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Matheson urged to sort out 'misleading' crime figures

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- Matheson urged to sort out 'misleading' crime figures

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Scotland's justice secretary has been urged to sort out the Scottish Government's reporting of crime figures, after they were branded 'confusing and misleading'.

In a letter from Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross, Michael Matheson was told it was almost impossible to gauge violent crime because of the disparity in figures used.

The SNP has been criticised in recent weeks for boasting there were less than 7000 violent crimes in Scotland last year, even though data recorded by the police suggested there were close to ten times that.

It said there were 6775 instances of violence, but when incidents such as broken noses and cases where a victim loses consciousness are included, the toll rises to 68,482.

The disparity is caused by the distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences' in the recorded crime statistical bulletin, which ministers argue has been made since the 1920s.

But Mr Ross pointed out that the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey – which is also used to record violent crime – makes no such distinction.

And Derek Penman, HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, said last week that figures combining violence with and without injury offer "a better overall measure of violent crime".

Mr Ross argued that ministers should therefore create a clearer system of recording and publishing, adding it would increase the public's confidence in policing.

Earlier this month, the SNP was accused of "fiddling" crime figures after offences including punching, kicking and brandishing a weapon were left out of statistics.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said: "The inconsistent use of 'violent crime' by the Scottish Government is at best confusing and at worst misleading.

"The SNP should consider implementing a joined-up, common sense and transparent approach on this issue so that the public can have full confidence in crime statistics.

"The current spin from the SNP does a disservice to tens of thousands of victims of violence and fails to provide an accurate overall picture of violent crime in Scotland."

A copy of the letter is below:

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

General Questions – Thursday 19th January 2017

I wish to follow up in writing on our exchange during General Questions on Thursday, 19th January, when I asked whether the Scottish Government is content with the way it records crime. You will be aware this is an issue the Scottish Conservatives have raised before, and which was reported in the national and local press earlier this month.

The Scottish Government statistical bulletin, 'Criminal Proceedings in Scotland, 2015-16', explicitly states that "violations of criminal law are divided, for *statistical purposes only*, into crimes and offences." Equally, the UK Statistics Authority, to which you referred in our exchange, emphasised in its July 2014 assessment report of the recorded crime statistics that the distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences' is "...made *only for working purposes*."

Nevertheless, the Scottish Government is issuing press releases, such as the release on 27th September 2016, which states that "non-sexual crimes of violence are at their second lowest level since 1974, despite a slight rise over the twelve months from 6,357 to 6,775." In this instance, and in others, the reference to violent crime fails to include weapons offences and common assaults – encompassing a broken nose and loss of consciousness, as well as domestic abuse – which would bring the total closer to 70,000 incidents across the country. This spin from the SNP does a disservice to tens of thousands of victims of violence and fails to provide an accurate overall picture of violent crime in Scotland for the public.

As a defence, and as you mentioned in your remarks last week, the SNP repeatedly argues that the distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences' has been made by consecutive administrations since the 1920s. Yet the Scottish Government's own website says that the recorded crimes bulletin in its current format has only been published since April 1998. Furthermore, you mentioned during our exchange that the Scottish Government records crime using the Scottish crime and justice survey (SCJS) and police recorded crime statistics.

However, and as you will be aware, the SCJS does not make the same distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences': *"...violent crime in the SCJS includes assault and robbery, crimes which are included in Group 1 (Nonsexual crimes of violence) and Group 6 (Miscellaneous offences) in police recorded crime figures."* (Scottish Government, Recorded Crime in Scotland 2015-16, p. 25)

The inconsistent use of 'violent crime' across the Scottish Government's statistical publications on recorded crime is at best confusing and at worst misleading. I am not alone in this view – it was reported last week that HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland has questioned whether it is right that some 60,000 common assaults are not treated as "crimes of violence" in official publications. He further commented that the Crime Survey for England and Wales, which includes violence with and without injury, offers "a better overall measure of violent crime."

The SNP's argument in favour of "continuity for continuity's sake" does not serve the best interests of the public. Above all, the information should be targeted to the audience, even if the status quo better serves the SNP's spin machine. I strongly urge you to consider implementing a joined up, common sense and transparent approach on this issue so that the public can have full confidence in the Scottish Government's crime statistics.

I look forward to receiving your response to the points raised in this letter. Yours sincerely, Douglas Ross MSP

The SNP was accused of fiddling figures earlier this month:

<https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/404767/snp-accused-of-fiddling-crime-figures-as-the-shocking-extent-of-violent-incidents-in-scotland-is-revealed/>

The Scottish Government hailed what it said was statistics showing fewer than 7000 instances of violent crime last year:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00506122.pdf> (p1) and

<http://news.gov.scot/news/recorded-crime-at-a-42-year-low>

However, when a range of other violent incidents are included, such as handling offensive weapons, broken noses, loss of consciousness and other common assaults, the figure rises to 68,482. HM Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland Derek Penman said on [Twitter](#) on 19th January that the approach used by the Crime Survey for England and Wales *"includes violence with & without injury and is a better overall measure of violent crime"*.

China to speed up ethnic regions development

Chinese authorities have pledged to accelerate development of ethnic regions during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), as the country aims to create a moderately prosperous society by 2020, according to a State Council statement.

The development of ethnic regions is important for ethnic unity, social harmony and stability, as well as the country's lasting peace and stability, according to the statement signed by Premier Li Keqiang.

The document details major targets ranging from continued rapid economic development to improved ecological environment and ethnic unity, to ensure the regions do not fall behind on the country's journey toward becoming a moderately prosperous society by 2020.

The central authorities aim to achieve annual gross regional product growth of over 8 percent in these regions, lifting 18.05 million people in rural areas out of poverty.

Other major tasks were also set, including improving livelihoods and the protection of ethnic minority villages and towns, asking authorities to support development of the regions via preferential policies.

Minorities account for 8.5 percent of China's population.

After six wasted years of Tory failure on the economy it seems that under Philip Hammond it is only going to get worse – John McDonnell

John

McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, responding to the ONS public sector finance figures today, which show the national debt having risen to £1.7 trillion at the end of December 2016, said:

"After

six wasted years of Tory failure on the economy it seems that under Philip Hammond it is only going to get worse.

"It

appears 2016 was yet another bad year for the national debt with the Tories adding an increase of £91.5 billion, or an average of £251 million each day over the last year: the equivalent of £1,400 per head in the last 12 months.

"Under

Hammond's new fiscal rules, presented in the House today, there is insufficient scope for investment in our economy, which will hinder growth and therefore our ability to reduce the national debt.

"Only

Labour has a real investment plan underpinned by our Fiscal Credibility Rule to tackle the national debt and to deal with the public finances, so we can transform and rebuild Britain in order that no one and no community is left behind."

[Enhanced inspection ordered following food poisoning incidents](#)

China's food watchdog has ordered stepped up inspection on food safety in the rural areas after eight people have died from tainted food over the past two months.

In one incident on Dec. 18, 2016, 30 residents came down with food poisoning, two of whom later died, after the cook mistook sodium nitrite for salt during a funeral dinner in Miaoya Village, Bazhong city of Sichuan Province, according to a circular released by the China Food and Drug Administration.

The other two cases included one in a village in Mudanjiang City in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province and one in Huilong Village in Hubei Province in November and December last year. In both instances, methanol was mistakenly served during the banquets, leading to three deaths in each case.

The administration ordered enhanced inspection of the liquor market and strict penalties for illegalities such as selling fake or adulterated liquor.

Regular inspections and supervision of rural catering services should be strengthened and standardized guidance should be released for food safety and banquets in rural areas to prevent such incidents from happening again.