


# Our friends in high places

 I could not help smiling the other day when the new Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Hain, was challenged during a BBC TV interview about his views on Ulster back in the days when he was the leader of the radical Young Liberals and was calling for Britain to get out of Ireland. With characteristic insouciance, Mr Hain retorted: 'We've all got things we said 20 years ago. The world has moved on.'

Indeed it has, and how some politicians have moved with it. Today, Mr Hain is just one of a select group of former gadflies from Labour's loony period who now grace the ranks of Her Majesty's Privy Counsellors. Twenty years ago, they were all enthusiastic police baiters. Mr Hain had just published a book about how Britain was becoming a police state. Over at the NCCL, now called Liberty, Patricia Hewitt and Harriet Harman were the tireless defenders of victims of alleged police brutality and


other abuses. Paul Boateng, now the Queen's High Commissioner in South Africa, was the rabble-rousing head of the self-styled Police Committee in Ken Livingstone's GLC. He poured ratepayers' money into a campaign against the PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act), and his free sheet, *Policing London*, directed an unending barrage of condemnation at the Met. The former Environment Minister, Michael Meacher, spent years campaigning against alleged police maltreatment of prisoners. Then there was the young David Blunkett, cutting his electoral teeth as the fiery leader of Sheffield City Council, in the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire. Strange to think that these pillars of the New Labour establishment, mostly solid supporters of the Government's 'tough' law and order stance, were leading lights in the gang that made Old Labour unelectable.

As for Ken Livingstone, His Honour the Mayor of London, he





Tony Judge, founder of *Police* magazine in 1968

may still be on the outside of Mr Blair's circle and likely to rebel for old time's sake, but he never misses an opportunity to take the credit for all the extra police


and CSOs in the capital. This from the man who used to call for the abolition of the Special Branch and the Special Patrol Group. 

## Keep the police off the grass?

 The football world is up in arms about the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service CPS, not the police, as wrongly stated in the media to bring an assault charge against Lee Bowyer after his on-field handbag swinging contest with Keiron Dyer. This is not without precedent. Duncan Ferguson went to gaol for assaulting an opponent when playing for Rangers. Eric Cantona was convicted of assault after leaping into the crowd to discuss a difference

of opinion with a Crystal Palace fan. I recall an incident when a South Wales officer managed to bite off half the ear of an opponent in a police rugby match. He got six months, and I was criticised by the branch board for saying in *Police* that it was a correct decision. One soccer pundit, incensed by the action against Bowyer, wrote that the police should stay out of football and concentrate on 'keeping the streets safe' for citizens. 

## Lawyers on the bread line

 Poverty is not the first thing that comes to mind when we think of the legal professional. The astronomic fees of some leading lawyers suggest that the cynic who described British justice as the best that money can buy wasn't far off the mark. There is widespread public anger about the huge cost of criminal legal aid.

So it comes as a surprise to hear the leaders of the Criminal Bar Association, the trade union for barristers in the criminal courts, saying that their members are living on or below the bread line. What's more, the cash strapped learned friends are threatening to go on strike and thus bring about a breakdown of

the criminal justice system, which isn't far away from such a catastrophe, strike or no strike. They say that their incomes have been capped since 1997 and that they are not paid a penny for hours of obligatory work that they are obliged to do. I think they have a good case, but perhaps the problem goes deeper than the rate for the job. Would it not be better if all legal aid funded criminal defence work was carried out by salaried lawyers, employed by a public defender service? Yes, barristers would lose their precious independence, but at least there would be more transparency about where the money goes. 