

Scotland Yard chief's fury over MP's arrest

Sir Paul Stephenson, the acting head of Scotland Yard, had a furious row with the senior officer who ordered the arrest of the Conservative MP Damian Green.

By Andrew Pierce

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Sir Paul, who had been the front-runner to succeed Sir Ian Blair as Commissioner, now fears his chances have been damaged by the uproar over the police search of Mr Green's office in the House of Commons.

The Daily Telegraph can disclose that when Bob Quick, the head of anti-terrorism at the Metropolitan police, told Sir Paul he had authorised the arrest, he replied: "You are completely ****ing me over you know. I will get the blame when it all goes wrong."

Sir Paul, in a frank exchange of views with Mr Quick, an assistant commissioner, was appalled by the timing of the arrest, which took place only hours before he took over as acting Commissioner after the departure of Sir Ian. It was also just before the deadline for him to submit his application to the Home Office for the most senior job in British policing.

He told Mr Quick that if he moved to stop the arrest it would have been leaked to the press "within hours". He would have been accused by Labour of blocking a complaint from the Cabinet office and protecting the Tory MP.

But by not reacting to the briefing, which he received from Mr Quick in his office, he effectively sanctioned the arrest.

He told his colleague that in the inevitable political fallout with the Tories, including London mayor Boris Johnson, he would be the one who would be blamed and not Mr Quick, who is also a candidate for the Commissioner's post.

Relations with the London Tory administration have soured because of the arrest, although Sir Paul was credited with having told them hours before the arrest that it was imminent.

Mr Johnson put to him in "trenchant" terms that he believed the move to be a mistake and has publicly criticised the Met for their actions.

A friend of Sir Paul said that he conceded that he had been badly damaged by the controversy but hoped that it had not destroyed his ambition to succeed Sir Ian. He has privately admitted he should have intervened by holding a meeting with advisers to consider the ramifications of a high profile arrest of a Conservative Party frontbencher.

Sir Paul has subsequently defended the actions of his officers but admitted he has "proper concerns" about the political backlash caused by the investigation into Mr Green. He has now called on Ian Johnston, chief of the British Transport Police and chairman of the Association of Chief Police Officers crime committee, to produce a report within a week on the leak inquiry.

One senior source said: "Paul Stephenson knows he should have convened a meeting of some sort to consult on the impact of the arrest of an MP and search of his Commons office but he did not do that.

"There is a feeling in some quarters of Scotland Yard that he has been completely stitched-up. But Stephenson is adamant to this day that he was damned if he did block the arrest and damned if he did not."

A Scotland Yard spokeswoman said: "We would not discuss any internal conversations between senior officers in the run-up to this arrest. We can't make any comment."

Insiders said that Mr Quick would not have deliberately sought to land his boss in trouble, and said that at worst he is guilty of being "politically naïve" to the consequences of the controversial inquiry.

Mr Quick has also defended his role and apparently contradicted the version of events told by Michael Martin, the House of Commons Speaker.

The anti-terror chief insisted that police followed correct procedures when raiding the office of the shadow minister. The intervention left Mr Martin's position looking increasingly untenable.

ANALYSIS: Political police chief who lost the plot

By RICHARD PENDLEBURY

Last updated at 9:15 AM on 23rd December 2008

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Bob Quick had been in the running to become the next Commissioner of the Met. As recently as last week Bob Quick had ambitions to become Britain's next top policeman. What a difference one intemperate phone conversation can make. Today the assistant commissioner's judgment is discredited and he will do well to hang on to his current, highly sensitive, post as head of the Metropolitan Police's Specialist Operations. The view from one senior New Scotland Yard colleague last night was characteristically blunt.

'Bob's finished. There's nowhere to go from here.'

It is a swift reversal of fortune for 'a safe pair of hands'. Ironically, it was Quick's political instincts which had put him in the running for the highest office in policing - Commissioner of the Met. Now they could be behind his downfall.

This is a story that has become all too familiar in policing over the past 11 years. A senior officer of steady competence rather than brilliance, Quick slogged his way close to the top by reflecting the political zeitgeist. In other words, he became a very political policeman.

A taxi driver's son from Surrey, he joined the Met 30 years ago. After serving as a beat bobby in South London he was selected for training as a detective and began a slow rise through the ranks.

His interest in theoretical aspects of policing was evident at an early stage. One colleague remembers Quick as an inspector in Greenwich.

'Bob was very heavily involved in developing what was called "performance packages".' These were the first moves towards monitoring policing by statistics, something that has now become the norm.

Later, as a detective superintendent serving at HQ, Quick was a central figure in the force's preparation for - and participation in - Sir William Macpherson's inquiry into the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence.

The subsequent report was damning of the Met's 'institutional racism.'

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In 2000, he was promoted to the 'white knight' position of head of the Met's anti-corruption unit. In 2004, he transferred to Surrey Police as Deputy Chief Constable.

The following year, with the backing of his friend, former Met boss Sir Ian Blair, he got the top job in his home county.

While at Surrey, Quick cemented his reputation as a leading exponent of 'police workforce' reforms.

Eight months ago he was back at the Yard, to head Specialist Operations, a recently created amalgamation of the old Special Branch and anti-terrorism unit. This lumping together of political and anti-terrorist work contributed to the furore surrounding the Damian Green affair.

The Tory MP's arrest after the leaking of Home Office documents served to remind us how close the Government and certain senior policemen have become.

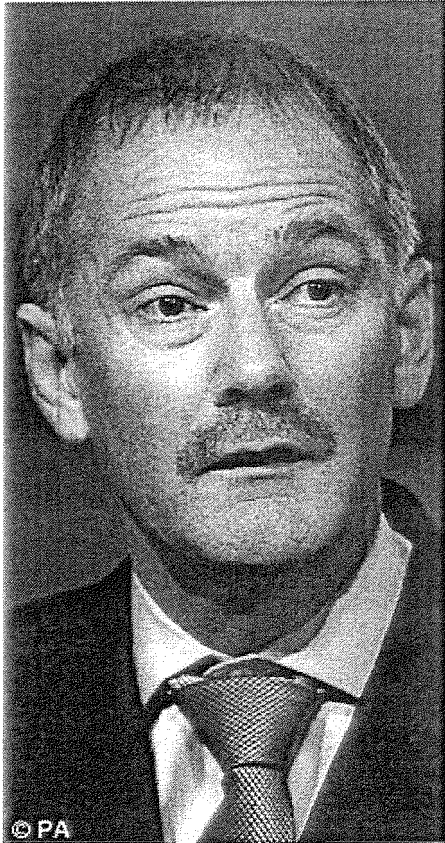
Quick's outburst at the weekend after a newspaper report that his wife ran a wedding car business from their home sealed the impression. In a telephone interview he accused the Tories 'and their Press friends' of working against the Green investigation 'in a wholly corrupt way'.

Not only did his comments betray his own political bias, they surely killed the police investigation into Mr Green stone dead.

'Sir Ian Blair was the benchmark for unwise public utterances,' says one of Quick's former colleagues. 'But even he would not have been so unwise as to accuse the Tories of being corrupt.'

'I would be staggered if the Green investigation goes anywhere now. Any good defence counsel would point out that the officer in charge has made clear his hatred, or at least deep-seated mistrust, of the Tories and that the prosecution reflected it.'





Sir Hugh Orde (left) and Andy Hayman (right) were both tipped as possible Met chiefs before embarrassing revelations about their private life

What then of Quick's suggestion that he is the victim of a plot?

He is just the latest of a number of contenders for the Met commissionership to have had embarrassing aspects of their private life publicly raked over during the past two years.

The marital breakdown of current favourite, Police Service of Northern Ireland Chief Sir Hugh Orde, was examined in detail by one Sunday newspaper.

Before his death another one-time candidate, the Greater Manchester chief Mike Todd, was the subject of a 'whispering campaign' about his own extramarital escapades.

And last year Quick's predecessor in charge of anti-terrorism, Andy Hayman, resigned after a smear campaign regarding his expenses and private life.

But Quick has some pertinent questions to answer. Reports that he was not obliged to report his wife's business to his superiors were questioned by a former senior colleague last night.

'Whether he did or not, Bob should have declared his wife's firm to the Metropolitan Police Authority for approval,' says one Scotland Yard source.

'As a police officer he would have got an allowance to cover home costs and so any business based there is being funded from his salary package. And that is before you look at the risks of running a commercial enterprise from the home of the head of counter-terrorism.'

Acting commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson has been happy to distance himself from both the Green arrest - he said it was Quick's decision - and now Quick himself, say the latter's friends.

While Quick did not make the four-man shortlist for Commissioner he was seen as a strong contender for the deputy's role if Sir Paul got the top job. No longer, it seems.

Anti-terror chiefs cannot afford what one Quick apologist yesterday called 'a moment of madness'.

Quick may have done us all a service. The Yard is in hopeless disarray, once again. Time for a clearout of the political policemen.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1100562/RICHARD-PENDLEBURY-Political-police-chief-lost-plot.html#ixzz1kO85QRFu>