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The day I knew Bob Quick was flawed

By David Davis



Hard lessons: Bob Quick

It has been an open secret for some time that I harboured doubts about Bob Quick as head of our counter-terrorism police. My initial concern started at our astonishing first meeting. New to the job, he had come to persuade me of the merits of New Labour's latest mad idea, namely 42 days' detention without charge.

He started reasonably enough. 'The problem comes when we have to release a suspect at 28 days who we know is a risk to the public but for who we don't have enough evidence to give a better than 50 per cent chance of conviction,' he said. 'We could end up releasing a terrorist on to the streets and endanger the public.'

I looked quizzical at this. 'So then you charge him using the threshold test,' I said.

This was a piece of law that allowed police to charge suspects, in special circumstances, with a lower level of proof. Police have to have an expectation that they will get enough evidence in the near future. I explained this to Mr Quick. 'Oh no, it doesn't work like that,' he said, and as he went on I realised that he simply did not understand the law.

My heart sank. The new head of Special Operations at the Yard, the past Chief Constable of Surrey, did not know a fundamental piece of law about charging terrorist suspects. And he came to lecture me!

The rumour was that Mr Quick was Jacqui Smith's choice. Then came the Damian Green affair. Put to one side the Keystone Cops elements of police surrounding the wrong house, or needing nine officers to search a house occupied only by his wife and child, or the illegal taping of his conversations.

To understand the sheer depth of the constitutional outrage represented by the act of arresting a Tory MP for doing his job – telling the truth on immigration – you have to know a little legal history.

In 1989, a new Official Secrets Act removed from criminal law the offence of leaking confidential information if it did not affect national security. Even under the old law, no MP

was ever arrested. So in the arrest of Damian Green, Mr Quick was not enforcing the law, he was inventing new law.

Then, when The Mail on Sunday carried a story about his family's commercial sideline, he lashed out, wrongly accusing the Tory Party of briefing against him.

So it was no surprise that, when he made a potentially life-threatening error this week, nobody rushed to his defence. At least he did the honourable thing by resigning after revealing a document detailing terrorist targets as he stepped from a car in Downing Street. Mr Quick's replacement John Yates should learn three lessons.

First, do not get closely associated with politicians or politics of either party. Second, put old-fashioned police operational management ahead of media manipulation. The practice of lying to the Press has got to stop. We saw it after the De Menezes case. Finally, enforce the law, do not invent the law.

* David Davis quit as Shadow Home Secretary last year to force a by-election in his Yorkshire constituency – which he won – on the issue of civil liberties.

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