

Craig Murray case exposes factional warfare in Scottish National Party between Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond

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3 February 2021

Former British diplomat Craig Murray has published affidavits submitted to the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh, Scotland as part of his defence against charges of contempt of court.

The case arose from his reporting of the trial last year of former leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and former Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond. Salmond was acquitted in March of charges of sexually assaulting SNP and Scottish government officials.

Murray's statements offer further evidence supporting his allegation of a political conspiracy to smear, convict and potentially jail Salmond, organised by his former protégé and successor as SNP leader and first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, her aides and allies.

Murray produced the affidavits to defend himself from charges that his commentary sought to influence the jury in Salmond's trial and that his articles could have allowed some of the anonymous accusers to be identified.

Murray is a Scottish nationalist and longtime supporter of the SNP. Politically, his criticism of Sturgeon et al is that they are not moving nearly fast enough towards independence. Nevertheless, his exposure of the SNP leadership's manoeuvres against Salmond is devastating.

In his submission to the court, Murray reported, 'with a high degree of certainty' that Nicola Sturgeon's Chief of Staff, Liz Lloyd, was behind lurid reports that suddenly appeared in the Scottish press in August 2018 of an alleged sexual assault by Salmond.

Murray also wrote at the time of the role of the Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government, Leslie Evans and of Judith Mackinnon, the former HR chief of the Scottish Police Authority, brought in to lead investigations of claims of harassment against Salmond. He noted that none of these people had been sacked after a judicial review accused the Scottish government's

investigation of being 'tainted by apparent bias', suggesting Sturgeon's continued support for them.

Murray recounted a 2019 meeting sought by Salmond with him, the first time the two had met. Salmond told Murray, 'Nicola Sturgeon had been behind the process designed to generate false accusations against him. He said as well as Mackinnon and Evans, Liz Lloyd was responsible for the actual orchestration.'

Salmond spoke of a 'massive police operation underway to try to get accusers to come forward against him.' 400 people had been interviewed. He told of one retired police officer's view 'that the fact it was a stitch-up was evidenced by the fact all the accusations emanated from the same small coterie, there was not a single accusation from an outside or independent source.'

Asked about the motive for attacks on him, Salmond replied he had intended to quit politics, and take up the chairmanship of Edinburgh based Johnston Press, which then owned the *Scotsman* newspaper and local titles in Britain and Ireland. Salmond said, however, he 'had made plain to [Sturgeon] that he was not happy with her lack of progress towards an independence referendum following the Brexit vote.'

In June 2019, Murray claimed, 'Sturgeon and key members of her inner circle, including ministers... gamed the possible outcome of the Salmond affair.' Those present concluded that if Salmond could be convicted on a single charge he would be destroyed politically. 'He would be on the register of sex offenders and branded a rapist in the public mind, even if the actual offence convicted was knee touching. I was also told that the Law Officers were confident of a conviction for something, which is why the multiplicity of charges.'

Murray asserts that this would be impossible without 'corrupt collusion between Nicola Sturgeon's ministers

and aides and the Crown Office [Scotland's public prosecution service] over the handling of the Salmond case and the charges being brought.'

He cited as his source someone close to Sturgeon who was 'not happy with the 'fitting up' of Alex Salmond, which they described as 'unnecessary.' Murray considered his contact as a 'highly credible source with good access', who seemed 'straightforward and no inconsistencies had appeared under question'. He believed their account.

Murray noted that he had briefly been able to see a message between Peter Murrell, SNP Chief Executive Officer, Sturgeon's husband, and Sue Ruddick, the SNP's Chief Operating Officer proposing 'it was now the right time to put pressure on Police Scotland to move forward against Alex Salmond' (Murray's words).

Another message from Ruddick suggested that if the police would explain what evidence they wanted, Ruddick et al would get it. Another explained the plan to have a 'strongly detrimental effect' (Murray's words) on Salmond while retaining anonymity.

These messages remain subject to intense disputes between a toothless Scottish parliamentary inquiry set up to investigate the Salmond affair and the Crown Office, the Scottish government, and the Lord Advocate. Salmond is due to give evidence in February, Sturgeon soon after. Peter Murrell has refused to return to the inquiry to explain contradictions in his own evidence.

By November 2019, Murray had become aware of the identities of all those accusing Salmond of sexual offences. He commented, 'I realised that something extraordinary and morally disgusting was happening. If the public knew the identities of those being put up to make allegations, and just how close to Nicola Sturgeon they were, they would immediately understand what was happening. But the convention protecting the identities of those making allegations of sexual assault made such allegations the perfect vehicle for a positive campaign to frame on false charges, while the perpetrators of this conspiracy to pervert the course of justice had the protection of the courts against exposure.'

The same month a deluge of lurid news and TV headlines accompanied the news that Salmond had been charged with attempted rape, intent to rape, indecent assault and a series of more minor charges. Murray noted, 'The Crown can release salacious detail about attempted rape while lying naked on top of somebody in bed, and the media can echo this to the heavens. But from that moment, nobody can publish anything to contradict the Crown without being in contempt of court.'

Murray resorted to satire, proposing a script for the famous BBC TV comedy, *Yes Minister*, which sketched 'the tactics being employed by the prosecution, and seeking to make it plain to the Sturgeon circle that I knew precisely how their scheme was supposed to operate.'

He continued, 'The notion that this cryptic, satirical article, described as fiction, on a personal blog, would influence a jury is fanciful. When compared to the absolute torrent of hostile mainstream media material fed by the Crown Office, as detailed above, and vicious social media comment, aimed at Alex Salmond, the fact that the Crown Office are prosecuting only an extremely rare news source sympathetic to Salmond is, in my view, deeply sinister...'

The remainder of Murray's submission compares his writing and commentary with other reporters, hostile to Salmond, offering far more explicit clues as to the identity of the accusers and none of whom have been accused of contempt of court. These include pieces by Dani Garavelli for *Scotland on Sunday* and news presenter Kirsty Wark's 'The Trial of Alex Salmond' for the BBC, both of which sought to rerun the trial, missing out defence witnesses whose evidence led to the Salmond's acquittal on all charges, and giving the impression that the jury's verdict was perverse.

The WSWS defence of Murray's right to comment and report on a blatant political conspiracy to destroy a major public figure does not imply the slightest support to either Murray's or Salmond's nationalist political agenda, which like Sturgeon's, sows divisions in the working class in pursuit of the commercial ambitions of the Scottish bourgeoisie and its upper middle class periphery. Indeed, the methods utilised by the SNP leadership against Salmond, one of their own and the principal architect of the SNP's internal regime, should serve as the sharpest of warnings about the methods all factions of the SNP are prepared to use against the working class.



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