

Statement: Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity party dissolves - what lessons for socialists in Scotland?

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Socialist Party Scotland (SPS) statement.

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At its conference on 4 December, Solidarity - Scotland's Socialist Movement voted to effectively dissolve as a party. This followed a recommendation from its NEC, which includes Tommy Sheridan. Solidarity is now deregistered and can no longer stand in elections. Instead it is now a "network" helping to build Alba - [the populist, pro-capitalist nationalist party led by former SNP first minister Alex Salmond](#).

This is just the latest step in the long term nationalist trajectory by Tommy Sheridan, formerly a significant reference point for fighting socialist ideas in Scotland.

His and Solidarity's current political outlook is underlined in the concluding points in the NEC statement which says their key aim is "pushing them (Alba) from left of centre towards our left and socialist vision a socially just, fair and equal nuclear free independent Scotland".

The long term political abandonment of a principled socialist position by Tommy Sheridan and Solidarity has, unfortunately, been taken to a new level.

SSP split

Solidarity, when it launched in 2006, had the potential to be a significant and positive step forward following the divisions in the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) that erupted in 2004.

The early section of the NEC statement raises correctly that Solidarity was launched as a result of the split in 2006 in the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in the context of the battle against the witch-hunt organised by the Murdoch empire against Tommy Sheridan, [wrongly aided by a section of the SSP leadership](#).

The SSP at the time had six MSPs and was a force gaining ground to the left of New Labour and the SNP.

The capitalist establishment had consciously targeted Scotland's most well known socialist, Tommy

Sheridan, for his role in the anti-poll tax campaign from 1988-1991. The mass non-payment campaign played the key role in defeating the tax and bringing down the Thatcher government.

This movement was spearheaded by the ideas, strategy and tactics of Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party and Socialist Party Scotland. Tommy Sheridan was a leading participant in the ranks of Militant in Scotland at the time.

As a result of this struggle in particular, Tommy Sheridan and Scottish Militant Labour (SML) emerged as national point of reference for significant sections of the working class in Scotland. However, by the time of the launch of the SSP in the late '90s both Tommy Sheridan and the majority of what became the SSP leadership had broken away from a revolutionary Marxist position. They split from the Committee for a Workers' International in 2001 after a long debate over the need to retain a distinct revolutionary socialist organisation in Scotland, which they rejected.

Many workers and socialists will wonder how Tommy and those still in Solidarity can reconcile participation in Alba, a party led by Alex Salmond who when he was Scottish first minister and SNP leader had the cosiest of relationships with Murdoch matched only by the likes of Tony Blair.

Those supporters of Militant in Scotland who stayed with the CWI when the SSP leaders split in 2001 were founding members of Solidarity in 2006. Our material at the time, unlike the Solidarity NEC statement now, which is silent on this, outlines the significant position in the workers' movement Solidarity had at the time. Large numbers of the SSP's branches, active members and a majority of its trade unionists joined it.

The launch rally in September 2006 was attended by 600 people. The RMT trade union, who disaffiliated from the SSP, sent a delegation of observers, 100 open cast miners from the TGWU in Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire applied to join. The meeting was addressed by the then PCS civil service union national president Janice Godrich - then a supporter of the CWI in Scotland - a Fire Brigade Union representative and Sinead Daly from the International Socialists (the Scottish section of the CWI).

moving away from socialism

In the 2007 and 2011 elections Solidarity ran principled independent socialist campaigns, which included CWI members as candidates. Solidarity stood expressly against the SNP and Labour's role in passing on cuts and their anti-working class policies in general. Tommy Sheridan only failed to be re-elected in Glasgow as a socialist MSP by 1% of the vote in 2007.

The Solidarity statement of course does not mention that they were also part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) which was launched by then RMT leader Bob Crow alongside the Socialist Party in 2010. Tommy, standing as a TUSC candidate in the 2010 Westminster general election, won a credible 3% in Glasgow South West.

In stark contrast, in 2016, Solidarity, while running on the regional lists, called explicitly for a "independence vote" for the SNP in constituencies. Since the 2014 independence referendum, Solidarity has been calling for a vote for the SNP in elections. Even when socialist candidates, for example those standing for the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, were also contesting constituencies.

The Solidarity NEC statement claims that they achieved the highest socialist votes in elections between 2007 and 2016, but now it is time to "move on". In reality Solidarity's votes, compared to the high point of 2007, were very modest. Particularly given the position held by Tommy Sheridan

in the past as a working class leader and an MSP for eight years.

There is no doubt that Tommy's shift away from a socialist position: i.e. offering no support to pro-capitalist parties and linking the fight for independence to the building of mass working class struggle and an independent socialist Scotland played a key role in undermining Solidarity's base among the working class.

Solidarity's political evolution is simply another example of socialists embracing the theory of stages; first independence and then the fight for socialism can begin. In practice this means leaving the fight for self-determination in the hands of bourgeois nationalists. Not only that it means suspending criticism of the SNP and their pro-cuts policies - which Solidarity has been guilty of for many years.

2014 indyref

The Solidarity NEC statement also doesn't tell the full story when it references the Hope Over Fear - Socialist Case for independence campaign, which did attract tens of thousands to its meetings. Socialist Party Scotland played a central role in the campaign, including speaking on the platform at many of the packed mass meetings.

Indeed it was Socialist Party Scotland who first raised the need for a independent, mass working-class socialist campaign in 2012 in the the run up to the indyref. We argued there was a need for a campaign that would put the interests of the working class and socialism centre stage

This was in contrast to the official YES campaign led by the pro-capitalist SNP. Tommy Sheridan opposed this proposal orgninally and only changed course when it became clear Solidarity would be excluded from YES campaign at the behest of the SNP, led by Alex Salmond, the Scottish Greens and the SSP.

A huge opportunity was squandered by Tommy Sheridan and Solidarity in the aftermath of the referendum. After the indyref campaign and the mass support for socialist ideas that were so evident at the Hope Over Fear meetings an opportunity for a sizeable working-class formation to the left of the SNP was inherent in the hours and days after the result was announced on September 19 2014.

[Socialist Party Scotland was alone at the time in raising clearly the need for the formation of a new party](#) based around a socialist programme to appeal to the the tens of thousands mobilised by Tommy Sheridan, and HOF.

Tommy then, without democratic recourse to Solidarity's structures, released a press statement calling for workers and youth to "[lend their vote" to the SNP](#), which in part facilitated the surge of 90,000 into the SNP in the autumn and winter of 2014. An historic opportunity was missed.

Tommy and the current leaders of Solidarity rejected our appeals that either a new formation be launched or that Solidarity be used as a reference point to take the fight to the SNP, Labour and the Tories. This was despite thousands applying to join Solidarity immediately after the referendum result, which points to the tragic irony the NEC's current admission about the decline in the Solidarity membership since.

Socialist Party Scotland then left Solidarity and [released a public statement](#) that has been borne out over the last six years

“As the most prominent socialist in Scotland, Tommy Sheridan’s voice, and now that of a majority of Solidarity members, will be increasingly associated with support for the SNP, a pro-business party that is carrying out cuts.

“This can only damage the reputation of Solidarity as increasing numbers of working class people over time see through the hollow words of the ‘anti-austerity’ SNP leadership and move into opposition to their cuts policies.”

Socialist Party Scotland, alone on the left at the time, argued for and since for the creation of a new workers’ party in Scotland. But we did not simply wait passively for it to appear. We have continued to, alongside the RMT and others, stood as part of Scottish TUSC in a series of elections.

The Solidarity NEC wrongly claim the SNP as a “left of centre” party which was worthy of socialist’s support from 2014-2021. Apparently its only recently that a “radical degeneration” has taken place.

Solidarity’s only criticisms of the SNP in their statement are their timidity on the issue of a second independence referendum, their position on gender self-ID (with Solidarity leaders echoing the divisive identity politics based approach of the Alba leadership opposing the right of trans people to self-ID) and the SNP’s opposition to a public energy company.

The NEC statement has nothing to say on the SNP implementing billions in Tory cuts at Holyrood and in local councils. It is silent on the issue of the anti-trade union position of the Scottish government and SNP councils as seen recently with the rail and bin workers strikes in the run-up to and during COP26. Not to mention the SNP leadership’s opposition to public ownership and taxing the wealthy.

Solidarity dissolving into Alba is just the logical next step after turning away from building an independent, socialist and working class political alternative. In the 2021 Scottish elections Solidarity called for a vote for Salmond’s party on the list and the SNP in constituencies.

Solidarity members, including Tommy Sheridan, are participating in Alba since its launch as members and could even seek to be selected as candidates for the 2022 council elections.

new workers’ party

In contrast to seeking unity with pro-capitalist nationalism, Socialist Party Scotland fights for the building of a new mass workers’ party. Such a party that would have a federal democratic structure allowing all trends and organisations to argue and put forward their position.

While Alba as a populist formation is posing to the left of the SNP leadership, for example calling for increased EMA and child payments and a public energy company, its pro-business character means it’s unable to go beyond the limits of that system.

Alba councillors, when they were still in the SNP in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire supported yearly cuts budgets. In the forthcoming council elections, unlike Scottish TUSC, Alba is not putting forward a fighting no cuts budget strategy.

Socialist Party Scotland appeals to workers and youth to [join us](#) in fighting for a new workers' party and an independent socialist Scotland as part of a voluntary democratic socialist confederation with England, Wales and Ireland.

Socialist Party Scotland

P.S.

- Socialist Party Scotland. 10 December 2021:
<https://socialistpartyscotland.org.uk/2021/12/10/tommy-sheridans-solidarity-party-dissolves-what-lessons-for-socialists-in-scotland/>