

Published: September 25, 2012

<http://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2012/09/shane-stone-obsessed-with-andrew-mitchell-the-british-media-is-neglecting-the-police-story-that-real.html>

Shane Stone: Obsessed with Andrew Mitchell, the British media is neglecting the police story that really matters

The Hon Shane Stone AC QC is a former (Australian) Attorney General, Police Minister and barrister who specialised in the criminal jurisdiction – defence and prosecutions.

My arrival in London last week was framed by two unfolding stories: first the tragic brutal slaying of two unarmed police officers in Manchester; the second about a Cabinet Minister who gave a police officer a gob-full out the front of 10 Downing Street. Hardly comparable events, yet a week on and one has overshadowed the other – that is a travesty.

As I leave to return home to Australia the senseless deaths of those two police officers has been overtaken by a running commentary on “did he or didn’t he call the copper a ‘pleb’”. What is wrong with you people? It seems that this terminology is “toxic” according to some, and the BBC to make the point (as they predictably would) featured one Classics Professor Edith Hall who gushingly and somewhat sneeringly assured viewers that this was an insult of monumental proportion. Really?

The other dynamic at play has been the ferocity with which the Metropolitan Police Federation has maintained the rage. The chairman of that organisation, John Tully, seized on Andrew Mitchell’s outburst so fast that I was left wondering whether he was hiding in nearby bushes. Like Professor Hall, he asserts as fact things that he wasn’t privy to. Don’t let the truth stand in the way of a good story, guys.

To compound matters the police unionist, keen to keep the story going, rails against the temerity of Andrew Mitchell for calling into question the “integrity” of the police officer’s account; notes and all. Well blow me down — I thought the “integrity” of police officers’ recollections, and their contemporaneous police notes, was called into question every day in the criminal justice system. And whilst I don’t doubt that the police officer concerned faithfully recorded his version of events and conversation, it is exactly that – his version.



What I don't understand is why, on this occasion, police decided that Mitchell couldn't ride his bicycle through the main gate, assuming he has made a practice of this in the past. What had changed? Second, if Mitchell had made such an offensive goose of himself and swore at the officer, why wasn't he arrested on the spot?

Mitchell has apologised to the officer concerned and, on my understanding, the apology has been accepted. The evident contrition and regret of Andrew Mitchell is on full public display – what more do you want? Mitchell's humiliation is complete.

Labour has not called for Mitchell's sacking, rather an inquiry into the matter. And whilst the lunatic fringe of UK politics, the Lib Dems, has enjoyed and revelled in his discomfort, they are not demanding his head on a pole.

Thankfully, newspaper editors armed with superficial and predictable poll results don't get to run the country and decide who stays and who goes – that's the prerogative of the PM. And, in my view, he has called it right. In Australia we would say "fair go". We would also be focusing back on the story that really matters – the death of police officers in the line of duty.