



Tony Judge

The striking difference

Two of the most over-used phrases in discussions about the police reform project have been 'workforce modernisation' and 'the extended police family'. The first implies that the service is bogged down by outdated demarcation lines that frustrate all attempts to secure greater efficiency; the second suggests that everyone who works within the police service belongs to one big happy family in which all are equally valued. Those who have swallowed these notions should take careful note of what happened on March 28 this year, when according to Unison, thousands of police staff picketed police buildings to protest against proposed pensions changes.

We should never forget that the Police Federation came about because, in 1918, almost every constable and sergeant in London went on strike to press for better pay and pensions, and the recognition of the outlawed police union. The Prime Minister, Lloyd George, granted the pay claim in full and pensions were improved, but he stalled on the crucial issue of union recognition, and a year later, following the Desborough Report, the Federation was born, the union was outlawed, and striking by police officers became a criminal offence.

Since then, successive governments have made it clear that the Police Federation cannot be a part of the family of unions. Thirty years ago, when discontent over police pay was running so high that forces were voting by large majorities to press for the right of police officers to strike, the Federation Conference voted to press for that right, and to affiliate the Federation, as a free association, to the TUC. The Labour Government would have none of it, but following the Edmund Davis report, they did concede the largest pay increase since, well, since the 1918 police strike. The new pay levels contained an unspecified amount to compensate the police for not having the same rights as other workers.

Having achieved its real aim, the Federation quietly buried its new-found enthusiasm for becoming a union.

When thousands of police staff, at the behest of their union, shut down their computers and picket police buildings, they demonstrate an adherence to a culture and that is totally alien to the notion of the extended police family. If loyalty to the union takes precedence over loyalty to the service, we should think twice before eradicating all distinctions between sworn and non-sworn staff.

If ministers and chief officers are unconcerned about what happened on March 28, and could happen again if the pensions issue is not resolved to the union's liking, then they should be. As very recent events have demonstrated, the terrorist threat to this country has never been as high as it is now. Every contingency plan that has been drawn up to counter that threat, and to respond to whatever emergencies and disasters result from terrorist action, takes it for granted that the entire police service, officers and unsworn employees alike, will play their designated roles as required. The ability of terrorist cells to take immediate advantage of any disruption of police readiness must not be discounted.

I don't suppose that any right-minded police officers lack sympathy with their staff colleagues over the government's shabby behaviour concerning local government pensions. But the greater issue remains; how can the service rely on the total loyalty and co-operation of its unsworn employees in times of emergency in the future?

Tony Judge has been involved with the *Police Federation* for 40 years. He was the youngest police officer on the Joint Central Committee and founded *Police* magazine in 1968.