

Britain's Sex Scandal. Sleaze and Defection: The Threats to David Cameron's Tories

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Continental people have sex lives: the English have hot water bottles. –George Mikes, How to be an Alien (1946)

So much fuss about nothing, which is the perfect storm for a British political scandal. Even as the British Prime Minister David Cameron was readying for the Tory Party conference in Birmingham, his minister for civil society handed in his resignation over a sex scandal. To make matters more baffling for the Prime Minister, the UK Independence Party's siren song proved impossible for another Tory MP to resist. In a matter of hours, Cameron had a resignation and a defection.

In what is surely a comic miscasting, Mark Reckless, MP for Rochester and Strood, decided to add credence to his name by leaping over to Ukip, whose anti-EU message has spoken in moving volumes. This followed in the wake of Douglas Carswell's move to the same party for similar reasons. The Eurosceptic group among the Conservatives, which has been a bone of contention for years, is assuming serious proportions with the presence of a proudly fashioned anti-EU party. "I promise to cut immigration while treating people fairly and humanely. I cannot keep that promise as a Conservative; I can keep it as Ukip."

The optimists in Cameron's camp might be relieved that there is finally a beacon to draw away the rabble rousing anti-Europeans, who have had a habit of sabotaging the conservatives at vital moments of their political fortunes. But such departures do bring their inevitable costs.

The strategists will be worried whether the Ukip temptation may convert the Tories into mere mimicry, an anti-European, populist echo keen to smash welfare and don the John Bull attire. In the words of Home Office minister Damian Green, "We must at all costs and at all times resist the temptation to become Ukip-lite." [1] Critics such as *The Guardian's* Polly Toynbee are convinced that the push to the right is entirely self-inflicted and conscious, a very clear, all out strategy to begin with. "Out of Europe is not just a policy, it's a proxy for all they hate, from human rights to welfare." [2]

That brutal fight for the inner Tory has proven a dysfunctional, and disorienting one. No one is genuinely conservative enough, just as no one is clear what exactly a modern conservative looks like, however much welfare is slashed. "As with so many things," surmises John Harris, "it's ultimately Margaret Thatcher's fault." [3]

The good tradition of Tory turncoats has been well complemented by that of titillating sleaze. The Reckless defection was complemented by the resignation of the MP for Braintree, Brooks Newmark, who proved he was not the sharpest knife in the conservative

drawer in sending “inappropriate messages” on the WhatsApp to a journalist. Such inappropriateness involved a “girl snap of his willy” as a tabloid so unflatteringly called it. The *Sunday Mirror* decided to make it less graphic, but the suggestion was unmistakable: “As a part of a series of exchanges, he sent a graphic picture exposing himself while wearing a pair of paisley pyjamas.” Such taste from the founder of the Women2Win campaign group!

The male journalist was ever so cheeky in posing as online alter-ego and party activist “Sophie Wittams”, someone Newmark wanted to bag and shag. The conservative magazine, *The Spectator*, decided that such behaviour was not reprehensible to require expulsion from Parliament. “But it doesn’t help a ministerial career: Newmark is out as a civil society minister.”[4] Nor did it help Malin Sahlen, a Swedish model whose photo was used to cover for Wittams. While Newmark was a rank amateur relative to his Tory predecessors of the “Back to Basics” era of John Major, he paid the expected price.

Those selling the paisley pyjamas were the only ones to cheer at this story of entrapment. “It seems that the suburbs of England are now feeling the ‘paisley effect’ as the classic pyjama design has now sold out at M&S.”[5]

Cameron’s calculations have been thrown out given his reluctance to continue with the Liberal Democrats in a coalition arrangement. The Tories have been doing much effacing and removal of their Lib Dem counterparts, much of it in anticipation of cutting them away like irritating impedimenta. In the view of the prime minister, “I’m more keen than ever to lead a government that can really deliver, unencumbered by the Liberal Democrats. We can take it from here now.”[6]

The threat posed by the Tory vote eating organism that is becoming Ukip may well force the Tories into an arrangement they otherwise despise. Much of that may well be academic – the British voter is unlikely to spare the Lib Dems for their spineless performance in the coalition bedroom. But even as such manoeuvres take place, it is touching to see the tradition of Troy sleaze, but more importantly reaction to it, being upheld with a touching diligence.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/sep/28/tory-conservatives-mark-reckless--ukip-brooks-newmark>

[2] <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/30/tories-ukip-david-cameron--europhobic-right>

[3] <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/sep/30/tories-war-troublemakers-egotists--backstabbers-ukip-leadership-annual-conference>

[4] <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeehouse/2014/09/david-cameron-loses-two-mps-in-one--day-as-brooks-newmark-quite/>

[5] <http://metro.co.uk/2014/09/28/has-tory-sleaze-made-paisley-pyjamas-sexy-marks-spencer-->

[sells-out-after-brooks-newmark-scandal-4885274/](#)

[6] <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/09/minority-retort-tories-are-looking--future-without-lib-dems>

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