


The night I guarded Winston Churchill


 Watching the TV pictures of the massive police security operation at the Tory conference in Blackpool, I was reminded of how different it was when, as a green recruit to Blackpool Police in 1953, I was for a few hours the sole protector of Sir Winston Churchill, at that time one of the four most powerful statesmen in the world.

In those days, the Tory leader did not deign to attend the party conference itself. He travelled down to the seaside on the last evening, to dine with his Ministers and to address a mass meeting of the adoring faithful the following day.


Reporting for night duty that Friday night, I was told to take a police bike after refreshments, and go to the Imperial Hotel to

patrol the terrace below the great man's first floor bedroom. It was one of those wonderful still and balmy autumn nights. Hotel guests in evening dress came and went, unchallenged. From the open French windows of the Churchill's apartment, came the sound of deep snoring. The Premier's Scotland Yard detective was fast asleep in an adjoining room, confident that

his charge was in safe hands – mine. I was equipped with a short truncheon, a pair of rusting Hyeth handcuffs, and a whistle. Why should England tremble?


When daylight came, another probationer relieved me, and that was that. Thirty-one years would pass before the IRA blew up the Grand Hotel at Brighton, and the age of political innocence was over. 

Stevens does a knee jerk

 As commissioner, Sir John Stevens liked to capture dramatic headlines. In retirement, Lord Stevens has joined the media, writing a weekly column in the tabloid *News of the World* – “The Chief. When he speaks, Britain listens”.

Last month he told his readers that he was so sickened by the horrific murder of PC Sharon Beshenivsky, that he had abandoned his lifelong opposition to the death penalty. Now he demands that the gallows should be brought back to execute the murderers of police officers. On November 18 he was a committed abolitionist; On November 19, he became a convinced pro-hanger, the swiftest conversion since St Paul's trip to Damascus.

We all share his abhorrence of this crime, but what separates the killing of a police officer from a whole series of appalling murders of women, children and old people that have shocked and disgusted the nation in recent times?

Arguing about which murders deserve the extreme penalty and which do not is an exercise in futility. Lord Stevens knows that he will never sit in the House of Lords to approve a Bill to restore capital punishment. Apart from the impossibility of surmounting the barrier called the Human Rights Act, no Parliament of any persuasion will turn the clock back. Many regret this, but it is the unalterable reality of political life. 



Tony Judge, founder of *Police* magazine in 1968

What do you think?

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