

Case of Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant

1918 + 1919
3953

Dismissed summarily 1918 - claims enquiry refused - again & again - Questions in H of C
H of L. -

Meetings organised to claim that enquiry be granted. -

Meeting held at Bayona April 1919 - Bishop of St Asaph in the Chair passed resolution demand in full enquiry by Gov.

Points made: 1) 500 camps - little or no supervision
2) inexperienced ladies who appointed to highly-paid & responsible positions

3) Expensive quarters for officers

4) Girls kept out late by men officers of the Force

5) Reports sent in (late leave, so on) signed only by a man officer - she rejected - must be signed by a woman officer as well.

When dismissed - told by one General she was inefficient - by General Biancher that she was "not inefficient but unpopular"

Bishop quoted from "a respectable paper" M.G. -

"The only possible explanation of the refusal of inquiry is that the Government fear a scandal and as the inquiry has been refused we may as well state plainly what is the cause of Miss Pennant's dismissal. It is that some of the officers, who are sheltered from danger of contact with the enemy, wish to have their mistresses maintained by the State in their appointments at three or four hundred a year"

Miss Douglas Pennant

Ap. 1919

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(2)

Colonel Cotton supported the Bishop - he said
"Put into plain English it meant - it was not in the
interest of the state to expose jobbery, corruption,
inefficiency, immorality and injustice. The Welsh
people intend to see this through whatever the
consequences may be."

Rev. John Williams sued Miss D.P.'s unpopularity.
was because she was determined to clear the camps
from the disreputables she found existing in them.

The Mayor of Bangor, said Mrs D.P. was prepared to
substantiate that the intrigue which caused her
dismissal was deliberately started in order to
prevent the exposure of scandals which were
rife in the camps. Speeches from M.C. Ap 17 1919

Still the enquiry was refused!
Also
McG May 24. 1919 published a letter from Mrs D.P.
dated May 5 (to the National Political League which
had been supporting her claim for enquiry).

"I am astonished to learn that at a recent interview
with Mr Tyson Wilson M.P. you were informed by him
that he had been officially advised by the Secretary
of the Air Ministry that I knew of the charges made
against me before I was summarily dismissed
from the Air Force & that before my dismissal an
enquiry was made and that I was given a full
opportunity of hearing and answering the charges and
showed myself unable to make an adequate
defence.
I can only tell you that there is not one word of truth in these
statements. signed V. D-P.

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(3)

The National Political League at once wrote to Gen. Seely asking for full particulars of the exact position as to the enquiry which it is alleged preceded the dismissal of Mrs Pennant. - & followed this up by heavy questions asked in H of C. It concludes its letter to Mr

"In the H of C (May 8) questioned on this point - Mr Churchill directly refused a reply. No comment is needed. We can confidently leave the public to draw their own inference from the letters here published. The last shadow of a doubt must now be removed. Such methods of subterfuge and evasion only serve to bring into strong relief the grave need for a full enquiry.

The preceding is a summary of an article in The Vote (May 30, 1919) by Margaret Wynn Nevenson

"We are told," she says, "that an enquiry may compromise leading society people; if they cannot set a better example to the common people it is high time they ceased to lead. Let the women join the Welsh in seeing the thing through."

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Summarily dismissed from commandship of the
Women's Royal Air Force.

Enquiry made into the matter Chair man Mr Harmsworth
reported to P.M. - "in the interests of the public
service there was the strongest objection to the
publication of the report -

Women's Societies claimed public enquiry with
women sitting as part of the investigating body.

On April 22 1918 she was invited to become
head of the W.R.A. Force - Requested a month in
which she would look around - found it impossible
to discover the necessary facts - with promise
of official support she accepted.

asked to promote 5 most unsuitable women to high
& responsible positions - refused - got Lord
Weir's support - ^{General Paine's} position rendered difficult by
stiff attitude - instructions & telephone messages
of which she knew nothing issued under name
of officer of men's Department - involved. He was dis-
missed. General Paine went to France - Gen. Brancher
took his place & 3 days later ~~dismissed~~ ^{dismissed} her on the
Douglas Pennant & dismissed her on the
spot.

enquiry demanded by live section of
public & Press. - Ignored -

Miss Douglas Pennant

Oct 1919
14 3953

Enquiry obtained - H of Lords Enquiry
Committee Room 3.
Began by hearing Mrs Douglas Pennant
herself. -

Nov 11. This enquiry terminated -
The Report of the Committee will in due course
be presented to the H of L.

Meanwhile the Chairman declared the unanimous
finding of the Committee that no evidence of
immorality in the Force had been
forthcoming.

Strange Incident - at last session: - Letter from

Ex-Sergeant Major at Hurst Park to the Chairman
read. He offered to supply such evidence;
Chair asked Mrs D-P if she would agree to the
hearing of this witness; she agreed & offered
two new women witnesses on the condition
of that camp.

Chairman gave leave for all three as a special
indulgence on the condition that Mrs Pennant
should from that point onwards pay all the
expenses of the Enquiry for all parties.

Pennant Enquiry:

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Cont^d

Faced with this extraordinary burden at a moment's notice Mrs Pennant had to decline, - so that the statement - re "no evidence" becomes very dubious in value.

The Enquiry was granted by the Lords on the understanding that as is usual it would be financed by the State - from Oct 14th - until Nov 11th - it was so carried out. The Chairman's veto calls for public examination.

Women asked questions:

- a) Why did not - witnesses come to give evidence on Mrs Douglas-Pennant's charges in the first place?
 - b) Why was the financial blockade clamped down when at least three of them offered to appear?
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