


# Talent spotting?


 If some night security patrol at New Scotland Yard stumbles across a spectral figure in the full dress uniform of a Marshal of the Royal Air Force, muttering, "I told you so", there is no need to be alarmed. It will be the ghost of Lord Trenchard, a past Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. He founded the Hendon Police College in the 1930s, to train promising young men from public schools and universities who would be fast-tracked until they occupied all the senior posts. In the late sixties the highest ranks in the Met were occupied by Hendon graduates. Ironically, they presided over a force that almost imploded when

the biggest corruption scandals ever to hit the Yard were exposed by the press. It took a man who came through the ranks, Robert Mark, to clean up the mess the Hendon cadre left behind them.


Even Trenchard never went so far as to suggest that men and women should be drafted into the highest ranks without any police experience, but that is what this Government, with the active encouragement of ACPO and the Superintendents Association, intends. The stated aim is to give police forces a transfusion of fresh talent and leadership. What a withering dismissal of 50 years of Bramshill and all the resources that have



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been poured into higher police training, at the expense of the training needs of the rest of the service. 

# A licence to kill?

 When Robert Symonds was stabbed to death by a burglar at his Putney home, Dominic Lawson, the editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* launched a "right to fight back" campaign, demanding an "unqualified right" of citizens to self defence against intruders. By a tragic coincidence, the next victim of such a killing in London was John Monckton, a wealthy and highly respected bonds dealer, who was a cousin of Mr Lawson's wife.


Mr Lawson's campaign demands that, if a citizen kills an intruder, he should not face any prosecution. His readers have given him overwhelming backing. Now a Tory MP is to introduce a Bill to give total immunity to householders who kill or maim intruders, unless they have used "grossly disproportionate" force. The Conservatives have announced that, unusually

in the case of Private Member's Bills, they will give official support to this one.


The whole country was shocked by these crimes, and there is no doubt that the majority of people take the view that people who attack other people's homes deserve everything they get, but is this what we really want? What Parliament will shortly be asked to decide, is whether householders should be given an unrestricted licence to kill. How on earth could the police or the CPS decide what amounted to "grossly disproportionate" violence towards a burglar?

These two high profile murders are clear-cut. No reasonable person would expect a prosecution to follow had the intruders been killed or seriously wounded by their victims. But they are atypical. If the law was to be altered as Mr Lawson and his friends are demanding, it could

be open season on petty thieves, as opposed to the cold-blooded thugs who committed these killings. After all, we abolished capital punishment for burglars and thieves about the time that we created a paid professional police force.

Of course, Mr Lawson and others are absolutely right to condemn the inadequacies of the law and soft courts that put the interests of offenders before those of victims. And yes, the police have to be more visible in residential areas at night. Ironically, these two murders occurred in wealthy neighbourhoods where citizens, despairing of their local police, pay thousands of pounds a year to security companies for private patrols, which are now to be vested with police powers. How long will it be before they get handcuffs, batons and pepper sprays? 

# Turning the tap off

 It is not all bad news. A very nice little earner for lawyers - suing the police - is facing a knockout blow. The Legal Services Commission has proposed that legal aid should no longer be available for claims against hospitals, schools and the police. The Commission says that they should be brought, if at all, under "no win - no fee" arrangements. The law firms that have been happy to take on hopeless cases, knowing that public funds would foot their hefty bills, are not going to risk their own money. Ms Sarah Ricca, a London lawyer who specialises in actions against the police, says she finds this a "truly frightening development". She tells *The Times*: "Some clients have previous convictions and insurers won't touch these cases with a barge pole." So, provided this sensible proposal overcomes the powerful vested interests now lining up against it, the party will be over. 