



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Reform of the Police Federation](#), HC 1163

Tuesday, 6 May 2014

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair), Mr James Clappison, Michael Ellis, Paul Flynn, Mark Reckless, Mr David Winnick.

In the absence of the Chair, Mr David Winnick was called to the Chair. (At Q314)

Questions 270 – 363

Witness: **Jon Gaunt**, gave evidence.

Q270 Chair: Welcome, Mr Jon Gaunt, formerly of Gaunt Brothers. Mr Gaunt, thank you very much. We are most grateful to you for coming here to give evidence to this Committee.

Jon Gaunt: Thank you very much for inviting me.

Chair: I do not know if you have been following proceedings, but we are currently completing our inquiry into the Police Federation; we have looked at the *Normington Report* and we are shortly to complete our inquiry. You are the last witness and we are going to produce a report very shortly. Could you tell us a bit about your involvement with the Police Federation?

Jon Gaunt: Yes. In terms of the Police Federation nationally and regionally, it is very important, so if you could bear with me, that I explain both parts of it and how my relationship started.

Several years ago when I was on the national radio station *talkSPORT* I started getting invited to their conferences to be a facilitator and to be a spokesman there. I was very popular with police officers and my father was a police officer, as well; a police constable. That is how I got involved with the federation.

Then I had the main contract that you have been talking about, the six-month contract that ended after two months. There were a few contracts before that where I was giving them traditional media training; mock interviews; showing them how to get into newspapers, ironically, going through some of the questions that you have highlighted and indeed that

some of newspapers have highlighted—like how the heck are you going to justify that building; how do you justify the fact that you can't all meet there; how do you justify having so many representatives—to teach them how to answer those questions.

Chair: Very helpful. So if we could work out the difference between national and regional. In terms of your national dealings with Paul McKeever and presumably others, maybe it predates his arrival as chairman.

Jon Gaunt: Yes. I think the work started even before Paul McKeever became chairman, believe it or not. When Jan Berry was chairman I started going to the federation conferences but that was only the conferences.

Q271 Chair: I know you are keen to tell us the story and we will be asking you questions on that. But in terms of the amount of money you received from the Police Federation nationally, what was the total amount that you received from the national organisation?

Jon Gaunt: I couldn't possibly say. I don't know that off the top of my head. I am quite happy to talk about how much that six-month contract was and previous to that we had earned, say, £9,000 for several weeks' work doing the media training.

Q272 Chair: Do you not remember the total amount of money that the Police Federation paid you?

Jon Gaunt: Not the total. I didn't know you were going to ask that question, but I can give you that answer whenever you wish. I will find that out.

Chair: If you could send us an email, that would be helpful.

Jon Gaunt: Absolutely. I have nothing to hide.

Q273 Chair: Roughly what is it, in terms of the national body?

Jon Gaunt: The national federation contract, this is what I was going on to explain about the regions as well—

Chair: We can come to the regions; just the national.

Jon Gaunt: The national federation contract—I think you already know because the Treasury has told you, even though it was confidential—was £15,000 a month for six months. It lasted for two months. Then they invoked a clause within the contract.

Q274 Chair: So you got about £30,000.

Jon Gaunt: I got exactly £30,000.

Q275 Chair: Exactly. In terms of the regional work you did—

Jon Gaunt: Sorry, chair, if I could just say, because I do not want to mislead you, I had earned money before from doing workshops and so on.

Q276 Chair: Roughly how much was that? I know you do not have a precise figure.

Jon Gaunt: Maybe £20,000 over a couple of years.

Chair: About £20,000.

Jon Gaunt: I do not want to be held to that.

Q277 Chair: No, no. You have been very helpful so far and we are very grateful. So round about £50,000 so far for the national. In terms of the regional federations, how much would that have been?

Jon Gaunt: Again, you see, I think you are a bit mistaken about the regional federations because you seem to have focused on the contract we had with West Midlands, West Mercia and indeed with Warwickshire, but by the end of our period we were representing at least 14 federations—I want to be frank about it—seven in Yorkshire; Lancashire; North Wales. Anyway, it came to 14 regional federations. I will explain to you how that work came about.

Q278 Chair: We do not need to know that. It is very kind but if you could just bear with me. What would be the total amount that you would have received from the regional federations?

Jon Gaunt: Some of them, the smaller federations, were paying £1,000 a month.

Chair: What would be the total amount?

Jon Gaunt: Again, I am not sure. £10,000 a month.

Chair: A month?

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Q279 Chair: So what would be the total amount that you would have received, roughly, from the important regional work that you did?

Jon Gaunt: Over that period?

Chair: Over whatever period that you worked for the federation; the regional amount. We have the national amount, roughly £50,000.

Jon Gaunt: I am trying to get my head round it. Yes, £10,000 to £15,000. Something like that.

Chair: In total?

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Chair: Not per month?

Jon Gaunt: No, no. If I had known—I did ask for the line of questioning you wanted—if you had asked me this question in advance I would have brought it to you exactly.

Q280 Chair: We do not normally tell witnesses what the questions are. But roughly, the total amount you received from the regions, was it more or less—

Jon Gaunt: It depended because some months they were not there and some months they were there. Let me just think. Give me a moment. About £8,000 a month.

Chair: You keep saying “a month”. Roughly what is the global figure?

Jon Gaunt: They were all six-month contracts.

Chair: Right, so the total amount you would have received—

Jon Gaunt: Eight times six.

Chair: Right. So another £50,000 in total. This is roughly, we understand. You will send us an email. That will be very helpful.

Jon Gaunt: I am going to send you the exact figures.

Q281 Chair: So round about £100,000 was earned by you and your company to represent the national and the regional police federations over a period of time?

Jon Gaunt: Yes, but we were not representing the regions in the same way that we were meant to represent the national.

Chair: Sure. I understand that.

Jon Gaunt: It is important to say that. It was about media training. That was something completely different.

Q282 Chair: Let me turn to why you were employed. I am sure you have seen this, it is in the public domain, and I am sure you have seen the questions of this Committee and the reasons why Mr Ellis in particular has asked you to come in to see us today. We have seen a copy of this document, which you have produced, and in it there are a number of pages relating to your campaign, which you presumably put together for the federation in West Mercia, Warwickshire and others. What is this publication?

Jon Gaunt: Yes. What we did was, we did both an online version and a printed version like that because at the period we were signing up more and more federations, so it was designed to try to get more federations to sign to us; plus we were then going to go to other bodies and say this is the kind of work we can do. It is very important to stress at this point that there was a massive disconnect between the national federation and the regions.

There was a massive vacuum where the regions did not feel that the national was representing them at all. We will probably go on to it later, I guess. It is very important to understand that and they felt they were not getting any help in terms of press from the centre.

Q283 Chair: Were you surprised, therefore, to know that Paul McKeever wrote to Ken MacKaill and Ian Edwards to say this: “It has come to our attention that three forces in three regions have commissioned a campaign that includes a personal attack on the Prime Minister. We feel some of the dialogue between the federation and the Government has become too personal and unhelpful”? This criticism is very much put at your door, that as a result of what you have done, the federation had suffered a huge amount of bad publicity, which resulted in the *Normington Report* with some very serious recommendations. So in hiring you and giving you roughly £50,000 to look after their image, they have ended up basically being turned upside down. Do you accept that criticism?

Jon Gaunt: No.

Q284 Chair: Why do you not think that criticism has been made?

Jon Gaunt: Because I think that is too general a picture that you are trying to paint. I was there the day that Mr McKeever came to Birmingham. He did not just write a letter, he came to Birmingham during the height of the Tory conference or just before the conference—I will find out the date for you if you wish—and he asked them to stop the campaign. He thought it was too personal. That was his view.

Q285 Chair: In his attack on the Prime Minister and Ministers?

Jon Gaunt: Yes. There was a poster that said, “Say hello to Dave. Wave goodbye—”. When I started working for the West Midlands, Mercia and for Warwickshire, we were not employed to run a campaign. We were employed with the other federations to do their media training. They asked us to do this. They had already booked all of the billboards in Birmingham outside the NIA before we got involved. They had already designed the posters, “Say hello, wave goodbye”. I was not involved in that decision. I was involved in the poster decision that was, “Are you taking the P?” which was a police hazard tape, and the P cut out. They had already decided they were going to use—

Q286 Chair: So this was their campaign?

Jon Gaunt: Yes, they had already decided—

Q287 Chair: You were then hired. So you were not responsible for the personalised nature.

Jon Gaunt: No. They had already decided that was what they were going to do. Our company helped them with it. When you say “personalised,” where you draw the line between politics and personal is very difficult, isn’t it? It was not an attack on Mr

Cameron, just like Mr Mitchell. The bottom line is that it was a campaign about the 20% cuts. These officers right across the country felt they had been let down by the Government and indeed been let down by their national leadership. When Mr McKeever said, “Please stop it” that was no surprise to those federation officials or indeed their membership.

Q288 Chair: Do you think they had been let down by the national federation?

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Chair: You do?

Jon Gaunt: There had been a lack of leadership for at least two years, in my personal opinion. Yes, I would agree with that.

Q289 Chair: Do you think the federation is indeed in need of fundamental reform?

Jon Gaunt: Yes. And I think also it is very important to stress—I have watched some of your evidence—for example Mr Mordecai, the treasurer, when he said, “Oh, I don’t know how much money they’ve got”, well, of course he does not know because the federation as you know was set up by statute. It was set up so there were 43 separate federations. They have control over their own money. There had been a battle the whole time I had been involved with the federation between the national trying to get more money from the regions and the regions not wanting to give it to them. Then coupled with that they had had a protest—you may remember they had a march through London—and it got no publicity. It got a little bit on Sky. It was after that moment that the national federation decided that they wanted to employ us to be more aggressive. The person—and I am going to put this on the record—who orchestrated that, because it is in your records already although people are skating over it, is the present chairman of the Police Federation, Steve Williams. Steve Williams had meetings with me and my brother saying, “We’ve got to get you involved”. This was before he became chair elect. He orchestrated a meeting in The Garden at Leatherhead, and I will give you the exact date.

Chair: Please.

Jon Gaunt: First of all, he said, “How are we going to do it? We need to get tougher. We need to be more aggressive”. I don’t know whether he used the word “personal” but “more aggressive”. We talked about how to do that. He then presented that to Mr Ian Rennie, the general secretary who has just resigned; who was going to retire. He also presented that to Mr McKeever. We had the meeting in Leatherhead in The Garden. The reason I remember it, it was an absolutely boiling hot day. We sat outside on stools at a sort of bar table and talked about the contract. At that meeting, Mr McKeever, Mr Rennie and Mr Williams—who were the only people present—agreed the contract.

Q290 Chair: But you were subsequently dismissed from that contract.

Jon Gaunt: I will go on to that. No, we were never dismissed. I will go on to that as well. They agreed the contract and the contract was signed. I also note that Mr Mordecai has

subsequently said that he was against employing us. Well, that is not my recollection of it and Mr Mordecai sent emails—

Q291 Chair: Do you have those emails?

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Q292 Chair: Would you send this Committee all correspondence?

Jon Gaunt: Yes, I will.

Chair: Can I just finish? I know you are very keen to get this on the record and you will get it all on the record, worry not. It would be extremely helpful if you could send this Committee the correspondence.

Jon Gaunt: Can I clarify what that is, Mr Vaz?

Chair: Yes.

Jon Gaunt: It is two emails where he questions a couple of clauses in the contract.

Chair: We would like you to send us all your correspondence with the federation.

Jon Gaunt: Yes. No problem at all.

Chair: Thank you.

Jon Gaunt: And then the contract was signed. There was a clause that said that after two months, if they wished, they could stop the contract. It was not a termination clause and we were not sacked. We were in North Wales working with another federation and we had a phone call from Mr McKeever and he said, “We are not going to carry on”.

Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful and I am grateful. I have given you latitude because there is a lot of information in there and we are extremely grateful.

Q293 Michael Ellis: Mr Gaunt, thank you for coming in. I wanted to give you the opportunity—I know the Committee does—to answer some of the points that have been raised by other witnesses who have given evidence to this Committee. Can I ask you a little bit more about this contract that we have heard was £15,000 a month.

Jon Gaunt: The national contract?

Michael Ellis: The national contract.

Jon Gaunt: Yes, sure.

Michael Ellis: That was £15,000 a month for a period of six months, but it was broken after two months.

Jon Gaunt: No. There was a termination clause. After two months either side could get out. When Mr McKeever phoned us he said they were going to do that. We asked him why. He said, “All will be explained in the letter”. When we got a letter there was two lines saying, “We are invoking clause 2”.

Q294 Michael Ellis: Who did you first meet from the national Police Federation with regard to discussing this contract? Who was your point of contact?

Jon Gaunt: The present chairman of the Police Federation, Steve Williams. It was his idea to employ us.

Q295 Michael Ellis: It was his idea?

Jon Gaunt: Absolutely. But please let me clarify; we had been working before and some of the work we did before, which I discussed with you earlier, was initiated by Mr Simon Reed, who is the former deputy chairman under Mr McKeever. He had now retired.

Q296 Michael Ellis: We heard from a witness, a lady, who came to this Committee and had been working with the Police Federation and did not last long there.

Jon Gaunt: Yes, 10 weeks.

Michael Ellis: She mentioned that there had been what are called the guerrilla terms of this contract. It was variously described as a blitzkrieg contract. Who instigated that?

Jon Gaunt: Can I clarify—

Chair: Can we just clarify her name, please? It is Fiona McElroy,

Michael Ellis: Fiona McElroy.

Jon Gaunt: Yes, I read what she said. May I clarify both the terms first? I think it is very important.

Michael Ellis: Yes, please.

Jon Gaunt: I think the two terms have been conflated. She has not shown you the contract and from what she said, she did not have a copy of the contract.

Can we deal with the blitzkrieg first? The blitzkrieg part of our tactic was to go round the country, meet all the other federations, carry on the training we had been doing with them, which was showing them how to get on traditional media, how to get into local papers.

Q297 Michael Ellis: Can I just ask you who instigated it?

Jon Gaunt: I am going to come to that in a minute. I am going to clarify why. I think it is very important.

The tactic was to go round the country teaching them how to use Twitter, Facebook, every method in the wider police family, so that when a message came out, they could get their message over. That is what the blitzkrieg refers to, that we would organise a blitzkrieg in the media; we would make sure that when a poster went up, we were talking about it; local reps were on local radio, BBC, whatever. So that is the blitzkrieg; totally unrelated to the guerrilla terms.

Q298 Michael Ellis: Hold on. On the blitzkrieg—blitzkrieg literally means a lightning strike—it implies a full scale, unhindered attack. Is that not what that contract was all about?

Jon Gaunt: No. You should read the contract, with the greatest respect. In the contract blitzkrieg in the media is what it says, and it talks about this method that I have just described, which is making sure everybody is trained; making sure everybody knows. There were lots of examples in the regions where nationally they had put out a poster about the cuts, but not told the regions. They had not told the regions, therefore the poster went up and they did not get double-bubble. I know from media that what you have to do—you probably know this from your own campaigning—is that if you put a poster out during an election, you then want to couple that up with getting phone-ins; getting in Twitter. That is what the blitzkrieg was about, to teach them that. Maybe it was unfortunately phrased, especially when you link it to the guerrilla tactics, but the two were totally separate.

Q299 Michael Ellis: So who instigated the guerrilla or blitzkrieg style?

Jon Gaunt: Let's talk about blitzkrieg. I think we put the word blitzkrieg in.

Q300 Michael Ellis: So you put the word blitzkrieg in. What about the guerrilla tactics?

Jon Gaunt: Guerrilla tactics are a bit like above and below the line advertising. So guerrilla activity was to basically create stories that were not necessarily attributable right back to the Police Federation. So the idea was we would get stories and plant stories, all based on fact, about the cuts. Don't forget that this was all about the impact the cuts would have on the general public. So that is the guerrilla tactics.

Q301 Michael Ellis: You were doing something that you did not want to be identified back to the Police Federation.

Jon Gaunt: No, it is about doing something in tandem, at the same time. You would call it, I guess, spin. Certainly Alastair Campbell would call it spin. Other people would call it the kind of negative lobbying and the negative politics that we are going to see as the general election approaches.

Q302 Michael Ellis: So it was a negative style of attack. It was not easily to be linked to the Police Federation. It was designed to be a disguised form of attack.

Jon Gaunt: No, not disguised. It is a well-used form. People do it all the time in politics. This was a political campaign, with a small P, and of course we are going to use it.

We have a confidentiality clause in the contract—

Q303 Michael Ellis: Mr Gaunt, the Police Federation are not supposed to be political.

Jon Gaunt: I just said, with a small P. The bottom line, Mr Ellis, is that if you read the contract you would see what I am saying.

Q304 Michael Ellis: Perhaps you will send us the contract.

Jon Gaunt: No. I think I am bound by confidentiality and if the Police Federation are willing to waive that, so that I don't get any problems—

Q305 Michael Ellis: You keep saying that I should read the contract but if you do not send it to me, I can't.

Jon Gaunt: Yes, but I can't. Be fair.

Q306 Chair: Mr Gaunt, there are no worries. We have asked Mr Mordecai and we will get a copy of the contract.

Jon Gaunt: Okay, fine.

Chair: If you are happy as the other signatory, I am not an expert in contract law.

Jon Gaunt: I don't have a problem.

Chair: If you are happy to release it and he is happy to release it, it can be released.

Jon Gaunt: I will speak to my legal advisers but I think on general principle, Mr Vaz, I do not have a problem.

Q307 Michael Ellis: Can I ask you who introduced you to the joint central committee of the Police Federation?

Jon Gaunt: When?

Michael Ellis: In connection with this contract. I am trying to get to the provenance of this contract. You have mentioned Steve Williams.

Jon Gaunt: Steve Williams was the main instigator of this contract, which is why I find it ironic that he is now the leader of the reform. Mr Williams is the man who found, I think—there was this vacuum at the top. There was dissatisfaction with the late Mr McKeever; there was dissatisfaction with Mr Rennie, among the rank and file and among the regions. I feel that what happened was that Mr Williams was positioning himself to get elected. There was another lady who was standing who was on the Constables Committee. You are probably aware there are three committees under the JCC; Constables, Inspectors and Sergeants. There was massive rivalry because the Constables felt they paid all the money but had none of the power. So they put up—her name was Julie; forgive me I have

forgotten her surname—and those two were the main contenders. Steve Williams did get elected and of course they are elected by the JCC. She would have introduced it to them, I guess.

Q308 Michael Ellis: So was this contract put out to tender? Did you compete?

Jon Gaunt: No.

Q309 Michael Ellis: So this was a deal, basically, between you and the Police Federation leadership to engage this contract in a way that was not advertised; others were not invited to compete for it.

Jon Gaunt: No.

Michael Ellis: It was a personal arrangement.

Jon Gaunt: That is nothing to do with me, is it? That is their business. That is the way they employ. We had done lots of work for them before. They then said, “Would you do this?” We then discussed what it was about. They agreed the contract. They told us what the terms of the contract were. It is their contract. We agreed. We did the work.

Q310 Michael Ellis: I just would like to pin this down if I may. Perhaps you can help. What was the thinking, the motivation, behind the guerrilla tactics, the blitzkrieg tactics? What was the thinking behind it? What was the object of the exercise?

Jon Gaunt: The object of the exercise was to try to reverse the 20% cut that the Police Federation and its members felt was going to put the public in danger. That was the object of it. You are focusing on blitzkrieg. I have explained it already. The guerrilla tactics was a very, very small part about the rest of it. The rest of it was a 360 campaign where we were going to basically train people in media, train people how to place the stories, meet influential people. For example, we introduced Paul McKeever to some social commentators in the newspapers. It was basically taking a more professional approach to their press and PR than they had had up to that point.

Q311 Michael Ellis: What impact did it have on what is called “Plebgate”? What impact, do you think?

Jon Gaunt: Which part?

Michael Ellis: Any of the involvement of your company in the Police Federation.

Jon Gaunt: That is a bit of wide question. Could you be more specific in what you are trying to ask?

Q312 Michael Ellis: The issues ranging around the guerrilla tactics, the blitzkrieg—

Jon Gaunt: Excuse me. The guerrilla tactics, I will show you this contract as well, and all our regional contracts.

Michael Ellis: Please do.

Jon Gaunt: You will find that the blitzkrieg and guerrilla tactics are not involved in any of these—

Michael Ellis: That is why I am asking you.

Jon Gaunt: I am telling you. They are not in the regional contracts because that was not needed from the regions. What the regions wanted was media and press-office training, which is what we gave them. It led on to a campaign in the Birmingham area because of the conference and because of the inactivity of the centre. So it was different. So when you ask why the guerrilla and blitzkrieg were there I have been straight with you and said that we probably put those terms in but it came from the discussions with Mr Williams about his wanting to be much more aggressive. I seem to recall him saying, “We need to go toe to toe with the Government”.

Q313 Michael Ellis: There was a wish to attack the Government of the day?

Jon Gaunt: There was a wish to say that the approach had to be more. Our approach for the national federation—we did several surveys for example—

Q314 Michael Ellis: Can I just stop you there? I understand the point that you have made but what I want to ask you about is pinpointing, for example, the particular issue of the meeting at Sutton Coldfield. I would like to come to that.

Jon Gaunt: I will come on to that.

Michael Ellis: Is it true that you tipped off various media outlets about the meeting that Andrew Mitchell was due to have with Police Federation representatives?

Jon Gaunt: So you are now moving on to how all that happened, are you?

Michael Ellis: I am asking you about that.

Jon Gaunt: I think you will find in my written evidence I said that I don’t recall telling the press. Obviously the press knew where it was going to be. It was a Friday afternoon. He had already been on TV that lunchtime opening a yoga centre. It was pretty clear where he would be on a Friday afternoon.

Mr Winnick: Could I just interrupt at this point, with apologies, Mr Ellis? The Chair had to leave. It is my intention to finish this meeting by 5.30pm. So if you could indicate—

Michael Ellis: Yes, Mr Winnick.

Mr Winnick: I will then call anyone else that wishes to speak.

Michael Ellis: Thank you. A few more questions if I may.

Q315 Michael Ellis: You say you do not recall. Surely you would recall, would you not? Did you travel with these police officers?

Jon Gaunt: Yes and I have said that in my written statement.

Q316 Michael Ellis: Did you telephone or text the media and tell them that you were on the way?

Jon Gaunt: No.

Q317 Michael Ellis: Did you send a tweet with breaking news that Andrew Mitchell's fate was to be decided?

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Q318 Michael Ellis: So you did send that?

Jon Gaunt: Yes, of course I did.

Q319 Michael Ellis: Was the meeting with Andrew Mitchell not supposed to be confidential?

Jon Gaunt: No.

Michael Ellis: Mr Gaunt, this was prospectively a full-scale personal attack on an individual.

Jon Gaunt: Can I answer your question?

Michael Ellis: Yes.

Jon Gaunt: You asked me did I tip off the press. I said in my written statement, "No". You have asked me did I pass that tweet out. Yes. Do you want me to say what the tweet meant? I thought his fate would be decided one way or the other because I thought, and I hoped, that at the end of that meeting there would be some resolution to this long-running sore. That is what that meant. My clients did not want me to tell people where the meeting was and so we did not. That is the situation. If you want—

Q320 Mr Winnick: Mr Gaunt, if you would address the Chair while trying to address Mr Ellis, that would be helpful, otherwise it is just a duel between the two of you, which is unacceptable.

Jon Gaunt: I am awfully sorry.

Q321 Michael Ellis: I realise that is difficult but can I just ask you this, Mr Gaunt? I have to say to you that my suggestion is that you were part of a personalised, highly politicised campaign that was focused very much on individuals and individuals particularly, like Mitchell. Is it not the reality that focused a very personal attack on Andrew Mitchell for the Police Federation and that was the essence of your conduct on their behalf?

Mr Winnick: Just before you reply, Mr Gaunt, Mr Ellis, is that your final question?

Michael Ellis: I have one more after that if I may.

Jon Gaunt: If you want to ask how the PC Pleb thing came about, obviously the altercation at the gate, which we cannot really talk about at the moment because it is sub judice, the only thing we know for sure is that the policeman who went to jail was telling a lie. I will again add to what John Tully from the Metropolitan Police has told you—we never represented the Metropolitan Police at any point in time and do not know this police officer. We went on that story with the Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands because it filled the narrative, which according to the police at that time, the federation members, was that the Government was removed from the effect these cuts would have on the general population.

Mr Winnick: I think we have got the point.

Jon Gaunt: That is why we went on it. And, yes, it was personalised, if you want to say it was personalised, but it was personalised in a political way. It was free speech.

Mr Winnick: I think you have answered the question.

Jon Gaunt: A police officer has the same rights to free speech as anybody else.

Mr Winnick: Mr Gaunt, you have answered the question. The last question from Mr Ellis, please.

Q322 Michael Ellis: First this. You accept it was personalised. Are you now working for any Police Federation branches?

Jon Gaunt: No.

Q323 Michael Ellis: Why was your contract terminated, or whatever phrase you wish to use?

Jon Gaunt: Which one?

Michael Ellis: The one that was finished after two months. Why was it not renewed?

Jon Gaunt: You would have to ask allow me—

Michael Ellis: What is your assessment?

Mr Winnick: Briefly, Mr Gaunt.

Jon Gaunt: You can't ask the late chairman, but it was the late chairman who did it. I think they employed us because after the demonstration, which the rank and file demanded and had been a complete flop, I think they thought by employing us, that would keep the rank and file quiet. They had us on for two months and then they got rid of us. They never told us why. They did not want to continue it. I do not know the answer to your question. You would have to ask the federation.

Q324 Paul Flynn: Did you advise policemen to tweet under false names?

Jon Gaunt: Absolutely not.

Q325 Paul Flynn: Did you advise them to tweet with their names and ranks?

Jon Gaunt: I never told them. I showed them how to tweet. I showed them the boundaries of how to tweet and how to Facebook and how to create events but I did not in any way ever tell them—I don't know where that question comes from.

Q326 Paul Flynn: On this meeting with the three members of the federation and Andrew Mitchell—

Jon Gaunt: With Mr Mitchell?

Paul Flynn: Yes. You say you did not inform the press. Could you explain why there were camera crews waiting outside?

Jon Gaunt: Sorry, I did not catch that?

Paul Flynn: Could you explain why there were camera crews waiting outside?

Jon Gaunt: Because at the time we had run a very successful campaign and for four weeks we had kept it on the front pages of the newspapers. I presume—I am answering the question—we had launched our poster campaign there three or four week previously at the constituency office. Ian Edwards, and he has given you evidence, who was the chairman of the West Midlands Police Federation, had asked for the meeting. I was immensely surprised when Mr Mitchell accepted the invitation. They had also asked Mr Cameron for a meeting during the conference, and he had said no.

Q327 Paul Flynn: We have seen this. Could you explain to me how the camera crews knew where you would be?

Jon Gaunt: Because the press are clever. Because it is a Friday afternoon. It was the week of the conference. Mr Mitchell would clearly be in his constituency. If you look at the press archive—

Q328 Paul Flynn: Wait a minute. Could I ask the next question? You have clearly been on talk radio; it certainly was not silent radio you were on. I presume you have trained people to give evidence at Select Committees, have you?

Jon Gaunt: No, I have not. No.

Q329 Paul Flynn: If you did, would you suggest they speak as long as possible to avoid several questions being asked?

Jon Gaunt: I am willing to stay for as long as wish, Mr Flynn.

Q330 Paul Flynn: Did you advise the federation members going into the meeting that the best thing they could do—

Jon Gaunt: Which meeting?

Paul Flynn: The meeting with Mr Mitchell.

Jon Gaunt: Yes. I can answer that.

Paul Flynn: Did you advise them when they came out that they could lie because people would believe three witnesses rather than one politician, and who believes them anyway?

Jon Gaunt: Okay.

Paul Flynn: Was that the advice you gave them?

Jon Gaunt: Can I answer the two questions?

Paul Flynn: Yes.

Jon Gaunt: The first question is did I advise them what to do in the meeting. We had a meeting at Guardian House, which is the West Midlands Police Federation, in the morning. That discussion was about what is Mr Mitchell going to say; where does it go from there. There was no discussion about “Shall we tell him to resign at the end.” There was none of that. I think everybody in that meeting hoped that at the end—I hoped, in a way—there would be a resolution in the sense of Mr Mitchell was going to say—

Q331 Paul Flynn: This is very interesting. We are not here to hear your life story. Could you try to answer the question?

Jon Gaunt: The question is—no, I did not.

Paul Flynn: Did you or did you not tell them to lie?

Jon Gaunt: No. Of course I did not.

Mr Winnick: Right. You have answered that question.

Q332 Paul Flynn: They did lie.

Jon Gaunt: You say they lied.

Q333 Paul Flynn: Would you advise anyone who is going to have an interview with someone that you were advising to take a tape recorder in with them?

Jon Gaunt: No. I will tell you what I would advise and I think what has been forgotten is that Mr Mitchell said, when they came into the meeting, they were going to take notes. The police officers said, "Fine. We will take notes as well". Mr Mitchell did that tape recording without their permission and without their knowledge.

Q334 Paul Flynn: If he had not have done that his career would have been ruined.

Jon Gaunt: Well, hold on a second, please.

Q335 Mr Winnick: Both of you can hold on a second. Mr Flynn, how many more questions do you have?

Paul Flynn: I would like to continue questions until I get an answer but I haven't yet.

Jon Gaunt: What is the answer?

Q336 Paul Flynn: You are putting out this verbal diarrhoea, which is non-stop. How people employ you to teach them how to tweet at £16,000 a year I have no idea because you do seem to be very vacuous.

Jon Gaunt: What is your question, Mr Flynn?

Paul Flynn: How on earth do you make money?

Mr Winnick: Mr Flynn, if you please. We cannot have an ongoing duel for the next half hour. I would suggest, with respect, you ask two more questions. If the answers from Mr Gaunt are not satisfactory, you will just have to accept that position.

Q337 Paul Flynn: The meeting ended at 5.45pm, precisely the right time for the news bulletins. Was that the instructions you gave?

Jon Gaunt: In my written evidence to your Committee I was asked the question: did I tell them to try to finish for the 6.00pm news? My answer was yes. Why? Because I am a PR person and we wanted to get on the 6.00pm news, of course. The officers in the meeting before they went in with Mr Mitchell said, "Jon, we won't stop if we are getting somewhere". They told me.

Mr Winnick: Yes. I think you have answered the question.

Paul Flynn: We read that.

Jon Gaunt: It is in the written evidence. It is in the written evidence.

Mr Winnick: Thank you, Mr Gaunt. Last question.

Q338 Paul Flynn: You were sacked after two months of doing this job.

Jon Gaunt: I was not sacked.

Paul Flynn: The contract ended after two months.

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Q339 Paul Flynn: Do you think anyone should be very wary of employing you again? Do you think the ordinary bobby on the beat, who pays large amounts of money to the Police Federation, had value from your work?

Jon Gaunt: We did not get a chance to finish the national campaign because after two months they exercised the clause. You are incorrect to say we were sacked and if you can prove it, I would love to see the letter.

Q340 Paul Flynn: I am quoting correctly. It is in the contract.

Jon Gaunt: No, we were not sacked. I have the letter, which said they wanted to invoke that clause.

Q341 Mr Clappison: Would I be right in thinking, having heard your evidence, that we could say that your relationship with the Police Federation did not end happily?

Jon Gaunt: No. If we are talking about the regional federations, I do not think there is any problem at all.

Q342 Mr Clappison: With the national federation?

Jon Gaunt: The national federation clearly did not carry on after the two months, but we were then already, as I have openly said today, working for 14 or 15 regional federations, which is why Mr McKeever then came to see the Birmingham people and said that he did not like the style of the campaign, which of course is his right. But it is their right to say, "Our members want it".

Q343 Mr Clappison: When you were asked questions earlier you said that part of what you did was to put out material that was not attributable to the Police Federation. Yes?

Jon Gaunt: I think what I actually said was that using guerrilla tactics, sometimes you would place stories that were not directly coming back to the Police Federation; both soft and hard stories.

Q344 Mr Clappison: You agree with that. Could you give us an example of a hard story?

Jon Gaunt: We did not do any because we had only just got started and we did not carry on after the two months.

Q345 Mr Clappison: So you did not put out any things that were not attributable to the Police Federation?

Jon Gaunt: No. Not the national.

Q346 Mr Clappison: Not the national. Did the Police Federation know that you were going to do that, you were prepared to do that, in the course of the contract?

Jon Gaunt: It was in the contract, which they asked us to sign.

Q347 Mr Clappison: Did you have a hand in the poster campaign: “Say hello to Dave. Wave goodbye to your police service”?

Jon Gaunt: I answered that, I think, before you came in. Did you come in—

Q348 Mr Clappison: No, I was here all the time. I want to establish exactly what you had to do with that.

Jon Gaunt: “Say hello, Dave. Wave goodbye to the police force” we got employed by the West Midlands Police Federation; they had already booked all the billboards and that particular design, they had already got through a different firm.

Q349 Mr Clappison: You have mentioned this, there is document you have put out, *Making Your Voices Heard*, where you refer to this billboard campaign as to how you were helping them to prepare for the party conference. This is specifically referred to in it.

Jon Gaunt: What does it say?

Q350 Mr Clappison: It says, “The Gaunt Brothers were helping the three federations prepare for the Conservative Party conference held in Birmingham from 7 to 10 October. The plan was to run one advert with the public-facing message at sites around Birmingham including a huge billboard outside the conference venue. Various designs were submitted by advertising agencies and two adverts were chosen. The first was, ‘Mr Cameron, are you taking the P?’ and the second was, ‘Say hello to Dave. Wave goodbye to your police service’.

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Mr Clappison: So you put that in but that was nothing to do with you?

Jon Gaunt: No. What happened was, when we came they had already booked the billboards. They wanted to give the billboards to the national federation. The national federation did not want to use them, so the regionals were going to use them. They had

already agreed to the, “Say hello, wave goodbye” and I think if you ask Ian Edwards he will tell you that, as well.

The second one, we were involved. We were not involved in the first one. Although I do not see anything wrong with it; I would have been okay with it. I think it is perfectly legitimate in terms of political free speech for a police officer to make that statement.

Q351 Mr Clappison: I am trying to establish how it came about.

Jon Gaunt: It was already in place, Mr Clappison.

Q352 Mr Clappison: One could draw the conclusion from your document that you were partly responsible for it. So what are you claiming?

Jon Gaunt: Well, we were responsible to work with the campaign, so that is what that is about, saying, “Look, this is what we did when we were doing the campaign with West Midlands” but if it reads as if we had the idea of the billboards, then that is incorrect because we did not have the billboard idea. As you are probably aware, buying billboards around a national political conference is done two years in advance and I think you will find that West Midlands bought them two years in advance.

Q353 Mr Clappison: What was your reaction to the eruption of the Andrew Mitchell affair?

Jon Gaunt: Fantastic. The initial reaction?

Mr Clappison: Yes.

Jon Gaunt: Absolutely fantastic because obviously the first time we saw it it was on the front page of *The Sun* when the story broke because it was another piece of publicity that we could use to further the campaign for our clients, which was all about the cuts. As I said earlier, it would appear—we have to be careful here because we do not know the truth now, do we?—that it filled the narrative of a Government out of touch with the rank and file and with the British public.

Q354 Mr Clappison: Do you have any regrets about the way in which you handled that?

Jon Gaunt: Which bit?

Mr Clappison: Regrets about the way in which the Andrew Mitchell affair was handled.

Jon Gaunt: The Pleb part?

Mr Clappison: Yes, the Pleb part.

Jon Gaunt: I have absolutely no regrets. We ran a very successful campaign. We kept it on the front pages of the newspapers for four weeks. Clearly I regret that the police officer who went to prison, who lied and said he was there when he was not there. I regret that

happened. But, as I say, we never represented him and if I did represent him, I would have told him not to do it.

Q355 Mr Clappison: I want to ask about the meeting that took place between the federation and Mr Mitchell, which you have said was some sort of clear-the-air meeting that was going to bring a resolution to it.

Jon Gaunt: Yes.

Mr Clappison: You did not see it, then, as part of the opportunity to make your case about Plebgate?

Jon Gaunt: No. The whole idea of that meeting, which was Mr Edwards' idea, the chairman—he wrote to them and he wrote to Mr Cameron—the idea was to have a meeting, clear the air. The three police officers, as far as I understand it, wanted Mr Mitchell to say exactly what he did say at the gate; not what he did not say. Mr Mitchell, in their view, did not say what he did say at the gate. It is for others to judge whether or not that is correct. That was not in the meeting.

Q356 Mr Clappison: That is the part of your evidence that I find hard to believe.

Jon Gaunt: Why?

Mr Clappison: Because you said that everything else you saw as an opportunity to advance the police campaign. Yet here was this meeting and you said it was just going to be simply a clear-the-air meeting. It was a further opportunity wasn't it?

Jon Gaunt: It was a further opportunity.

Mr Winnick: Address the chair. That was Mr Clappison's last question.

Jon Gaunt: I do apologise. It was a further opportunity, obviously, because it was part of the whole campaign and obviously going to see him, and if Mr Mitchell had said—well, I will have to be careful with what I say here, don't I, because of the sub judice. But yes, the idea was to try to clear the air. The idea was not to get him the sack because if Mr Mitchell got the sack, then the story is over completely. So that would not serve our PR purposes. The idea was the three officers—and it was their idea; Mr Edwards' idea, who did not go to the meeting—it was Mr Edwards' idea to see if they could get some clarity. I was surprised that Mr Mitchell agreed to the meeting and I did not know what he would say at the meeting and I did not know what the papers would say afterwards.

Q357 Mark Reckless: You said it would have defeated your PR purpose if Mr Mitchell had been sacked but would it not have appeared to give confirmation to the allegations that were being made by the police?

Jon Gaunt: Which allegations? None of my police officers made any allegations about what happened at the gate at Downing Street because how could we possibly know? Just like you, Mr Reckless, we can't possibly know at the moment what happened and we have to be very careful what we say about that issue. We have to stress—there are two libel

cases—that the officer on the gate who made the allegation has not been arrested, let alone charged.

Q358 Mark Reckless: I am trying not to go into that. I am just questioning your assertion that were Mr Mitchell to have been sacked that would have defeated your PR purpose.

Jon Gaunt: It would have ended it, wouldn't it? And it ended anyway, to be absolutely honest, at the end of that meeting. These things have a natural life

Q359 Mark Reckless: Can I clarify something you said earlier, Mr Gaunt? You said in your written evidence to us, when asked the question of had you tipped off the media about that meeting, that you did not recall.

Jon Gaunt: No. In written evidence I said, “No, we did not tip off the media, we didn't need to because they all knew where it was.”

Q360 Mark Reckless: Why was I hearing you say probably about 15 minutes ago that you did not recall?

Jon Gaunt: Same thing—basically because it is so long ago now.

Q361 Mark Reckless: Do you sometimes advise your clients to say, “Do not recall” when they are asked a difficult question that rather puts them on the spot?

Jon Gaunt: No.

Q362 Mark Reckless: I am slightly surprised you gave us such an affirmative “No” to that because were it the case that any journalist were to recall being tipped off by you, they would then infer that you had lied to a parliamentary committee.

Jon Gaunt: The question was did I tell people where the meeting was. The answer is no.

Mr Winnick: Mr Gaunt, the Chair of the Committee has asked you for certain financial information, which no doubt you will send us as quickly as possible. The members of this Committee represent the two main political parties and I have to say to you, Mr Gaunt, as the temporary Chair, that we are far from satisfied with the way in which your firm has carried out its contract with the Police Federation. We do not believe that it has done a service for the Police Federation and indeed we take a rather critical view, which will perhaps not come as a surprise to you. But I thank you for coming along today and giving evidence. You have been very forthright. You have tried in your own way to answer the questions put to you, but no doubt you will bear in mind the comments I have made. Thank you very much.