

UK's "Plebgate" scandal: Police go unpunished for set-up of Conservative MP

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The chief constables of West Mercia, Warwickshire and West Midlands police are to appear before the UK parliament's Home Affairs Select Committee on October 23.

The announcement came as further evidence emerged of police lies, false testimony and fabricated documents over what has been dubbed "Plebgate."

On September 19, 2012 Andrew Mitchell, the Conservative Party Chief Whip, was accused of getting into an altercation with police on duty in Downing Street, home to the official residences of the prime minister and chancellor of the exchequer. When he tried to exit the main gates with his bicycle, two police officers refused to open the gates, telling him he had to leave by the pedestrian side gate, which he did.

Both officers later wrote in their log books that Mitchell had told them, "Best you learn your f**king place ... you don't run this f**king government ... You're f**king plebs."

His last comment to them was reported as, "You haven't heard the last of this."

The following day Conservative Deputy Chief Whip John Randall MP received an email from one of his constituents claiming to have witnessed the incident. His account, which said Mitchell's conduct had shocked passers-by, supported the police logs.

The following day, Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* newspaper led with Mitchell's supposed attack on the officers as "f**king plebs" and the log book was leaked to the *Daily Telegraph*.

Mitchell protested the claims. He acknowledged that he had sworn under his breath—saying "I thought you lot were supposed to f**king help us"—but, while apologising profusely, he denied any of the abuse. Under advice from Tory Central Office, he refused to say the police were lying, carefully buttressing his protestations of innocence with the assertion that the officers involved must have

misunderstood him.

Serving police officers wearing *Sun*-issued "PC Pleb" T-shirts staged an unprecedented demonstration outside Mitchell's constituency office, where Police Federation representative Chris Jones stated that the row was proof of the Tories' "elitist attitude" towards police.

"By denying the police report he [Mitchell] is calling the integrity of those police officers into question, the public need to know the police and our official reports are something they can trust," he said.

While the media demanded Mitchell's resignation, Labour Party leader Ed Miliband came forward as the champion of the police, while the Trades Union Congress demonstration held in October that year solidarised itself with the supposedly much-maligned force.

On October 12, Mitchell met with three senior members of the Police Federation from the West Mercia, West Midlands and Warwickshire forces—Inspector Ken MacKaill, Detective Sergeant Stuart Hinton and Jones—to try and draw a line under the row. Immediately after the meeting MacKaill, chairman of the West Mercia Police Federation, told the assembled press that Mitchell had refused to elaborate on what had happened at the Downing Street gates and said the MP's position was untenable. On October 19, Mitchell resigned.

None were more enthusiastic at the outbreak of this "anti-toff" populism than the pseudo-left, with the Socialist Workers Party presenting Mitchell's resignation as a triumph.

In fact, the entire affair was a set-up. Moreover, the exposure of this set-up has owed nothing to any official investigation, as the parliamentary parties fell over themselves to assuage the police.

It was a Channel 4 *Dispatches* in December that showed that CCTV footage from Downing Street did not support the police version of events, and that the "eye-witness statement" turned out to be from a police officer from the

same Metropolitan Police unit as the diplomatic protection squad, who was not even in London at the time.

Only then, and with great reluctance, was it finally agreed that there should be a further investigation into the events.

According to the *Sunday Times*, a whistle-blower from within the Metropolitan Police confirmed that a conspiracy was hatched among police officers to frame up Mitchell, which included fabricating evidence. At the time, the Police Federation was running a high-level public campaign insisting that government austerity must not be applied to the police, who should be ring-fenced from the cuts taking place elsewhere in the public sector. The attack on Mitchell was intended as a demonstration to the government of police power and the political damage it could cause.

One year on, evidence of a police conspiracy continues to go unpunished. A police-led investigation into the three officers involved in the October 12 meeting has decided no disciplinary measures will be taken. The inquiry by West Mercia police concluded that while the public statements made by the three officers after the meeting could be seen as “ambiguous or misleading”, they did not deliberately lie so there is no case to answer.

This is despite Mitchell having made a secret tape of the discussions—the transcript of which is now available—that makes clear that they did lie about the content of the discussion.

This transparent whitewash has occasioned a protest by the usually compliant Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). The IPCC has covered over numerous instances of police abuse, including murder. As is usual, the IPCC had been content to allow the police force to investigate itself over the Mitchell affair, choosing only to “supervise” the West Mercia inquiry.

A statement by IPCC Deputy Chairwoman Deborah Glass challenged the police decision, stating that the meeting raised an “issue of honesty and integrity, not merely naive or poor professional judgment.”

“In my view, the evidence is such that a panel should determine whether the three officers gave a false account of the meeting in a deliberate attempt to support their MPS colleague and discredit Mr Mitchell, in pursuit of a wider agenda”, she wrote.

The response of Head of the Association of Chief Police Officers Hugh Orde was to demand the abolition of the IPCC.

It has now been revealed by the IPCC that the

conclusions of the West Mercia inquiry were watered down, reportedly after the intervention of senior police chiefs. In a letter, Glass stated that the first report submitted to the IPCC in July concluded “that there was a case to answer for misconduct, although their final report, submitted in August, did not.”

Despite the furore, the only action that is being proposed is that the police representatives involved should apologise to Mitchell.

As to the events of September 19, 2012, although eight people have so far been arrested, including five serving police officers, the Crown Prosecution Service has yet to decide on the central allegation of a conspiracy to depose Mitchell.

Nor are there any answers as to who leaked information to *The Sun* and the *Daily Telegraph*, or who organised “witnesses” to make lying accounts.

“Plebgate” does more than prove that nothing has changed following the exposure of criminal activity—involving bribery and corruption—between police and the Murdoch press as was revealed in the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal. The scandal testifies to the enormous powers accrued by the police over the last decades.

The assault on democratic rights under the guise of the “war on terror” and preserving “law and order” means the police are ever more nakedly a law unto themselves. Empowered to mete out punishment and abuse against workers and youth as a matter of routine, free from any accountability, they felt no compunction against the set-up of a serving MP. Many others lower down the social hierarchy suffer far worse fates than the career destruction—including being beaten and murdered—at the hands of this wholly corrupt and purposefully unaccountable mechanism of state repression.



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