



SNP ex-chief Peter Murrell sentenced to five years for embezzlement

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SNP ex-boss Murrell

The Scottish National Party (SNP)'s former chief executive Peter Murrell has [finally been sentenced](#) for his conviction of embezzlement. The SNP bigwig was handed a five-year custodial sentence, or prison time, for the crime to which he pleaded guilty.

Murrell is the estranged husband of SNP ex-party leader and former Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon. He accepted responsibility for embezzling Â£400,000 of SNP party funds for personal purchases over 12 years.

The 61-year-old had doctored invoices and falsified SNP accounting records to cover up how he was misusing party funds. He embezzled money to buy luxuries (like a Â£3500 silver wine coaster or a Â£125,000 motorhome). In addition, he also spent the money on the extremely mundane (such as egg poachers and toilet seats).

Murrell's lawyer John Scullion KC argued for a mitigation of the sentence. Scullion said Murrell had lived in "isolation" since his guilty plea, was "ostracised" by former friends and colleagues, and had become:

a figure of public ridicule.

However the judge, Lord Young, said that Murrell had been ["unable to stop"](#) embezzling from the SNP and that his crimes only came to an end once they were discovered.

Sturgeon: guilt or association?

Murrell's guilty plea led to intense scrutiny of his former partner Sturgeon. The former first minister denies knowing of his crimes and said he "deceived, misled, and betrayed" her and their marriage.

When Murrell plead guilty, Sturgeon claimed that she had no knowledge of his spending habits, especially the notorious camper van. Many of those which she saw she hadn't questioned owing to their large party salaries, she claimed. Many have cast doubt on her version of events, however.

In her interview with the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg, post Murrell's guilty plea, Sturgeon was, at points, tearful:

I am not responsible for the crimes that my former husband committed and I'm not going to apologise for somebody else's crimes. ";

He perpetrated a crime on the SNP that included me as leader. ";

I feel like I'm out here serving a sentence for a crime I did not commit.

She spoke specifically about the necklace Murrell gave her. She said it makes no sense for her to have worn it if she had known that it was tied up with embezzled funds.

Sturgeon maintains that Murrell had control over the financial mechanisms necessary for his heist. But multiple party whistleblowers had raised concerns about financial notes. Multiple senior staff figures quit positions in the SNP over these worries of financial malfeasance.

However, Sturgeon blames the police investigation ongoing at the time for her decision not to act on the whistleblowers' worries. She also credits that investigation with having cleared her of wrongdoing.

SNP trial by politics?

Ultimately, we cannot know exactly how much, if anything, Nicola Sturgeon knew about her ex-husband's financial crimes. It's also hard to see what motivated Murrell - not exactly a poor man - other than the strange thrill of the crime, perhaps. Many are unlikely to give either the benefit of the doubt.

It is true, however, that Sturgeon was under investigation, even arrested in June 2023 albeit released without charge on the same day. If prosecutors could substantiate enough for Murrell to plead but not enough to even hold Sturgeon on remand, maybe there's weight to her case.

Others might say that Murrell pleaded guilty to avoid a trial, to save Sturgeon's neck and defend the SNP's remarkably successful - almost hegemonic - [political project](#). However, it could also be that he pleaded because it was him and he acted alone and knew his time was up.

Sturgeon has never had many political supporters in Westminster nor among the journalists that inhabit its bubble. As journalist Matt Kennard [said recently](#), the British state deeply fears Scottish independence perhaps above any comparable domestic movement.

Add to that context the [heavily gendered media portrayal of Sturgeon](#) as arguably the most consequential and successful woman actor in UK political life, and it looks inevitable that sheâ??d be held responsible. She was also scrutinised endlessly for Alex Salmondâ??s sexual harassment allegations, which [she was cleared of](#)

Perhaps itâ??s another case of a woman being held responsible for the crimes (or alleged) of men close to her. Or perhaps sheâ??s smarter than weâ??ve all given credit for. Either way, itâ??s clear that the British establishment had Sturgeon well in its trained sights.

Featured image via the Canary

By [Cameron Baillie](#)

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