

## **Summary of An Investigation Into A Claim That The Society Had Been Brought Into Disrepute**

11th November 2017

As documented in detail elsewhere, a complaint was brought before the committee on the 7th of September 2017 by two committee members in that an individual had written offensive remarks by referring to two people as '...two mini-Hitlers...' without mentioning names during a rancorous session of the Yahoo Group; one member in writing, a second member verbally, while a third committee member supported them in principle. During the discussion it became apparent by the forceful nature of the complainants that they wanted an immediate vote in favour of dismissal against the author of the remark, in accordance with clause 3 of the constitution. It also became apparent that at least one of them did not want to see the appointment of a sub-committee, claiming that the formation of such a committee was not in the constitution -a specious argument. This simple refusal gave confirmation of the intention to force a dismissal during the session without even referring to the author of the so-called offensive remark. The same complainant was threatening legal action against the author (and against advice) if he did not reveal the names of those to whom he had been referring. The meeting was duly closed and it was evident that the majority of the committee around the table were unhappy with the nature of the complaint. It had been duly noted that the author of the remark had received censure from another committee member and had been struck off from the Yahoo Group members access list, but had made an open and sincere apology to the Yahoo Group members beforehand albeit, not mentioning any names. Neither complainant made mention of this fact during the presentation of their grievance. The committee had worked through a backlog of emails to discover this as part of their early research.

Immediately after the committee meeting the chairman issued *guidance notes* on the issues of legal threats and counter legal threats and the 'lose-lose' situation that the principal complainant had put the society into. Since this had happened within the jurisdiction of the Yahoo Group's owner/moderator it was his responsibility therefore, it was not a matter for the committee particularly, since the owner/moderator had used his authority to punish the author by banning him from the group. He had already been punished.

The Chairman called for the appointment of a sub-committee to investigate and issued a sub-committee brief to pursue the matter without limitation as to the material they required to see or to whom they felt it necessary to select for interview. During the following days both the Secretary and the Chairman received emails from both complainants that were pointed, demanding and insulting. Such barracking was seen as attempts to manipulate the committee into giving the complainants what they wanted by including accusations of ineptitude, false claims of underhandedness, and an unmitigated twisting of the facts. It was even claimed that without the three complainant members being present on the extraordinary committee there would not even be a quorum of the committee to hold a 'legal' committee meeting. It became apparent that with such acrimonious behaviour there would be a clash of interests if the complainants sat on the extraordinary committee meeting to receive the sub-committee's findings. The Chairman wrote a second *guidance note* to the committee on the way to manage clashes of interest which included the right to remain free from interference during the decision-making process of a committee. All members of the committee received both guidance notes. Including the two complainants who then dismissed the sub-committee as a secretive group since they had been denied access to it. In reality, from the outset, the committee was seen by them as a legitimate target of blackmail and manipulation by personal attacks via emails which were also made public amidst further false claims of dishonesty, ineptitude, etc, etc. In spite of the current practice to publish all minutes of all committee meetings on the RNARS website for all members to peruse at their leisure and nothing is left out as intimated by the accusing team. The minutes of the sub-committee's findings have been extracted here for reference:

The sub-committee's report of 15th October 2017:

*The Sub-Committee concluded that:*

1. *This was a matter for the Yahoo Group and not for the RNARS.*
2. *Dave G4JBE reminded the Chairman that he was the owner of the Yahoo Group and that as he stated on 25 September 2017 "The Committee HAS NO jurisdiction over the Yahoo Group, and certainly has NO RIGHT to close the Group, ONLY the owner of the Group can do this"*

3. *The Concise Collin's Dictionary defines 'Hitler' as "A person who displays dictatorial characteristics." In Southern England the term 'mini Hitler' is used to denote a person who is a bit of a bully; there are no anti-Semitic overtones.*
4. *On 18 August 2017 Phil G1LKJ apologised for his original posting saying "I used an unfortunate turn of phrase to air a personal opinion. I know I have caused offence for which I sincerely apologise to all on here."*
5. *The matter was resolved by the Yahoo Group Moderator banning Phil from the Yahoo Group.*
6. *The affair may lead to one of the most active RNARS volunteers no longer being willing to represent the RNARS at rallies.*
7. *The Sub-Committee considers that the matter is now closed.*
8. *There is a need for a 3-stage disciplinary procedure within the RNARS which should be investigated by the full Committee.*

The principle points are these:

- (i) ***The owner of the Yahoo Group stated that the RNARS had no jurisdiction over the Yahoo Group. So why did they bring their complaint in the first place given the apology of the author of the unfortunate remark as well?***
- (ii) ***When legal action is threatened or implied between members it is not the business of the RNARS to be involved. The action demanded; to reveal the names of those in the reference was hopelessly unrealistic.***

There was a discussion after their findings were made known to the assembled extraordinary committee followed by a vote; those in favour of the sub-committee's findings, those against. The committee voted unanimously in favour of the sub-committee's findings. The response to this outcome has been two resignations from both complainants peppered with acrimonious and defamatory remarks. The whole raison d'etre of the Chairman and the Committee has been to oversee a fair and just process of investigation into this matter with a just and appropriate outcome in spite of the hostile environment that they have been subjected to. That has been achieved with all due credit going to the committee and the sub-committee who acted without interference from either side.

Regrettably, during the final stages of the enquiry, a poison pen letter and package was delivered to the home of the author of the unfortunate remarks. As such the contents of the letter-package amounts to a criminal offence which has since been reported to the Surrey police. While the contents remain undisclosed, but have been referred to as vile and lewd by one member of the committee, the postmark is known and the letter contains material which can only come from the mind of someone who is familiar with the details of the above investigation. The society has to step away from this because it is not involved, and its own enquiries have run their course. It is worth the mention that of the complainants only one registered the letter as part of a scathing diatribe about convenient timing and suspicion, while the other remained silent about it. Neither of them acknowledging the fact that this intelligence had been withheld until after the extraordinary committee meeting had voted, so as not to unduly influence the decision-making of the committee.

It is noted here that with the break in faith and in confidence with the committee the two complainants openly publicised their vexatious criticisms and accusations to the RNARS membership at large. This has two outcomes. The first is that any matter that comes under the gaze of the committee is treated in confidence while they investigate a matter and publish their findings -as a matter of practice- and unjustly smeared Chair and the Committee to break the faith of the membership in the governance of the Society. The second is that as a consequence of their unmitigated behaviour the Society has been brought into disrepute causing at least one member at large to resign. Now that is an appropriate context for a Section 3 action call for dismissal!

In summary, this was a petty quarrel that was blown out of all proportion by two individuals who are both old enough to know better, who knew from the outset that what they wanted was totally unrealistic. Particularly, it was unwholesome to expect the RNARS to get involved in something that did not fall under its jurisdiction, and then blame the RNARS committee for upholding the interests and the reputation of the Society in good standing. As one observer put it; just because you don't like somebody doesn't mean you can force them out of the Society. And that was at the heart of this dismal complaint.

*David*, Chairman