



Tony Judge

Policing politics

When Sir John Stevens stepped down as commissioner in 2005, 'Red Ken' Livingstone, the Mayor of London, threw him a surprise dinner for 200 guests to show his appreciation of what the 'coppers' copper' had done for the Met and London. It would be difficult to find two more disparate individuals than Tory-leaning Stevens and the one-time Commissar of County Hall, yet the two worked in harmony, to the lasting benefit of the public and the force (I refuse to call it a 'service').

Ironically, it was the even closer relations between Livingstone and Sir Ian Blair that irked the Tory national leadership and the new Mayor, Boris Johnson. Whatever the rights and wrongs of Sir Ian's departure, the status of future commissioners will never be the same.

Sir Ian Blair is not the first commissioner to fall foul of politicians. Sir Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, the first commissioners, spent most of the early years fending-off bitter opposition from Whig ministers and corrupt local functionaries. Sir Charles Warren was obliged to resign after the Jack the Ripper fiasco and the 'Bloody Sunday' riot Sir Edward Henry was forced out after almost all the constables and sergeants went on strike in 1918 whilst the Home Secretary who had stalled for years on the pay situation remained in office. The difference between these examples and the ousting of Sir Ian is that Mayor Johnson, in his capacity as chairman of the Metropolitan Police Authority, is determined to direct both the style and performance of policing in the capital. This was why Sir Ian had to go.

I have no doubt that Boris Johnson is as determined as was his predecessor to ensure that the Met gets the staff and resources to keep on top of crime, public order and terrorism, although he will have to operate in a much worsened financial climate. He wants the power to appoint the commissioner. The Conservatives favour the American system, with either elected or politically nominated chiefs. Either prospect should fill the police and the public with foreboding. The most frequently cited precedent is the relationship between Mayor Rudy Giuliani and police chief Bill Bratten New York City, when the police force was hugely enlarged and 'zero-

tolerance' resulted in a massive reduction in street crimes and disorder. It ended in tears when Mayor Giuliani fired Mr Bratten because the professional policeman was getting the credit that Rudy insisted was his. The Tories seem to have forgotten that it was the John Major government that wanted to establish an elected police authority for London. London Tory MPs, who feared that Red Ken would get his hands on the Met, killed this off. Who knows who the chairman of the MPA will be in years to come?

Giving local politicians hands-on control was certainly not the intention of the Labour government when it created both the Mayor of London and the Metropolitan Police Authority. It was envisaged that the relationship between the commissioner and the MPA would mirror the situation elsewhere. The responsibility for operational policing is vested in the chief constable. It is the Secretary of State, not the police authority, who can get rid of a failing chief constable.

Tony Judge has been involved with the Police Federation for 50 years. He was the youngest police officer on the Joint Central Committee and founded *Police* magazine in 1968.