



Lord Lexden
Conservative peer

Ted Heath has been betrayed by the Home Office and the government – we need a new independent review of the allegations against him

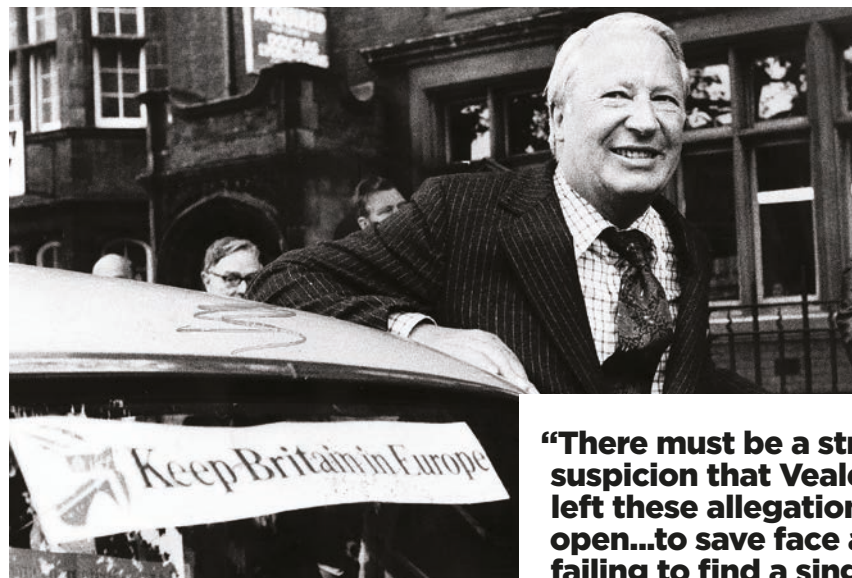
There is an overwhelming – some say unanswerable – case for an independent review of a number of allegations of child sex abuse made against Ted Heath after his death. The allegations were left unresolved at the end of a deeply flawed police investigation, known as Operation Conifer, in 2017.

I have brought the issue before the House of Lords on a number of occasions in the last five years. I returned to it again on 24 October, following a significant development: the outcome of a disciplinary hearing into the chief constable who led Operation Conifer in Wiltshire for subsequent misconduct in Cleveland.

one of his officers contemptibly publicised on television in front of Ted Heath's house in Salisbury.

The outcome of the disciplinary case, brought following an investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, should be followed by renewed scrutiny of his handling of the allegations against the former prime minister.

There must be a strong suspicion that Veale left these allegations open, neither proved nor disproved, to save face after failing to find a single shred of evidence to support any of the accusations, despite getting his officers to rifle through all of Heath's private papers, box after box, in the Bodleian Libraries during an operation that cost over £1m, paid for by the Home Office.



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Mike Veale, former chief constable of Wiltshire and Cleveland police forces, was found guilty of gross misconduct and barred from policing for life in July after a disciplinary hearing found that he had made inappropriate sexual remarks to colleagues.

As I said in the Lords in the wake of that adverse finding against Veale, it is imperative to carry out an independent review of the seven allegations made against Sir Edward Heath long after his death, which Veale failed to clear up after a long investigation that

We owe it to the memory of a dead statesman, the only first minister of the Crown ever to be suspected of such serious criminal offences, to get at the truth of this grave matter, and settle the doubts created by the disgraced Veale.

As on previous occasions, the call for an independent review was backed on all sides of the House with no dissenting views. The Home Office – and thus the government as a whole – were isolated in their refusal to do the right thing.

The Lords' Home Office minister, Lord Sharpe of Epsom, claimed it was for the local police and crime commissioner “to consider whether an inquiry is necessary”. There is no reason why the government should not institute an inquiry, as previous ministers have made clear over the years. The current minister also said that Operation Conifer “has already been subject to considerable external scrutiny”. That is true, but the scrutiny of Veale's work was carried out before the outcome of the current case. In any case reviews of Conifer and Veale carried out by policemen are not independent but ‘marking their own homework’, as some in the Lords say. As an acute observer with long-term experience of these affairs remarked, the Home Office is “either lazy or gullible, to put it mildly”. 🐼