

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1100HRS ON WEDNESDAY 13TH MAY 2009

Chairman's keynote conference speech
By Paul McKeever, Chairman of the Police Federation
of England and Wales
13th May 2009

Introduction

The whole world is a tomb to brave men who have not asked for any celebration of their lives, but we will celebrate them.

The good they do is buried with their bones but we will remember them.

We will remember Stephen Oakes and all the other police officers that died, especially those who have died whilst serving their communities.

Home Secretary, we are delighted that there has at last been recognition of Stephen Oake's bravery and we welcomed his award of a posthumous gallantry medal. But it is wrong that it took five years for this to happen.

I say to politicians who have criticised us in the past – how, after watching that video, can you say the British police service is risk averse?

What We Expect

We ask for little as police officers and all of us here today are proud to represent men and women who routinely commit acts of heroism bravery and compassion, yet they see themselves as ordinary individuals.

All we ask for is protection from politicians, the judicial system and from those who try to do us harm.

Life Means Life

And when our colleagues are murdered, in the absence of the death penalty, life should mean life. It is a deeply uncivilised society that puts the rights of murderers above those brave men and women we represent who day in day out are defending their communities.

Two cases in particular stand out in the minds of police officers. The murderers Harry Roberts and David Bieber.

Harry Roberts gunned down three brave men in London in 1966, officers Fox, Wombwell and Head. David Bieber slaughtered Ian Broadhurst in West Yorkshire and attempted to murder two other of our colleagues. How can any civil society consider releasing a vile monster like Roberts? How could an odious man like Bieber be allowed to have his sentence reduced? Did they consider the rights of the officers they brutally murdered or the rights of their families left behind?

NEVER AGAIN must the rights of people like Roberts and Bieber be put above the rights of police officers and the law-abiding majority.

I will reiterate, in the absence of capital punishment, the only outcome for these two vile criminals is for them to see the end of their days in their prison cells.

Home Secretary, although it's been a bad year for the criminal justice system, perhaps it's been a worse year for you. We're not going to dig over old territory but one recent comment is worth mentioning. Hazel Blears stated that the government 'had got on the wrong side of fair play'. My goodness, we're delighted that the penny has dropped at last. If only you'd recognised this 18 months ago in our pay dispute. But it's not too late. Binding arbitration is all we're asking for Home Secretary. It's only fair play.

Conference there are some good things that are going on too and we're grateful for that. But Home Secretary, one of the problems for any politician is losing the trust of those they work with and serve. I can assure you that there are many within this hall today who still look on you with real suspicion and distrust.

The good things though. We are pleased with the rollout of Tasers across the country and your continued support for them. And I have to say to some Police Authorities around the country, not least the Metropolitan Police Authority, what are you playing at by denying officers the use of Tasers?

Vernon Coaker, the Police Minister and son of a police sergeant confirmed that our three year pay deal would be honoured. He did this as George Osborne, Conservative Shadow Chancellor, had announced that The Conservatives would revisit our hard fought three year pay deal. The Conservatives have now announced they would look to reform our pensions. Look, we are ordinary men and women and we understand that many people in the private sector have seen their pensions erode, often unfairly and totally beyond their control. Friends of mine have lost their pensions. But two wrongs don't make a right. We have done nothing wrong and any attempt to attack our pensions would simply be unfair. Rather than negatively looking to punish the public sector, why don't you look at trying to mend the wrongs done to many of those who have lost their private pensions? Surely that is the fair way, the British way?

Roads Policing/CID

Many people, both inside and outside the service talk about professionalising the police and yet their actions do not reflect the words. In fact often we see the complete opposite - a contradictory position where high level skills within specialist areas in particular are being lost.

This is particularly true with CID and roads policing; we have senior officers and politicians who know the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

Here's something many people may not realise.

During the average service of a police officer 100,000 of our fellow citizens will die on the roads of the UK and a million will be seriously injured.

During your lifetime almost a quarter of million will die on the roads. Almost as many as died during the Second World War.

Statistics tell their own story. But behind statistics lie human beings with hopes, fears and loved ones. Behind official figures lie voices, faces and ambitions. And behind bland police reports are wives, husbands, parents and children.

Everybody in this room will have been affected in some way by death on the roads.

And I will tell you about one particular incident that has remained with me. Coming on to night duty in Lambeth, South London I was called to an accident where a motorbike and the pillion passenger travelling round the Oval (you may know it) clipped the curb and hit a vehicle coming the other way. The pillion passenger suffered multiple injuries and sadly died. He was taken to St Thomas' hospital and I arranged for the relatives to be informed and brought up from the West Country. I met the lad's father at Paddington railway station and took him to St Thomas' hospital where my wife, who was senior sister casualty that night duty, showed us to the Chapel of Rest where he identified his son.

He was a broken man and the family had been changed forever.

In the Jewish faith, I am told, they have a saying. If you lose your husband you become a widow. If you lose your wife you become a widower. If your parents die you become an orphan. But the pain of losing a child is so painful that there is no word to describe it.

My wife and I saw that pain on that father's face that night. You will all know exactly what I mean.

Conference, we need to preserve high levels skills within the police service, both the technical skills that are required within specialist departments, such as traffic and the CID and the softer human personal skills that only come after years of experience and can't be taught on a direct entrant conversion course.

Criminal Justice System 3 Phases

Do you know people seem to think that the police alone can solve the problems of society?

That's wrong.

There are three phases within the criminal justice system.

There's the environment in which we operate. Society. We have some influence there but we can't control everything that happens within society.

Then there's the environment in which we work; one of crime prevention, detection and bringing offenders to justice.

Lastly, there's the third phase, the CPS, the courts and probation service. If people do commit crime, breach the law, we intervene and we are highly successful at what we do. In fact, we are so successful that the prisons have become full to overflowing and the government are creating imaginative ways of letting people out before their time is served.

A third of the male population has a criminal record by the age of 30. We're not fools. We know most commit a minor offence and go on to lead normal law-abiding lives.

But within that third are the career criminals that we have identified to the criminal justice system and they have a 70% reoffending rate.

We and the people we serve are being failed by the rest of the criminal justice system. A criminal justice system that isn't working and is seen by many people as being there to protect the offenders interests above the interests of the law abiding members of the public. Rather than addressing the real problem of ineffective sanctions, ineffective education programmes and ineffective rehabilitation the focus is on us the police to detect the same people more often and bring them before the courts again and again and again.

Do you know, politicians have painted themselves into a corner here? They have promulgated the big lie that they can solve crime by reshaping the police service and, of course, they can't.

But what this means for us is that we're in a constant state of flux with politicians saying if only the police service would modernise or change then all will be well.

This means we will never be left alone as we can never be seen as fit for purpose, otherwise politicians would themselves have to be answerable to the electorate as to why crime goes on being committed.

In effect, in the eyes of politicians, the police are the problem that needs to be solved, when the reality is that it is the criminals who are the problem and we are the solution.

Listen to this quote.

"Politicians are responsible for the society in which crime festers. It falls to the police service to deal with the failures of those politicians."

These are not the words of a cynical Federation chairman – but the words of an esteemed previous Lib Dem spokesperson on Home Affairs, Sir Robert McClennan. Those words were spoken at the Wembley Rally we held back in 1993.

Home Secretary, I pose this question to you – how many times do you want us to arrest criminals before they are dealt with effectively in the Criminal Justice System, because we are sick to death of seeing the same people again and again and again. We're creating one person crime waves.

In relation to youth crime we seem to have created a criminal justice system that has resulted in responsible adults effectively having to cede authority on the streets to uncouth, frequently drunk feral youths who nobody dares to challenge. That has to be wrong. The madness of the 1960's generations idea of justice has to change, because it has turned the world upside down.

The government, and in fairness previous administrations, has created the Hokey Cokey Criminal Justice System. Yes conference, it's - in out, in out, let all the prisoners out. In out, in out, shake the system about.

Bureaucracy

The result of this? Surprise, surprise, increased bureaucracy.

We have a bureaucracy Tsarina, our past Chairman Jan Berry, who is trying to address the problem and she has our full support in that endeavour. But do you know conference? Bureaucracy would not be a problem for us if we did not have to do the paperwork for the same offenders again and again and again.

Keir Starmer/CPS

Other parts of the Criminal Justice System appear to want to work in semi-isolation, see themselves as superior to the police service, rather than seeing themselves as a whole.

Keir Starmer, the Director of Public Prosecutions, seems to be building walls around his Crown Prosecution System empire by putting up protectionist barriers in relation to charging offenders in particular, despite assurances from him that he wants more joined up working within the Criminal Justice System. Keir, actions speak louder than words.

Swift

On the subject of bureaucracy, we need to reflect that this isn't a new phenomenon.

Jonathan Swift wrote about it hundreds of years ago in his magnificent satire Gulliver's Travels. On the flying island that Gulliver visits, the island of Laputa, the statisticians honestly believed that if they didn't collate, tabulate and analyse the astronomical data that the island would crash to the ground.

Anybody who challenged this orthodoxy was hit in the face with pig's bladder.

Do you know – I've got news for modern day statisticians. Like Gulliver's flying island - the police service will not crash to the ground. Policing will not stop if we cease collecting and analysing statistics.

What the Public Want Quality – Quantity?

Think of this - does Mr or Mrs Average really worry or care about how well statistics relating to their crime have been collated.

Or do they care about the quality of the service they have received.

All too often we are only concerned with the quantitative and not the qualitative in policing. It is no coincidence that we have ranks such as inspectors that are created to inspect and ensure the quality of the service we deliver. We shouldn't forget that.

When have you ever heard a letter being written by a member of the public congratulating the service on the quality of statistics being collated in relation a crime committed against them? They are interested in quality of service they received, how we dealt with the incident, human to human interaction.

That's why we need supervisors, leaders, on the streets with constables, ensuring quality of service. Not in the station ensuring the crime report is beautifully presented to the superintendent the following morning.

Policing is simple. We keep the peace. We prevent crime. If offences occur, we detect the offender and bring them to justice.

Too many modernisers confuse this with the complicated processes they introduce to achieve this.

Good policing is the simple answer to complicated problems.

Modernisation

You will have heard me mention the word modern and modernisation on a number of occasions. This isn't accidental use of language.

Those people who choose to use the word modern or modernisation are doing so deliberately because it suggests anybody opposed to the ideas must be backward looking, old fashioned and outdated.

This deliberate use of language in such a way is a direct lift from the old Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe where nobody was unemployed, they were all jobseekers. Ring a bell? And 5-year plans always achieved their targets.

Well, dwell on the following statement for a moment the next time you hear someone using 'modern' to mean good, better and progressive.

Shortly after coming to office Gordon Brown set up the Financial Services Authority, the FSA, to oversee and regulate the banks in this country. It was described as a modern regulatory system fit for the modern world. Anybody who now thinks that is true is as deluded as the old Eastern European Stalinists were in their days.

So, please, don't be conned by the use of language.

And don't be conned by chief constables and police authorities blindly following the workforce modernisation Human Resources pied pipers, because we are in danger of seeing police officer numbers fall and with it a loss of resilience.

Why is it that other countries look at British police officers with envy yet we are on the precipice of giving up what has made us the very best police service in the world. Home Secretary, police officer numbers cannot be allowed to fall.

The most extraordinary factor in all of this is that the people we serve have never been asked if they want to see the police service radically changed. Many of those who are at the heart of modernisation have no idea what shape the police service is going to take, or whether the people we serve are with them.

We have been calling for a debate into policing for many years now but all we get is piecemeal change without any idea where we could be going. Now is the time for a Royal Commission into Policing.

You have already heard what I had to say at the start of conference in relation to public order policing. Conference, we can't go on being attacked for doing our job by the ill-informed and ignorant. We have to have the debate on what is wanted from policing and allow us to regain our independence and get on with our jobs. If structured, objective and considered debate is not forthcoming through a Royal Commission the police service will continue to be used by politicians of little integrity as a political football. The people we serve deserve better.

That is why we join the service. We are there police on behalf of the communities we serve. We are not a football for politicians to kick around. Let the people speak.

ACPO/Leadership

Some within the modernisation debate wish to be able to impose any shift pattern that they choose on their officers

This, despite the fact that we are seeing officers dying in what appears to be increasing numbers on the way home from night duty in particular.

The solution posed by some What do you think?

An enlightened policy to create shifts and processes that prevents officers dying when travelling home?

NO – change the regulations so that those officers no longer are seen as being on duty and are therefore no longer a problem to some leaders in ACPO.

They have demonstrated a cold, unyielding indifference to the lives of officers which is further compounded by the government's plan to change legislation to remove pension protections from those killed whilst travelling to and from work.

Those senior officers who appear to have an arrogant disregard for the welfare of their officers; we call on them to show leadership and gain the respect of those they should be leading. Like the majority of their colleagues in ACPO.

Home Secretary, I'm going to take you back to where I began. Let us remember all those who have died on duty with thanks and pride.

I want to take you back to Stephen Oakes who died five years ago and has finally received the Queen's Gallantry medal.

Home Secretary, Home Office officials present today – I direct my final comment to you. We should never have to wait five years to recognise our colleagues who make the ultimate sacrifice keeping safe the communities we serve.

ENDS