

UK Labour staffer death is second linked to unproved allegations of sexual harassment

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A second member of the Labour Party is believed to have taken his own life after allegations of sexual misconduct.

The man, said to be in his early thirties, worked at Labour's headquarters in Victoria, London. A Labour Party spokesperson said only that he died "suddenly and unexpectedly" and declined to comment further.

The anonymous man was reportedly suspended following "porn-related" allegations—said to involve photoshopping people's faces onto the bodies of porn stars. A Labour source told the *Sunday Times* an inquiry had only just been launched and was "in its early stages. No facts had been found nor was there any finding of guilt."

The news comes just a fortnight after the suicide of Labour Party Welsh Assembly Member Carl Sargeant. The 49-year-old father of two was removed as cabinet secretary for communities and children in the Welsh government and suspended from the party on November 3, after unspecified allegations of "sexual misconduct."

Sargeant had protested the allegations as "shocking and distressing to me" and had requested an "urgent independent investigation... in order to allow me to clear my name."

While Sargeant was not even told of the claims made against him, Labour First Minister Carwyn Jones made statements to the media that Sargeant's solicitor said were "clearly prejudicing what is allegedly an independent enquiry."

Family and friends complained that Sargeant had been thrown to the wolves and not afforded "common courtesy, decency or natural justice." In a letter to Labour Party officials, his solicitor Hugh Bowden warned that a drawn-out investigation was "both prejudicial to the preparation of our client's case but also to his physical and mental wellbeing."

On November 7, his wife, Bernadette, found Sargeant

dead in their Welsh home. Efforts by family and emergency services to resuscitate him failed. A post-mortem confirmed he had hung himself.

In all the allegations so far made of sexual harassment, no one has been charged with a criminal offence. Yet the presumption of innocent until proven guilty has been jettisoned based on unsubstantiated allegations, rumour, innuendo and gossip.

In Hollywood, where the campaign first began, careers and reputations have been trashed without any concern for due process. Those judged guilty without trial are being expunged from films and having awards rescinded.

The arrogance and contempt for democratic rights of those backing such measures was summed up by *Teen Vogue* columnist Emily Lindin. On Twitter, she wrote, "if some innocent men's reputations have to take a hit in the process of undoing the patriarchy, that is a price I am absolutely willing to pay."

In Britain, where the campaign has focussed on Westminster, two men have taken such a "hit" that their unproven association with sexual misconduct caused them to take their own lives. Those who have instigated, fuelled and joined in this hysterical campaign have blood on their hands.

One would have to be naive, stupid or have some vested interest to rule out the distinct possibility that allegations of sexual misconduct are being used for nefarious ends.

When the harassment campaign first broke in parliament, it focused on the Conservatives. A list of some 40 MPs was circulated electronically, accusing them of anything from having affairs to sexual assault.

The first scalp taken was that of Defence Secretary Michael Fallon. Only the week before his resignation, Fallon had been defending the despotic regime of Saudi Arabia, which the UK hoped to sell more arms as it prosecutes its criminal war in Yemen. But it was not such examples of political venality that did in Fallon, but rather

reports that he had touched a journalist's knee.

First Secretary of State, and de facto deputy prime minister, Damian Green was also first accused of touching the knee of a young Tory activist and journalist, which he bitterly disputed. Now he is under investigation for viewing pornography on his House of Commons computer—an allegation that he also denies, but which is just as difficult to disprove.

The pornography claims were made by Bob Quick, former assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. In 2008, Quick oversaw an extremely controversial police operation into the leak of government papers, during which Green's parliamentary office and home were raided and he was held for several hours. No charges were ever brought against Green, while an investigation into the police's actions cleared them of any wrongdoing. Quick was forced out of his position in 2009 after he was photographed carrying uncovered secret papers.

Green has described Quick as a “discredited former assistant commissioner” involved in “unscrupulous character assassination.” In a statement, he said that the police had never suggested “that inappropriate material was found on my parliamentary computer” and denied having a personal computer in his office, as had also been claimed.

That hasn't prevented media reports that the pornography found was “extreme”, while adding suggestively that it “didn't feature sexual images of children.”

Fallon and Green are May's key political allies, charged with overseeing a cabinet and government bitterly divided over Brexit—an issue becoming more contentious as the days go by. Much of the leaking against them comes from Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* and *Times* newspapers, supporters of the hard-Brexit strategy favoured by May's potential leadership challengers, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove.

But it is the Labour Party that has been most affected by campaign. Last week, former minister Ivan Lewis was suspended and placed under investigation over allegations of sexual harassment. Lewis is reportedly accused of touching a 19-year-old woman's leg in 2010 and inviting her to his house.

Lewis said he had “never made non-consensual sexual comments or sexual advances to women” and was “deeply saddened” by the allegations, which he strongly disputed. He expressed his regret that he had ever done anything to make a woman feel uncomfortable, saying “I have on occasion asked women I work with out for drinks

or dinner, or developed strong feelings for them, and I am genuinely sorry if this was unwelcome or inappropriate in the circumstances, and caused anyone to feel awkward.”

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has not made any effort to oppose such railroading, or expressed concern at the abuse of due process. Instead, he declared that the allegations must signal a “moment of real change” in overturning a “warped and degrading culture” across society, effectively treating all the accusations as good coin by claiming that sexual predators had been “hiding in plain sight.”

Two other MPs, Kelvin Hopkins and Jared O'Mara, have been suspended by Labour, and another, Clive Lewis, is also under investigation. The party has also retained the services of top barrister Karon Monaghan to investigate claims by party activist, Bex Bailey, that a party official told her to keep quiet when she informed them that she had been raped in 2011 by another party member. Monaghan's remit goes beyond this, however, with reports that she will also advise the party on putting in place procedures for dealing with such allegations.

Corbyn's right-wing opponents within the party have gone on the offensive. Jess Phillips, chair of the women's parliamentary Labour Party, who has previously argued that Corbyn must stand down, demanded he make clear there will be “zero tolerance of this kind of behaviour”—again junking the presumption of innocence.

The subtext is that Corbyn supporters—and the left more generally—are misogynists and rape apologists. The *Observer*, which along with its sister paper the *Guardian* has run with the campaign, reported salaciously and without citation or proof that it had “been told by several sources that another Corbyn ally bragged about how his friendship with the Labour leader allowed him to get closer to women.”



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