



View from the sidelines

Clive Chamberlain, chairman of Dorset Police Federation

Where's the justice?

The justice minister Jack Straw appears to have a very low opinion of the police service and chose the Eve of 2010 to launch an unprecedented attack on rank and file officers. Yes I know its old news – but I am still really incensed by Straw's outburst and believe that he should either evidence what he said or have the decency to make a public apology.

He said, just in case you missed it, that he was "sceptical" about suggestions that police were overworked or burdened with excessive amounts of red tape and form-filling which forced them to remain at their desks. His comments apparently had the support of the Home Secretary Alan Johnson, whose spokesman said: "The police's representatives have overstated bureaucracy to obstruct officers from carrying out their job properly."

The Right "Honourable Gentleman" also suggested that officers are using form filling as an excuse not to go out on the beat. He told BBC *Radio Four's* today programme: "Some police officers - whatever they may say - actually quite enjoy staying in the police station in the warm"

Simon Reed, our vice-chairman hit the nail on the head when he said, "Police officers are not the architects of bureaucracy, they and the public are the victims of it. It wasn't police officers who brought in 3,000 new laws and multiple forms. This was done by politicians."

Straw's attack on the integrity of police officers is a real cheap shot and in trying to comprehend his motivation I can only wonder whether it was an attempt to divert public attention from Westminster and the shameful

antics of many that lurk behind the Pugin's façade. In a recent Ipsos MORI opinion poll carried out for the Royal College of Surgeons government ministers came bottom in terms of trust and honesty so perhaps the Minister was feeling slightly unloved?

The truth is that we are burdened by paperwork and red-tape (as recognised by the appointment of the government's bureaucracy Tsarina) and if we don't complete reports correctly and on time I am sure that Jack will be nimble and Jack will be quick to publicly condemn us.

On the subject of paperwork perhaps Mr Straw should have been a little more diligent with his own, it could have saved him having to admit to using expenses to claim his full council tax bill despite only paying a 50 per cent rate.

He said he had acted in good faith and had repaid the erroneous claims once he was aware that MPs' expenses were to be made public. In a hand-written note to the Commons authorities he declared that "accountancy does not appear to be my strongest suit". Strange considering that he is a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society. He also admitted overcharging the taxpayer for his mortgage bills.

The next time that "I'm alright because I'm Jack" considers insulting frontline officers from the comfort of his office or back of the chauffeur driven ministerial car, he would do well to note the words of his own Prime Minister, who praised officers for the dangerous and challenging role that is undertaken. Gordon Brown said: "We as a government have a duty to provide you with the support and protection to back you in what you have to do and be there for you - because you are always there for us."

Officers are burdened with bureaucracy



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Straw poll: not so popular with police officers



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