

Lord Rennard

Last Update: 25/1/14

I am moved to make some observations about the Lord Rennard sexual harassment issue because it is so representative of the pathological state of gender relations these days. Let us firstly present the case for the prosecution. I believe there are four women complainants. Their accusations are given below. I have taken this account from The Guardian, 21/1/14, which is unlikely to be biased in favour of Lord Rennard.

Alison Smith, now a politics lecturer at Oxford, was an aspiring Lib Dem activist when she and a friend were invited back to Rennard's house after having dinner with him in central London. "He just very suddenly got up and plonked himself between us and then he started moving his hands down our backs and places where they had absolutely no business being," she said. "I straight away stood up and said, 'No, that's not acceptable. I'm going home.' He said, 'Oh you can't go home, you should stay here.' I said, 'What do you mean I can't go home?' He said, 'There's no taxis.' "I said, 'Well if there's no taxis then I'll walk.' He said, 'You can't walk you don't know where you are' ... and I got very, very, very cross ... he looked surprised, he looked shocked and he opened the door and we got a taxi home." She complained to then chief whip Paul Burstow. (*I am not aware of the date of this alleged incident*).

Susan Gaszczak says she was harassed by Rennard in 2007 when she attended an event for future female MPs as a parliamentary candidate in Peterborough. Gaszczak, who sat with Rennard on the party's federal policy committee, says that at the event Rennard's hand started to rub the outside of her leg. She claims that when she moved away he kept getting closer and was brushing parts of her that she "didn't want to be brushed". When she excused herself, she says he followed her and said: "Why don't we get a couple more drinks sent up to my room, where we can continue this conversation?" (*Note the date - more than 6 years ago*).

Bridget Harris, a former special adviser to Nick Clegg, says that Rennard repeatedly touched her legs in a hotel bar at a party conference in 2003 in Swansea. "As we carried on talking he was touching my legs and my knees and he did it two or three times, and the first time I thought it was an accident and I crossed my legs. Then the second time I realised he was actually doing it. ... the third time I basically had to physically move away from him," she told Channel 4 News, adding that the peer went on to invite her to his room, "clearly not noticing the signals". (*Note the date - more than 10 years ago*).

Alison Goldsworthy agreed to identify herself as one of the complainants, but has not publicly set out her allegations.

Logically, there are two possibilities,

- [1] The above accounts are a fair, full and complete account of true incidents and would give an unbiased third party a faithful picture of the events, OR,
- [2] The above accounts are not a fair, full and complete account of true incidents but rather they present an inaccurate picture of the events.

Let us take possibility [1] first. In other words, let us assume the most damning interpretation of these events for Lord Rennard. It seems to me that the worst he can be accused of is being rather sleazy and slow on the uptake when sexual advances are

unwelcome. After all, in none of these cases did anything occur beyond an invitation to his room or equivalent tactile advances - which, being rejected, ended the matter. As presented, it is certainly objectionable behaviour. But just how heinous a crime is the unwanted touching? I suggest that the massive tsunami of publicity which this issue has received is out of all proportion - even assuming this worst possible interpretation of the incidents.

Of course feminists will be incensed at this opinion. They will claim that such events are more serious than the touching *per se* would indicate. They will claim that sexual harassment is all about who has the power - see for example Polly Toynbee, The Guardian, 21/1/14, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/21/lord-rennard-why-sexual-harassment-matters>. Indeed it is, and feminists are almost as obsessed with power as they are with rape. But who has the power here? A very useful guide is this: to find out who has the power ask yourself who it is you are not allowed to criticise? It is permanent open season on criticism of men. But are we allowed to disagree with the feminist line on how heinous the above incidents are? The feminist line is that such incidents are so serious as to justify a man's complete professional destruction. Do I exaggerate? They clearly believe that Lord Rennard's expulsion from the party and his loss of all political position is justified. And we shall see below that they also believe removal of his Peerage is justified too. So, no, I do not exaggerate. The sentence demanded by the court of feminism is complete professional destruction. If you disagree with this, then you are a misogynist. Disagreement is not permitted. So who has the power?

In fact this whole issue provides another example of the largely illusory nature of male power. To be more exact, powerful men are only powerful within a very restricted range of application. My favourite example of this is Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Before his fall, Dominique Strauss-Kahn was sometimes described as the most powerful man in the world. As the head of the IMF, the leaders of major nations would do obeisance to Strauss-Kahn in order to obtain the IMF funds they required. So, without doubt, Strauss-Kahn was very powerful indeed when it came to international finances - and, I presume, he would have been able to exercise great influence in many political spheres as a consequence. And yet, in 2011, Strauss-Kahn was completely destroyed in a couple of days by an immigrant hotel chamber maid. I make no comment on the allegations made against him. The truth or otherwise of the allegations is not the point. The point is, had Strauss-Kahn been truly powerful he could not have been brought low by an ostensibly powerless hotel maid. Would this have happened to his namesake, Genghis Khan? Of course not. Power isn't what it used to be, is it? The truth is that Dominique Strauss-Kahn had power only within his professional sphere. But any man - any man at all - can be destroyed by any woman making allegations of sexual assault, because such accusations trigger the combined might of the judicial system and the court of public opinion. And both of these subscribe to the feminist narrative that even the mildest sexual harassment - if committed by a man - is so heinous a crime as to deserve the man's complete professional destruction.

Let us not forget, though, that even in this beleaguered world of ours, in which public opinion has been so perverted by feminist propaganda, there are still people - of both sexes - whose sense of proportion and true justice has not been corrupted. An example is Jackie Winter, who wrote the following letter to The Guardian on 21/1/14 in response to the Polly Toynbee article mentioned above. "*Enough of this "we're all victims" hand-wringing. I worked for the Liberal party in the House of Commons*

from 1976 until 1987, and it may surprise some that neither my female colleagues nor I put up with constant manhandling because we were either too ambitious for political advancement or too stupid to recognise it as sexual harassment. It simply didn't happen. Of course there was the occasional hand on knee or hug from a male MP or member of staff. If it was unwelcome, it was dealt with firmly at the time and there the matter ended, with no tears and no years of depression or counselling required for either party. Perhaps it is a generational issue, but I resent being made a victim by Polly Toynbee and those Liberal Democrat activists who seem to have allowed a few embarrassing incidents to blight their lives and the lives of others, and with a few facile generalisations have also managed (perhaps inadvertently) to tarnish the reputations of those women who have had political success. By screaming "sexual harassment" at the slightest touch, they trivialise the real humiliation and violence suffered by too many women every day. By depicting women as too fragile to deal with the occasional clumsy approach without the intervention of a more powerful male, they undermine our achievements in the workplace and beyond". Exactly so, well said, Jackie.

And so far I have considered only option [1].

So let us now consider the possibility that the four women's accounts of the incidents are not fair, full and complete but rather give an inaccurate picture of the events. The most extreme possibility is that the incidents are complete fabrication. Many people will not be willing to entertain such an idea. But women frequently make false allegations, particularly against men over matters relating to sexual conduct or partner abuse. And here we are dealing with politics, a sphere in which smearing is a normal part of the game, unfortunately. However, the fact that the incidents have been dredged up from the distant past suggests that they do related to actual events. However, this does not mean that the women's accounts are fair.

The most obvious lack of fairness is that, so far, we have heard only one version of events. It is common in such cases that a very different picture might emerge from the man's perspective. Whilst the women give us an account of Lord Rennard's actions, were the women themselves entirely innocent of sending confusing signals - if only accidentally? All I have seen in print on the issue is from The Guardian, 20/1/14, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jan/20/lord-rennard-sexual-harassment-allegations> which noted that, "*Lord Rennard has sought to rebut the charges during the Lib Dem party inquiry, but his evidence has not been published. Lord Carlile QC, who has acted for Rennard in the past year, said in a Mail on Sunday article that 50 statements supporting Rennard had been placed before the inquiry. He wrote: "In relation to the fourth woman's allegation, we have the picture, and the photographer provided a statement: neither supported the claim. In relation to one of the other three women, we provided a devastating item of contradictory evidence that it would not be appropriate to publish. In relation to another, we were in possession of totally contradictory potential witness evidence that we held back out of respect for requested privacy".* From these remarks it would appear that there is a strong counter-case for any wrongdoing in respect of three of the four cases.

Are there darker forces at work here? The fact that four women have come forward now with accounts which are many years old is somewhat odd. But there are other reasons to be suspicious that a conspiracy might be at work. The most alarming is the evidence from Amy Kitcher, a former Lib Dem parliamentary candidate. Like Jackie Winter, Amy Kitcher is one of the sensible women. The following I have taken from

The Guardian 21/1/14, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jan/21/alleged-victim-lord-rennard-amy-kitcher>.....

Although Kitcher did not inform the police, someone passed her name to the Met without her knowledge. Kitcher's name was also passed to journalists last year without her knowledge, prompting her to complain about the "incessant interference in my private life" by a stranger. She was interviewed by the police about Rennard's behaviour for two hours. She summarised her evidence to the police thus, "Chris Rennard touched my knee. This was inappropriate. Did I think it was sexual harassment? No. Did I feel threatened in anyway? No."

Kitcher said it would be wrong and naive of Rennard to apologise for his behaviour and has called for the matter to be closed by the party after the Metropolitan police concluded there was no criminal case to answer. In a lengthy post on her Facebook page, Kitcher wrote: "Does the continued pursuit of one man further the aims of respect and equality within the party? No, it doesn't".

In her post she added: "Am I a helpless victim that needs the party hierarchy to intervene on my behalf? Am I...such a pathetic figure that I believe only the police or the 'patriarchy' can deal with this for me? Of course not. As I said to the police at the time, if the worst thing that ever happened to me was someone touching my knee under a table then I would have lived a very sheltered life indeed. The fact is that women face this, and worse, everyday – and we cope! We deal with it, one way or another. Is it right? No, but it is reality."

Kitcher wrote of Rennard's refusal to apologise: "I can understand why Chris Rennard is not apologising. The police have said that there is no case to answer. Of course his legal counsel has advised him not to apologise. If he apologises now, it would admit guilt on his part. To expect him to do anything else is naive. Do I want an apology from Chris Rennard? No. Do I want people to respect the decision of Scotland Yard and the Met police? Yes."

But the most disturbing bit of evidence is what Kitcher is quoted as saying at the end of the Guardian article...

She alleged that one woman in the party had advised her to be "flirty" with Rennard to help her political career. She wrote: "What has not come out during the course of this case is that some people at the time sought to manipulate Chris Rennard. One woman in the party advised me to be 'friendly and flirty' with Chris Rennard as it would 'help me politically if he noticed me'. A paid party officer told me to exploit my contact with Chris Rennard to get a "much sought after 'constituency visit' from him."

Here we have an intimation, and perhaps more than a mere intimation, that ambitious women in the party might very well be willing to be "flirty" with Rennard in order to benefit from his ability to bestow political beneficence. And could Rennard's actions, as testified by the four accusers, actually be in response to their initiating "flirtiness"? I do not know, but the whole scenario seems to gain credibility with the addition of that ingredient. Moreover, it takes little imagination to suspect that the subsequent (and long delayed) transmogrification of the incidents into sexual harassment might be due to the women's disappointment at not receiving Rennard's political favour.

And who exactly is the *agent provocateur* in this conspiracy, the "one woman" who is encouraging other women to be flirty? And who was it that passed Amy Kitcher's name to the police and the newspapers without her consent?

There is other evidence that a conspiracy is afoot. Again, from The Guardian 20/1/14, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jan/19/lord-rennard-allies-allege-political-conspiracy> we learn that:

The peer's supporters have claimed that there is now a conspiracy between the four complainants and some solicitors to damage him. They released an email chain inadvertently sent to them showing some of the women taking up a suggestion from Lawrence Davies – the lawyer for one of Rennard's accusers, Bridget Harris – to petition the Queen to have Rennard stripped of his peerage. The proposal, dubbed "part of media planning for Sunday", was enthusiastically taken up by Harris. Setting out his plans in the email to Harris, Davies suggested: "One non-legal and cheap solution would be for the victims/appealers to say: 'If the appeal is unsuccessful, we will petition the Queen for Rennard to be stripped of his peerage'.

"You could also ask the Queen that all new lords should have to sign an anti-discrimination contract before taking up their seats because the political parties cannot be trusted to enforce it and it brings the political system into disrepute. I am happy to write that letter on a free/pro bono basis. We then leak it to Channel 4 news etc or if you/they approve that I can give it to the Mail on Sunday for tomorrow. The Queen won't do it but she will have to reply and it will add to the pressure on the Liberals and the politicians generally. Please bounce this on to the others and let me know."

These emails do seem to demonstrate an organised bid to discredit Rennard which goes well beyond justice for alleged sexual harassment and into the realm of murky politics. To "put pressure on the Liberals" appears to be an end in itself. And the seeming access these women's solicitors have to the press and media speaks of those familiar with propagandising, or at least PR. Where exactly the truth lies it is not possible for an outsider to know. But one thing is certain. The women accusers are not the delicate, defenseless rosebuds they would have us believe.