

## The Westminster Sex Scandal Highlights the Cracks in the Secular Liberal System

### News:

On Monday 6<sup>th</sup> of November, the leaders of the main political parties in the UK met to discuss plans for how to tackle the sex scandal crisis that has gripped Westminster and rocked British politics over the past fortnight. They agreed to a new independent grievance procedure and improved human resources to help potential victims who suffer sexual harassment by politicians and others working in parliament. Over the past 2 weeks, a string of allegations ranging from assault and rape to inappropriate sexual misconduct and lewd banter have been charged against a number of MP's and other senior political figures from across political parties, including the International Trade Minister, the First Secretary of State, and the Defence Secretary who resigned his post due to the allegations. The scandal has highlighted how sexual misconduct is a profound problem within the corridors of Parliament. Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn stated that "*a warped and degrading sexual harassment culture*" is thriving in Westminster. (Independent)

### Comment:

This immoral behaviour is just one of the undesirable fruits resulting from the flaws of the secular liberal culture and system that has nurtured a culture of disrespect towards women amongst many men as well as creating confusion regarding the morally appropriate interaction between the genders. The fact that sexual harassment, assaults and rape are endemic within liberal societies worldwide, affecting all fields of life, including politics, the media, educational institutions, the medical field, and the army, should surely warrant questioning of the role of liberal values and laws in causing this crisis. A survey published in 2016 by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Everyday Sexism Project found that more than half of women (52%) in the UK had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour at work, and among women and girls aged 16-24, the proportion reporting sexual harassment rose to 63%. Around one in 8 women reported inappropriate sexual touching at work and 1% said they had been raped or seriously sexually assaulted in their workplace. All this is despite the fact that sexual harassment is categorized as a form of unlawful discrimination under the 2010 Equality Act, and unwanted touching can constitute a sexual assault by law. It highlights the fact that simply strengthening disciplinary measures, grievance procedures and judicial punishments cannot be the way to generate a 'culture of respect' towards women. Rather, liberal societies need to recognise that the promotion of sexual freedoms, alongside sanctioning the sexualisation of society and women through entertainment, advertising and other industries will inevitably have a negative impact on how men view and treat women.

Furthermore, the reluctance of many women to bring forth claims of sexual harassment for fear they will be ignored, marginalized at work, or lose their job is an indictment of how low women's dignity has become within liberal societies. In the mentioned TUC survey, four in five women said they did not report the incidents to their employers, with many fearing that it would harm their relationships at work or that they would not be taken seriously. This fear is not unwarranted. In this current Westminster scandal, a number of women have reported that when raising their grievances relating to sexual misconduct by MP's or senior party members, their complaints were brushed under the carpet or that they were even discouraged from reporting the issue. Bex Bailey for example, a prominent Labour Party activist who claimed that she was raped at a party event in 2011, stated that when she raised the crime with a senior party official she was told that if she reported the incident it could damage her career. All this reflects how in capitalist societies, securing political power or profit will often take prominence over protecting women's dignity.

Additionally, what has emerged in discussions within liberal societies over this scandal is confusion over what exactly constitutes sexual harassment and what is 'just innocent flirtation and banter' or 'friendly physical contact between work colleagues' as some have called it. The subjectivity within liberal societies and absence of clear lines of demarcation of what is acceptable and unacceptable interaction between men and women due to considering mind the source of right and wrong for individuals have resulted in this confusion. Consequently, some women who are subjected to lewd comments or forms of unwanted touching are described as over-reacting and not taken seriously.

Preventing sexual harassment and assaults against women necessitates beliefs, values and laws that nurture respect for women and protect their dignity at every level of society. The Islamic social system embodies such beliefs, values and laws which oblige men to view and to always treat women with respect. It prohibits the sexualisation or exploitation of women for any purpose, unequivocally placing the protection of women's dignity above the pursuit of any monetary or materialistic interest. Islam also rejects sexual freedoms, and instead, it lays down a clear set of laws that effectively regulate the relationship between men and women to ensure that all forms of sexual interactions, without exception, are confined to marriage alone. This is alongside prescribing severe punishments for any form of violation of a woman's dignity, including even uttering a single word against her honour. All this facilitates a healthy and productive relationship between the genders in society, enabling women to work, study, travel and have an active public life free from the fear of harassment and assault.

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