UK Labour’s Carl Sargeant commits suicide after sexual harassment allegations

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10 November 2017

Labour Welsh Assembly Member (AM) Carl Sargeant tragically committed suicide Tuesday. By all accounts, he is the first fatality resulting from hysterical allegations of sexual harassment that are sweeping Westminster.

Sargeant, a 49-year-old husband and father of two, was a factory worker before being elected to the Welsh Assembly in 2003 and had served in several ministerial posts. He was found dead in his home in Connah’s Quay, Flintshire, Wales.

His suicide came just days after he had been accused of “certain incidents” involving several women, which led to his suspension from Welsh Labour on Friday.

Immediately after his suspension, Sargeant said the unknown allegations as to his “personal conduct … [are] shocking and distressing to me” and called on Welsh Labour’s general secretary to instigate “an urgent independent investigation into these allegations in order to allow me to clear my name.” Four days later he took his own life.

In a statement, his family described Sargeant as a “much loved husband, father and friend” and said that “Carl was not informed of any of the detail of the allegations against him, despite requests and warnings regarding his mental welfare.”

“The family wish to disclose the fact that Carl maintained his innocence and he categorically denied any wrongdoing.

“The distress of not being able to defend himself properly against these unspecified allegations meant he was not afforded common courtesy, decency or natural justice.”

Sargeant’s friends and colleagues have also denounced his treatment, saying that he had been left “isolated” and “thrown to the wolves,” despite none of the allegations—latterly said to involve “unwanted attention, inappropriate touching or groping”—being subject to investigation by the police.

The absence of “common courtesy, decency or natural justice” shown towards Sargeant is not unique to his case. It is intrinsic to a sex scandal, first initiated in Hollywood and then taken up with great enthusiasm in Westminster that involves jettisoning the presumption of innocence in favour of unsubstantiated assertions.

Those that have instigated, fuelled and led this railroading from behind the scenes, often in pursuit of concealed political and personal ends, are culpable in Sargeant’s suicide.

Correspondence from Sargeant’s solicitor Hugh Bowden to Labour Party officials, released by the AM’s family, underscores the traducing of democratic norms involved. In one letter, Bowden said his client faced “serious and career-threatening allegations” and was “anxious to ensure his name and the reputation of the Labour Party is preserved.”

Noting that a hearing was not expected until January 16, Bowden warned the “ongoing delay” was “both prejudicial to the preparation of our client’s case but also to his physical and mental wellbeing.”

In another, Bowden accused Labour First Minister Carwyn Jones of making comments to the media following Sargeant’s suspension that were “clearly prejudicing what is allegedly an independent enquiry.”

Jones, it should be noted, is an experienced barrister who had tutored law students for several years before entering the Welsh Assembly.

While Sargeant still had no details of the complaint or complainants, “the first minister has felt able to conduct interviews with the BBC,” Bowden noted, where he indicated “he became ‘aware of a number of incidents at the beginning of last week.’”

“This is clearly prejudicing what is allegedly an independent inquiry by your office,” Bowden complained. Moreover, the fact that “a large number of people have spoken to the complainant or complainants”

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from the First Minister's office, meant the "very real possibility that the evidence of the witnesses is being manipulated …"

Indeed. While Sargeant was denied his most basic right of knowing the allegations against him, and their source, others were free to fuel the witch-hunt atmosphere. Commenting on events on the BBC's *Sunday Politics Wales* show, for example, former Welsh government adviser Cathy Owens blamed an unspecified number of male politicians "who are sexual predators" who she said are protected by their parties.

Asked his opinion on her claims on Monday, Jones said, "I've got no reason to doubt what Cathy has said."

The Westminster scandal initially centred on the Conservative Party, with some 40 MPs accused anonymously of anything from consenting relationships with fellow MPs, through sexual "inappropriateness," gay sex involving men wearing "women's perfume" to serious allegations of sexual abuse.

Last week, Michael Fallon resigned as defence secretary over allegations he had touched a journalist's knee. Secretary of State Damien Green is currently under investigation, also accused of touching a journalist's leg and of viewing pornography. He denies the allegations.

It has not taken long, however, for Labour to become the main focus of the campaign. Those in the party accused and under investigation over the last days include former frontbench MP Kelvin Hopkins for allegedly sending "inappropriate" texts and rubbing his crotch on a female member (suspended) and former frontbencher Clive Lewis, for allegedly touching the bottom of a woman at a Labour conference in September. Both deny the accusations.

Sheffield MP Jared O'Mara is also suspended over Facebook postings from 15 years ago and more recent comments that he disputes, while on Wednesday, David Prescott—son of former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott—was suspended from Labour for reasons yet unspecified.

Such is the nature of the allegations that their veracity cannot be judged, resolving in many instances to a case of "he said, she said." However, it is surely more than mere coincidence that those cited above are associated with backing Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leadership (Prescott is a former speechwriter). And that many of those most vocal in demanding the exposure of alleged "sexual predators" come from the right wing of the Labour Party, and the political right more generally.

At the weekend, the *Daily Mail* leaked allegations of sexual harassment against Jim Mowatt, director of education at the Unite union, a principal backer of the Corbyn leadership. The newspaper revealed that Mowatt had been accused of "degrading" sexual harassment several months ago by "Left-wing Unite activist Kate Bradley," who said he had "belittled" her by asking if her mother knew "you're wearing make-up?" and describing her as a "femme fatale."

Bradley, a former organiser for the pseudo-left, pro-Corbyn RS21, condemned the *Mail's* leak in a statement posted on the RS21 web site. Explaining that the newspaper had chosen to proceed with its article against her explicit wishes, she said "the *Mail* is trying to use my complaint to undermine Unite, Jeremy Corbyn and the left, which is a totally cynical and unsanctioned use of my words."

Even more damning then is the blatant disregard of the pseudo-left for democratic rights under the guise of defending women's rights and anti-Toryism.

Only days before the *Mail* leak, Bradley herself on RS21 cited the "sex-pest" list as proof that "sexually predatory behaviour in the [Tory] party has been known about and tolerated" and complained, "Nothing has been done to remove these people from their positions of power."

For its part, the *Socialist Worker* embraced the scandal for helping undermine "Tory scum," while warning "the left" that they must not question the allegations or the political motives of those making them.

In a rambling statement, the Socialist Party lumped together Jimmy Saville, Harvey Weinstein, and the Westminster accusations as proof of "horrendous crimes" and symptoms of "a rotten system." While stating for the record that "socialists support all democratic rights"—except apparently the presumption of innocence—its indictment of capitalism resolves itself to the call for Labour to lead the fight to transform Parliament "into a far more democratic institution than it currently is."

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