


# Playing political football with SOCA

 The police service has a proud tradition of resisting political interference in operational policing and responding to the needs of the public. After all, surely police officers are working on behalf of the public and not simply jumping at every whim of the latest Prime Minister?

Yet, what is proposed for police officers under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill, currently meandering its way through Parliament, could mean exactly this. Those joining the Agency will no longer hold the Office of Constable which provides a certain amount of independence in operational matters.

The Federation believes that

such an important role in SOCA should only be carried out by a constable who has such independence.

However, under current proposals, those officers will no longer swear allegiance to the Crown, they will effectively be governed by the latest Home Secretary; their powers of arrest will be given piecemeal, as and when the director general of the Agency sees fit.

The Federation is opposed to the politicisation of policing in any form, police officers are not ministerial puppets. Why should a headline in a tabloid newspaper dictate how officers on the ground work? This is something

that any given Government in power will be influenced by.

Under the current Bill police officers would be employed as 'employees' under a contract of employment.

They will have less job security; their employment can be 'terminated' at three months' notice as oppose to under Police Regulations where this is subject to grounds of age, ill health, retirement or in relation to discipline and efficiency procedures.

Officers are currently expected to join without any formal agreement on these crucial elements, on the basis of the 'say so' from the Home Office that staff will 'transfer at no detriment.'

This month's *Police* publishes a letter sent out to officers advising them not to sign up to the National Crime Squad when they are likely to be transferred to SOCA (page 15).

The Bill also proposes the civilianisation of the custody sergeant's role, one of the most important posts in the police service. The position demands a vast knowledge of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and a raft of legislation and experience, it would be a huge mistake to think that this could be civilianised without repercussions on the integrity of the post and the Criminal Justice System.



## In Focus



A look at the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill including the stance of the Federation on key issues. We also publish a letter sent to officers recommending them not to join the National Crime Squad under the present terms and conditions. **Page 13**



The Met's safer neighbourhood scheme comes under the spotlight to see the impact of putting police officers and community support officers into dedicated teams. Syreeta Lund takes a look at the Woolwich Common Safer Neighbourhood Team. **Page 19**



Two police officers, who were on holiday in Sri Lanka when the Tsunami struck on Boxing Day, speak of their experiences and why this has prompted them to help set up a fund for the villagers whose lives have been devastated by the disaster. **Page 22**