

Ms Wilding's barbed view of her ACPO colleagues

One chief constable enjoying a high profile at the moment is Barbara Wilding of South Wales Police. Whilst her fellow Welsh chiefs and their police authorities are distinctly unhappy about one force for the Principality, she is all for it, possibly because she sees herself in pole position for the top job. Meanwhile, Ms Wilding doesn't mind having a pop at her ACPO colleagues. After 9/11, she 'chaired' the ACPO working group on suicide bombers, and now she tells *Police Review* that other chief officers "ridiculed" the group's

conclusion that firearms officers would have to shoot suspected suicide bombers in the head. She says that chief officers insisted that the public would find "shoot to kill" unacceptable, and that a suicide bombing would not happen in Britain. All the same, this became the policy, and after July 7, all those chiefs "jumped on the bandwagon to back it." This could well be true, but a chief constable who reveals what her colleagues say to her in confidence can't expect to be showered with congratulations.



Tony Judge, founder of *Police* magazine in 1968

Playing the numbers game

The chosen theme for last month's conference of Senior Women in Policing was: "to celebrate the achievements and success of women in the service", but this positive note was not evident in the negative comments of Ellie Bird, speaking for the British Association of Women in Policing. She said that there was an increasing gap of female representation between lower and middle ranks and those in senior positions. She told *Police Review* that it was not just married women who were being excluded, but single, gay and ethnic minority women as well, which just about covers every female officer hoping for advancement! HM Inspectorate's annual report refers to "a large disparity", because although women make up 20 per cent of the service, only 10 per cent hold the rank of chief inspector or above. Dare I suggest that this "large disparity" might be due to the fact that the service has been recruiting many more women in recent years, but most of them do not yet have the length of service needed for normal progression to senior ranks? The only valid comparison is between male and

female officers who joined at approximately the same time.

Women make up 16 per cent of ACPO members. Their numbers, and those of BCU female commanders, are certain to grow. Hazel Blears, the police minister, is leading the charge. She told *The Times* (March 7) that outdated working practices are constraining ambitious women officers "It is time to end the feeling that people have to work full time", she said. The Home Office is calling for changes in shift patterns to bring more officers on duty at weekends, opening up opportunities for women with children. Blears says there is no reason why BCU commanders should not job-share, and that these posts require skills other than the traditional "control and command" style of policing which, according to her, women possess more than men. Me thinks the minister, eager to showcase her feminist credentials, protests too much. With all three statutory staff associations singing from the same hymn sheet, isn't it time the service got some praise for its efforts to achieve diversity, instead of all this carping negativity?

Port in a storm

I have some sympathy for Colin Port, chief constable of Avon and Somerset Constabulary, who has owned-up to breaking the law by rejecting applications to become constables from 186 white men, simply because of their race and gender. He did this in order to boost the recruitment of women and ethnic minorities. So, at the same time, did the force's neighbour, Gloucestershire. Both chiefs were trying, unsuccessfully, to meet wholly unrealistic Government

targets. There is some talk of the Commission for Racial Equality taking forces to court for such blatant breaches of equality laws, but don't bet on it. Mr Port is unrepentant and has called for the law to be changed to allow this kind of discrimination, "in order that the service can reflect the communities it serves". I go along with many ethnic officers who believe that such contrived ways of achieving diversity imply that non-white officers are not appointed on merit.

Why Blair needed back-up

I wasn't going to mention Sir Ian Blair this month, but just as the column was almost complete, the bombshell burst. The commissioner taped his phone conversations with a minister and the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Of course he did. This Government has a track record of passing the buck to hapless officials, even if the sack is sometimes sweetened with a peerage, and the IPCC has shown it has media savvy. Lord Stevens says that whenever he went to see David Blunkett, he

took along a witness. The old bonds of mutual trust have broken down in this age of lucrative memoirs and back-stabbing. Sir Ian is making a habit of apologising profusely for his gaffes, but no commissioner has been more prone to self-inflicted injuries. This latest sensation broke as he was abroad on a skiing holiday. He will have to take great care while negotiating the nursery slopes around Westminster. Meanwhile, he should be worried about those ringing votes of confidence from his political masters.