

David Laws and 'living a lie'

DAVID LAWS, the LibDem MP for Yeovil, and the former LibCon Chief Secretary to the Treasury, has been caught claiming rent and expenses for staying in James Lundie's Kennington flat and then at James' new house in a square nearby. This has become a talking point because it emerged last week that David has been having sex with James (who apparently doubled as his landlord), for eight or nine years. The reason I have put it so bluntly is because although David was 'having sex' with James, his live-in landlord, they were not in any sense partners or espoused. They did not share bank accounts, friends, or social lives. James just had sex with David, and David reciprocated by paying rent and expenses to James.

These distinctions are crucial to David Laws' insistence that he was not cheating Parliament or the taxpayer by claiming expenses for his partner's home, because James Lundie was not David Laws' partner until last week when in anticipation of revelations in the *Daily Telegraph* David decided to announce publicly that he had some sort of relationship with James for years:

"James and I are intensely private people. We made the decision to keep our relationship private and believed that was our right. Clearly that cannot now remain the case.

"My motivation throughout has not been to maximise profit but to simply protect our privacy and my wish not to reveal my sexuality."

This sort of statement has, in fact, merely compounded the problem because it appears to confirm that whether spouse, partner, lover, or just plain old landlord and tenant, James was having a 'relationship' with David all along. It was a relationship

that they, because they are “intensely private people” decided to keep secret both from the electors and from the Parliamentary Fees Office, thus enabling James to receive £40,000 from public funds as his boyfriend’s landlord.

Now, you may well ask why such an intensely private person as David Laws should decide to engage in political activity for sixteen years or so, and why he decided to run for office and become a Member of Parliament and subsequently, a cabinet minister? This doesn’t seem to me to be the career of an “intensely private person”. Nor, it must be said, does his previous career as a Vice President at JP Morgan, and as Head of dollar and sterling treasuries at Barclay de Zoete Wedd strike me as the sort of activities that an “intensely private” person would engage in. Similarly, James Lundie’s jobs as adviser to LibDem leaders, Paddy Ashdown and Charles Kennedy, and his current role at Edelman, an independent “global” public relations firm, do not seem to be jobs for an “intensely private” person.

There are clearly two issues here: First there is the reason why two independently wealthy individuals should be claiming expenses from Parliament and the taxpayer for simply living together. Second there is the way they both used the closet as a cover for what were manifestly dishonest claims. It is difficult to see why David could not pay his share of the costs of living with James without involving the public purse, and it is equally mysterious why two such powerful, well-to-do and accomplished professional men should lie about their sexuality over the last ten years.

I use the phrase “lie about their sexuality” because as everybody knows if you keep your homosexuality secret you are sailing along in the hope that people will simply assume that you are straight, normal, heterosexual. Because, as is well known, heterosexuality is the *default* orientation; unless explicitly stated or indicated otherwise, we are all straight. I know something about this because I didn’t Come Out until I was 26 – I spent the entire nineteen

sixties in a state of denial about my sexuality – but then I did not have a sexual relationship or a sexual experience of any kind with a man. I was deeply, deeply, closeted. Then an accumulation of confusion and distress, drove me first to seek psychiatric help, and finally into the arms of the Gay Liberation Front.

Consequently, I am not without understanding or empathy for homosexuals dismayed by the prospect of having to live openly as lesbians and gay men. It was a daunting and frightening prospect in the sixties and seventies, and I imagine it can still be a daunting and frightening experience for youngsters in school, college, or university, still in the process of finding their feet in the world, or for those of any age entangled in communities where religious or communal prejudices remain strong. Indeed the dating agency, ManCentral.com recently found in a survey of 3,200 gay men that 61% were uncomfortable with displaying affection in public, whereas just 6% of heterosexuals were uncomfortable with kissing or holding hands.

Although we have come a very long way in the last twenty years, and have even achieved practical and legal equality since 2000, things can still be pretty hairy for homosexuals who find themselves stranded in out of the way places, in rough neighbourhoods or tough occupations, or embroiled in heterosexual relationships they find it difficult or impossible to extricate themselves from. But none of this applies to the Metropolitan elite; upper middle class men in London and elsewhere are as free as birds. They may from time to time encounter prejudice, and like us all they have to ensure that they do not find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, but apart from these caveats they are as free to enjoy their lives as similarly situated heterosexuals.

This is exactly the position of David Laws and James Lurie. Yet somehow and for some reason, perhaps shielding elderly relatives from the awful truth, they felt compelled to hide their sexuality and hoped that the world would assume that they were heterosexual. They went to great lengths to sustain

this lie, up to and including, cheating the authorities out of money that they certainly didn't need – indeed it is argued by them and their friends that David and James' motive was not in any sense, financial. They simply had a paranoid fear of acknowledging that they were homosexual presumably because they both felt that it is slightly more difficult to be taken seriously in many professional milieus if colleagues know that one is a cocksucker. However, given that they must both have known that Peter Mandelson was a cocksucker and that he, along with many others in Parliament and in business, have managed to overcome these obstacles with ease, it is difficult to grasp why Laws and Lundy should be so exercised by the need to remain in the closet.

Despite voting for homosexual law reform and supporting equal rights on paper, both of these shysters have been revealed as people who regard the oppression of homosexuals, and their collusion with this oppression, as intensely private matters. Astonishingly, for people who are political activists and prominent political players, they evidently, have not felt any need to stand shoulder to shoulder with homosexuals in much less favourable positions than themselves. Until they were Outed by the *Daily Telegraph*, they were perfectly happy to clamber up the greasy political pole as straight men in a straight world, acknowledging no fellowship or solidarity with gay people. I have no doubt at all that their defenders will respond by saying that everybody in the Westminster 'Village' knew that Laws was a 'shirtlifter' and friends will bang on about David and James' commitment to good conduct, privacy, and integrity.

However, it remains true that they have been caught out cheating and lying in order to pose as heterosexuals and in order to sustain their *self-oppressed* conception of propriety while the great mass of homosexuals have battled and fought, day in and day out, for years on end in order to maintain their dignity and to live freely and openly. Now, that is what I call integrity.