

Parliament 'misled' by Cash

25 October 2017

A Federal minister has “misled Parliament” with five denials, after the truth came out that her office knew beforehand of a police raid on union offices. One staffer who knew has resigned this week as the murky underworld of Canberra got muddier by the hour with claims of a public witch-hunt, police used as pawns in a political raid, then a failed cover-up after a media circus.

News reports claim that, as Employment Minister Michaelia Cash denied any knowledge five times to fellow senators, the staff member who did know was present at the hearing.

There have been calls for an independent inquiry, and for the resignation of Minister Cash



Minister Cash, who saw nothing

for misleading Parliament, which now takes the heat off Opposition leader Bill Shorten over union funding to a left-wing group years ago. That was the trigger which caused the blow-up at a Senate Estimates hearing on Wednesday.

Minister Cash was caught between a ROC and a hard place, after Federal Police raided union headquarters for documents relating to donations by the union under Mr Shorten. They acted on subpoena given to the Registered Organisations Commission (ROC), a recent creation of the Turnbull Government.

She changed her original story that neither she nor her office knew in advance. She later told Prime Minister Turnbull only that she herself was not told,

omitting reference to her office. A staff member who was aware has now resigned, as ministerial ranks closed around the embattled minister.

COSTLY RAID AS CRIME FUNDS CUT

At issue is who knew about the raid beforehand, and how it was leaked to news media, which turned up on cue with cameras rolling before 35 police removed bags of documents from two State offices of the Australian Workers Union. The AFP acted on a subpoena given to ROC, on grounds that documents might be destroyed.

Prime Minister Turnbull was “in it up to his neck”, the Opposition Leader claimed as the furore grew in Parliamentary question time.

Such a large and political police sting came only two days after the AFP had complained that shortages of funds and staff had threatened its war on crime, as it told the same Senate Estimates Committee on Tuesday (below). The raid proved otherwise.

Labor claimed that the documents seized were already made public in a report in 2015 by the politically charged Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption, which found “widespread and deep-seated” misconduct by union officials.

Following a controversial referral by Senator Cash, the commission has been investigating the legitimacy of the AWU's \$100,000 donation to fringe activist group GetUp in 2005 when Opposition Leader Bill Shorten ran the union.

Bizarrely, Minister Cash also asked ROC to consider referring the leaks for investigation by the Federal Police, which conducted the raids. It seems another case of police being asked to investigate themselves, a practice widely discredited over decades.

<http://www.skynews.com.au/news/top-stories/2017/10/26/media-advisor-resigns-after-leaking-awu-raids.html>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-30/trade-union-royal-commission-findings-released/7059348>

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Turnbull defends police funding cuts

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has dismissed claims by Federal Police that its effectiveness is under threat by government funding cuts, made to the same Senate Estimates meeting only a day before the denials by Employment Minister Michaelia Cash.

The prime minister, under questioning again from Labor in parliament, claimed that the Australian Federal Police had received an "unprecedented level" of investment in the May Budget, \$321million.

Earlier in a Senate estimates hearing, AFP Commissioner Andrew Colvin claimed that a funding shortfall of \$184million over the next four years would affect its operations against fraud, drug, organised crime and child exploitation.

That admission prompted Opposition Leader Bill Shorten to question whether the government had cut the operational capacity of the AFP. Ironically for him, on the very next day the AFP showed its ample resources -- for political raids at least on his former union offices in Sydney and Melbourne.

An internal document from a senior NSW-based officer written in July, was reported by the ABC blaming under-resourcing on an overstretched workforce, causing 23 criminal operations to be cut or moved offshore.

The July AFP memo revealed resourcing shortages left the AFP unable to properly investigate a 1.6-tonne cocaine importation, leaving it to be handled offshore. It meant the operations of an Australian-based crime group behind the import could not be fully explored.

<http://www.news.com.au/national/breaking-news/afp-defends-overseas-staff-deployments/news-story/478c2beebcc3f4dc249f8e695549bac4>