

Scottish National Party in meltdown

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The April 5 arrest of Peter Murrell, the Scottish National Party's former CEO and husband to former leader Nicola Sturgeon, accompanied by police raids on Murrell and Sturgeon's house and SNP offices to cart away boxes of material, points to a party in meltdown.

Murrell was released without charge later that day. He was arrested as part of Operation Branchform, the police investigation launched after complaints from supporters of Scottish independence over the fate of £666,953 raised between 2017 and 2020 and handed to the SNP for the purpose of mounting a second referendum.

Murrell's arrest comes just weeks after Sturgeon unexpectedly resigned as party leader. Her departure was attributed to opposition within the SNP to her strategy for making next Westminster election a de facto second independence referendum, and to misgivings over a Gender Recognition Reform Act passed by the Scottish parliament but stalled by the UK government.

It now appears likely that the timing of Sturgeon's decision had something to do with Murrell's imminent arrest. Murrell resigned as SNP CEO after he was exposed during the campaign to replace Sturgeon for having misled the party over falling membership figures. The party has lost around 30,000 members in two years.

Revelations have emerged of the SNP leadership's efforts to obscure its dire financial state. The *Sunday Mail* reported April 9 that as early as August 2021 Sturgeon sought to avoid questions from the party's national executive over the crowdfunded cash for a second independence campaign. A source told the tabloid, "She told the meeting that there was nothing wrong with the accounts and that people should stop talking about it because it was undermining the party."

The meeting came three months after the SNP's treasurer Douglas Chapman resigned claiming he was

unable to properly scrutinise party accounts and two months after Murrell loaned the party £107,000.

Media attention was given to the seizure by police of a "high end" Niesmann+Bischoff camper van, worth around £110,000, from outside the home of Murrell's mother. The vehicle, delivered in 2021 and never used, was later said to have been intended for use as a "battle bus" during the 2021 Scottish elections.

The BBC reported that the company tasked with auditing the SNP's accounts had also resigned. According to the UK Electoral Commission, political parties with income and expenditure exceeding £250,000 are required to have their annual accounts independently audited and reported. Accountants Johnston Carmichael's resignation was reported in the *Herald* to be coincidental with the party failing to inform the Electoral Commission of Murrell's £107,000 loan.

The SNP faces further loss of revenue if no auditor can be found willing to sign off on its £4 million accounts by May 31. It could also have external auditors imposed by the Electoral Commission. The SNP's Westminster Group of MPs receives £1.15 million in subsidies from parliament to pay staff wages, research and travel.

Some SNP MSPs threatened to withhold their £250 a month subscription dues if Murrell was assisted with his legal fees. The *Sunday Post* reported that an expert in "allegations of financial crime" had been hired. On April 11, new party leader Humza Yousaf was reported in the *Scotsman* stating that Murrell, CEO for 25 years, had been cast adrift.

Following an NEC meeting last weekend, Yousaf denied the party was close to bankruptcy but confirmed the need for "financial oversight." On April 16, the *Sunday Mail* reported police attention being directed to Sturgeon for her refusal to appoint a fundraising manager to oversee incoming donations. The same day,

it circulated a video of a March 2021 NEC meeting at which Sturgeon warned against public discussion of financial problems after Edinburgh's former Lord Provost Frank Ross, Allison Graham, and Cynthia Guthrie resigned from the SNP's finance and audit committee. Speculation is growing that she may even resign as an MSP.

SNP president, acting CEO and former minister Mike Russell complained, "In my 50-year association with the party this is the biggest and most challenging crisis we've ever faced, certainly while we've been in government."

Among the pseudo-left tendencies that have orbited the SNP for years, there is overt panic as all of them try to rescue the perspective of Scottish separatism from the unravelling of the SNP.

Writing before Murrell's arrest, Scottish Socialist Party co-leader Colin Fox complained, "Many SNP members I talk to privately fear their party is about to embark on the same path Labour in Scotland has followed since devolution, electing a series of short-lived leaders who fail to halt the decline."

Fox called for an independence convention to bring all the separatist parties together to mobilise "majority support via both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means."

Phil Stott of the Socialist Party Scotland presented the SNP's debacle as arising from a UK state attack on the supposedly "left" perspective of independence. "The SNP is certainly not a left party, let alone a workers' party. However, its support for the break-up of the UK has put it on collision course with the overwhelming majority of the ruling capitalist class who have welcomed the current SNP debacle.

"Despite our trenchant and consistent opposition to the SNP leadership's anti-working class policies and bureaucratic methods, we oppose the capitalist state intervening in this way."

No doubt there is immense schadenfreude in Tory, Labour and UK state circles over the SNP's travails. But if the SNP has indeed been undone by a police operation, it is one set in motion by Scottish nationalists!

The SNP crisis takes the form of a faction fight between rival, well-connected wings of the Scottish bourgeoisie and upper middle class, none with any qualms about using the state apparatus against their

opponents. It is only three years since former SNP leader and First Minister Alex Salmond was acquitted of #MeToo-inspired sex charges instigated by Sturgeon's close advisers, aided by powerful figures in the Scottish civil service and legal apparatus.

Today, writing in the *Scotsman*, former Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill, deputy leader of Salmond's Alba Party and still a Westminster MP, crowed of Sturgeon's fate, "Many knew and only the timing was unknown. Irrespective of what happens with Peter Murrell, her reputation will not survive and rightly so."

The attempt by the pseudo-left groups to portray the SNP's crisis as a product of its insufficient commitment to national separatism is a grotesque political distortion. The SNP's funding crisis is rooted in a membership decline flowing from the fact that in national and local government, it has imposed brutal cuts on every area of social spending, while also supporting NATO's war with Russia.

The eruption of a wave of class struggle in Scotland and throughout the UK has fundamentally undermined the attempt by the SNP and its apologists to advance separatism as a left alternative to the austerity and war agenda of the Tories and Labour in Westminster. The SNP has been exposed as just another pro-business party and the prospect of an "independent" Scotland as a reformist paradise for workers revealed as a chimera.

Contrary to the nationalist and pseudo-left claims, in the 21st century there is no basis for a tiny Scottish state to offer anything other than social misery, intense exploitation, and authoritarianism, achieved by means of the division and weakening of the working class.

The crisis of the SNP is an initial expression of the fact that class questions are again coming to the fore and in the process revealing the real social forces and interests represented by parties and their programs. Workers in Scotland, England and Wales have common interests which can only be advanced by rejecting all forms of nationalism and uniting with workers internationally in the struggle for socialism.



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