



Have our masters really got the message?

 Law and order was, after all, an election issue, but not in the way the politicians wanted. Voters were not impressed by what the parties promised; they had heard it all before, but this time it was the politicians who were obliged to listen to what the public felt about the yob culture and the inability of the criminal justice system to get to grips with crime and disorder.

Tony Blair, John Prescott and Charles Clarke have all been careful to stress that they have taken to heart what ordinary people told them about the mayhem that makes their lives a misery. If their election tours beyond the Westminster village turned out to be voyages of discovery, we can expect more action and less words in their third term.

Since the election, Hazel Blears, police minister, has been mocked for her bizarre suggestion that offenders on community service should be forced to wear garish


uniforms. Under the last Tory government, offenders on community penalties in Scotland had to wear overalls with 'Community Service Scheme' in large letters on the back. New Labour scrapped this, calling it 'a cheap political gimmick'. I can understand that Ms Blears wants the public to see that offenders are actually being punished, but what next? Should we bring back the stocks and the pillory? The odd branding would show that punishments were beginning to fit the crimes.

Ministers must know by now that the public is sceptical about community service because they feel that far too often it is imposed as a soft option, and to heed the Lord Chief Justice's plea to keep offenders out of gaol. If the Queen's Speech had promised a massive prison building programme, the public would have begun to think that New Labour was really beginning to get  tough on crime.



Tony Judge, founder of *Police* magazine in 1968

Evenin' all


 First it was Dr Who and the Daleks, now dear old PC George Dixon of Dock Green is coming out of retirement, albeit only for a short radio series. Back in the Fifties, the programme was a phenomenon, with close to 20 million viewers every Saturday night. By the end of its twenty-year run, Jack Warner, who played Dixon, was an octogenarian and waddled, rather than walked, around the Dock Green charge office.

He had become a risible cliché, with every satirist taking the Mickey out of his 'mind how you go' pep talks. By then, the harsher realities of inner city life made avuncular community bobbies an anachronism: the public preferred the bullying Barlow in Z-cars and the brutally amoral Regan in *The Sweeney*. Today we have wall-to-wall police soaps in which it's hard to tell the goodies from the baddies. The coppers in *The Bill* are more likely to be murdered by their mates than by criminals. They call it 'realism'.


Wisely, the Dixon radio pro-

grammes are based on the old TV scripts. The public simply wouldn't buy Dixon and the cosy Cockney denizens of Dock Green as a true representation of life on the streets of London today.

The original film, *The Blue Lamp*, in which Dixon was shot dead early in the piece, was made at the urging of the then Met Commissioner, Sir Harold Scott, to boost the image of the force.


Even in its prime, Dixon didn't reflect reality. The Met, throughout those years, was desperately short of manpower and had given up using bobbies on foot patrols in residential areas. The good old days of ubiquitous coppers who were "the monarchs of all they surveyed" are long gone. The glimmer of hope is that, despite all that is said about bureaucracy, there actually are now more police officers than at any time in the past. All the service has to do is to deploy them in pursuit of the public's priorities, not the latest bit of Home Office research or Government-dictated target.  It isn't rocket science, is it?

Welcome to fort apache — salford

 I was struck by the ironic juxtaposition of two crime stories that filled the papers one day last month. Both happened in Salford, which has the good fortune to be represented in Parliament by Hazel Blears. One story concerned the ongoing nightmare of Linda Walker, the teacher who "lost it" after being hounded by teenage yobs, and fired an air pistol (without hitting them).

First she was gaoled, then set free by the Appeal Court, and now she has been sacked by Salford Education Committee for "gross misconduct". Mrs Walker's continuing nightmare reads like something out of Kafka. The special needs kids she has taught for years need her. Let us hope that her school governors reverse the education

committee's farcical decision in double quick time. On the same day that Mrs Walker was fired, a Salford man, Mr Phil Carroll, was lying in hospital with brain injuries, because he tried to stop teenage yobs from wrecking his car.

When I interviewed Ms Blear for this journal a few months ago, she waxed lyrical about how the public order situation in Salford had been transformed by Government initiatives. Following the shocking attack on Mr. Carroll the local police commander told the media that areas of Salford are under siege from "feral youths" who are completely beyond control. So who is right about the crime situation there: the police chief or the police  minister?