its provisional findings and of using “a veritable sledgehammer” against what it described as a “trivial teething problem.”

Salmond has also come under attack for his advocacy of a second referendum on Scottish independence.

Scotland recorded a majority vote in favour of remaining within the EU, in contrast to England and Wales. This has led to renewed calls by Scottish separatists for another referendum on independence. Amid already febrile tensions within ruling circles over Brexit, such a prospect would create a constitutional crisis. Not only would it likely be opposed by central government, but it would also raise the

possibility of Scotland opting out of the UK to pursue relations with the EU.

Sturgeon had previously said she would provide an update for plans on a second independence referendum in the autumn, while Salmond had pledged to return to frontline politics as soon as an “indyref2” was announced.

Even before the latest events, Sturgeon was forecast to face a “impossibly tough choice” when the SNP conference convenes October 7 as she sought to balance between contending views on the timing, and advisability, of a second referendum.

Salmond's decision to resign lessens the risk of an open split at conference. But his launch of a crowd-funding appeal to help pay his legal costs is calculated to mobilise political support. Within hours of announcing the appeal, it had raised £70,000, including donations from some SNP MPs—way past the initial £50,000 target.

The entirely dubious affair underscores the contempt for democratic rights within official political circles, especially the Labour Party.

Labour and the Tories denounced Sturgeon's argument that there was no legal basis for suspending Salmond—even under the blatantly anti-democratic complaints procedure drawn up by her government—as he holds no elected office within government or the party.

The disregard for due process was spelt out by Rhoda Grant, Women's spokesperson for Scottish Labour, who demanded Salmond's removal to “make clear that there is safe space for any other survivors [of sexual harassment] to come forward.”

“Decent people will rightly be furious that he is to raise money to take the Scottish government to court,” Grant complained. “Alex Salmond is abusing his power, and dragging Scotland into the gutter.”



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