

**CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH
CONSTABLES' CENTRAL CONFERENCE, BOURNEMOUTH
TUESDAY 18TH MAY 2010**

Paul Lewis, Chairman of the Constables' Central Committee, will say:

Conference, we meet at a time when we, as a service and a Federation, are under a greater threat than ever before. I want to look today on the ways in which modernisation is served up to us like a dish in a restaurant.

Too often words don't mean what we want them to mean. That is why people often ask for something in writing.

"Put that in writing" is often the cry of the barrack-room lawyer. Let me commend, therefore, the letter from the last Police Minister, David Hanson in The Guardian of 18th February this year. It was headed "Bobbies on the beat do help to cut crime."

He says that crime has fallen and let me quote in full his third paragraph; this is what Mr Hanson says: "This has been made possible because of the investment this government has put into policing. We have over 16,000 more police officers than in 1997 and our investment in neighbourhood policing has delivered a further 16,000 police community support officers."

That is what he said in writing in The Guardian. Effective negotiation often means making common cause with management thus causing maximum embarrassment. I am not advocating such a crude strategy. What I am suggesting is that we should never allow government of whatever party to forget what they have said.

In March of this year, the then Home Secretary said this: "In December, we set out our plans to protect police funding, so that there will be no reason based on central government decisions why police and PCSO numbers should fall over the next 3 years. We have set out our challenge to local authorities and police authorities to match this commitment. Having a real police presence on our streets addresses crime and the fear of crime. As the last Prime Minister announced in April, we expect neighbourhood policing teams to spend 80% of their time on the beat, in the neighbourhoods they serve. It's one of ten commitments in the policing pledge that all police forces have signed up to."

That was the last Home Secretary speaking. Not me, not one of us here in the hall. It was the last Home Secretary and he quoted the former Prime Minister. *Their* rhetoric can be more effective than *our* rhetoric.

That rhetoric was rich in facts. It wasn't the rhetoric of the soundbite. We all remember "Tough on crime; tough on the causes of crime." It sounded good. The problem was that nobody quite knew what it meant.

After the trickery of the Trojan horse, the Latin poet Virgil warned, “Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” I think a similar warning should be attached to all documents that build on the government’s White Paper of last December. One contains the ominous phrase “Police value for money.” That is what is called, nowadays, blue sky thinking. What it actually means is fewer police officers and a poorer service under the guise of “more for less.”

Colleagues, when we see on our televisions tearful, elderly people who have been duped by unscrupulous fraudsters, we are told “if it sounds too good to be true, it *is* too good to be true.” That applies to us in our dealings with the government just as much as it applies to the tearful, white-haired old lady. And let’s remember this, colleagues. No matter how high or low our position in the police service, it is not for any one of us to say that we earn too much.

Let us say loudly and clearly where we stand. Colleagues:

- We are not going to accept reduced officer numbers.
- We are not going to accept a reduced service to and for our communities.
- We are not going to accept a deterioration in our terms and conditions of service.

Like Martin Luther King, we should all declare: “Here I stand; I can do no other.” This is where we start from. These are our principles. These are the values that we shall not compromise. We must oppose modernisation when it is used against us, when it erodes our professionalism, undermines our dignity and puts a crude price on what we value. That we must oppose.

However, when we look back at our careers we can see where modernisation can be a force for good. Let me give you examples of the good and the bad.

When I joined the police service, as a very young constable, I served in the Rhondda Fach. I know that most of you will be as familiar with the geography of the Rhondda as you are with the Welsh language. However, for the handful of you who do not know the Rhondda Fach, the famous Rhondda valley consists, in fact, of two valleys. They are the Rhondda Fawr – in English *big Rhondda*, and the Rhondda Fach – in English *little Rhondda*.

I served, as I have said, in the Rhondda Fach where radio communication varied between poor and non-existent. The biggest community in Rhondda Fach was Maerdy, also known in the middle decades of the 20th century as little Moscow. I had to climb half way up the mountain in Maerdy to get a signal. Now, constables in the Rhondda have Airwave which provides excellent communication. Here, modernisation has quite clearly been a force for good.

Now let’s look at another aspect of change. When I was a new, young constable, when a person was arrested four sheets were ample for the initial hearing at court. There was 1 - the charge sheet, 2 – a brief summary of the facts, 3 – the availability of the officer and 4 – any previous convictions.

You know what I am now going to say don't you? Today 20 plus sheets of paper are needed. A rainforest and one day's paperwork are involved.

This is not modernisation as a force for good. In fact, it is the opposite. We need to embrace modernisation where it improves the way we work and serve the community. However, we must reject it where it derives from a desire to save money or to take responsibility away from the serving police officer.

Recently the CBI suggested that the police service could benefit from performance related pay. How do you judge this? By the number of arrests? "Oh dear me no" was the response of the representative of the CBI interviewed on the radio. He had seen the trap and was going to avoid it. Well, said the interviewer, if the number of arrests are not necessarily an appropriate way to measure performance, perhaps an absence of arrests would indicate good performance? Yes, indeed, agreed the man from the CBI. In which case, said the interviewer, how do you judge performance where there are no arrests? Ah, said the man from the CBI, it will be the sergeant or the inspector – the appropriate line manager – who will make the assessment. And on that assessment a police officer's pay will be determined. You do not need a PhD in human nature to see how disastrous that would be. It would, in John Cleese's immortal words, need only "a PhD in the bleeding obvious."

However, what seems obvious to you or to me and what sounds like common sense to the man or woman in the street can be ignored by senior management or the professional politician who have undergone delicate surgery leading to a common sense by-pass.

That brings us to the crucial question. Who makes the decisions about policing – the politicians or the police officer? This takes us to our second bit of trendy jargon. The first was modernisation. Now we come to centralisation.

Probably from a politician's perspective, central decision making is simpler, neater and this of course, the clincher, more cost effective. However, what happens in practice? Throughout England and Wales we have market towns, delightful places they are too, the majority of them. A decision by politicians a hundred miles away would show communities are safe, peaceful and require little active policing.

However local knowledge would show a slight but very significant difference. You and I know that these delightful market towns undergo a dramatic change every other Tuesday or Thursday or on whatever day of the week or fortnight market day falls. Then, people come from all the neighbouring communities, many drink enough alcohol to justify being teetotal until next market day, and from midday to midnight and after our peaceful market town represents a serious challenge to effective policing. That is why local police officers need to be listened to, to have their views respected and to have their experience valued and local risk assessments should be taken by local line managers and not people sitting in ivory towers.

The three Rs defined a bygone era. Our three Rs define the age that we are in. The theme of this Conference is Respect, Rights and Responsibility. Of course, we want respect from the communities we serve, but we also need to show our respect for our communities. The best way we can do that is by showing that we know our communities and that we understand them. Respect works both ways. I think that, on the whole, our communities understand that. I am less convinced that management and politicians have the same understanding.

Now we come to rights. Police officers are not robots programmed to behave in a certain way by a distant control centre. Police officers are professionals. They need to exercise judgement. That results in better policing. The use of discretion is judgement in action. What is necessary is the sharing of best practice and that comes about through in-service training that is sensitive to the needs of serving officers. That is the way to make best practice 'common practice'.

Unfortunately, this is too often not the case. The quality of in-service training is too often patchy and inconsistent. We need to be proud of our professional training, not embarrassed by it.

The third of today's 3 Rs is responsibility. We need to be treated as professionals in our dealing with our communities, with the courts and with the social services, indeed with all the outside agencies with whom we have overlapping responsibilities.

And we need to be treated as professionals when it comes to workforce modernisation. This is not something to be imposed from the outside. Workforce modernisation is a phrase that is used as though it is a refreshingly new concept that no one in the police service has ever thought of before.

In fact workforce modernisation, as a concept if not as a phrase, has been around for a very long time. It means developing and adapting so that we more effectively serve the communities that we protect and care for.

As a concept it goes back to the days when Sir Robert Peel first introduced the modern day police service.

All too often it seems that within the police workforce it means stripping a sense of vocation from its officers. It means seeing officers and support staff as bean counters, as mechanistic items to be deployed according to a grand plan that has no room for personalities, commitment or vocation.

On the other hand, it would give us, the serving police officers, greater credibility if we modernised our own structures. How do we make sure that the Police Federation of England and Wales is listened to and respected by its members, by the government and by the British public?

First, we must surely hold fast to that fundamental principle, in *Unity is strength*. The Police Federation of England and Wales must be and must

remain the only body to represent police officers of every federated rank and in whatever geographical area they serve. Fragmentation is the enemy of the police service, not its friend.

We must be clear about what we are for; what our purpose is. We are, of course, a staff association concerned with raising the level of pay and conditions of service of our members. We are also a professional association concerned with standards, with values and with principles. We do not just react. We also affirm, we celebrate and we advocate.

Today we have a new coalition government, something which we have not had for 36 years. What we do not want is government by soundbite. Police officers' lives must be respected. Police professionalism must be acknowledged. We are willing to listen to what the new government has to say. We expect them, in return, to listen to us.

Thank you colleagues for listening and I hope you have a good Conference.