

**Jan Berry:** [*General announcements about charity donations etc.*] I am handing over to Nick Owen, with thanks for him being a late replacement.

**Nick Owen:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. John Stapleton was supposed to be here but is precluded from doing so by domestic problems. It is a delight for me to be able to come back to this Conference. Some of you may remember that I was at Bournemouth a couple of years ago, and to remind you, I have a son in the Metropolitan Police so I take a close interest in what you get up to here. I asked him last night if he had any message for you all, and he just said, 'Get us a pay rise, Dad'. [*Applause*] Like politicians, I can talk a lot but I cannot deliver on my promises, which is not intended as any criticism, of our first speaker. I want first to say that this session has about a half hour to run. The timetable on these occasions is always very short, as you know. We will hear from the man next to me, who you know very well and who I will introduce in a moment. He will speak, not for too long, then we really do want questions from the floor. This is your chance to have a go at the guys here – do not waste it! Do not leave your questions till the end of the session because you will be cut off if we cannot go on.

It is my great pleasure to introduce to you the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, the Rt Hon Sir Menzies Campbell, MP. [*Applause*]

**Sir Menzies Campbell CBE QC, MP  
Leader, Liberal Democrats**

Nine a.m, on the third day of the Conference – I do not know whether to congratulate you on your enthusiasm or your stamina! The ground is somewhat cut from beneath my feet when the person who introduces me tells me that all you are interested in is a pay rise, which may put all these careful thoughts and principles in the shade. But I am very pleased and grateful to you for inviting me to speak here today.

Before I entered Parliament, I spent 20 years practising law in Scotland, for four of which I was Crime Counsel, prosecuting serious crime in the High Court – murder, rape, armed robbery and the like. As a result, I saw first hand the effects of crime on victims. I saw young people who had been attacked because of how they looked, who had been attacked because of the friends they chose or even, the football team that they supported. I saw older people who had been abused because their attackers knew that they could not fight back. And I saw women who had been beaten and raped by men, sometimes their partners, who used physical strength to dominate and to terrify. As a prosecutor at the end

of the chain of which many of you are a part, it was my job to try to bring serious criminals to justice. But I also felt the frustration of seeing those who were able to walk away without ever paying the price to society for the pain and suffering that they had afflicted. I know that you understand these experiences because you see the impact of crime, day in and day out. By reason of your obligation, you place yourselves in harm's way because of the commitment to uphold the rule of law and to protect the innocent. These, of course – as you have no doubt noted already – are the principles for which brave and dedicated officers, like Richard Gray, have sometimes, tragically, paid the highest price.

Over the years, therefore, police forces in this country have enjoyed the vital respect and cooperation of the British public and that for generations. But you would no doubt acknowledge that something has gone wrong, that in recent years, that relationship has become more strained. The police have of course played their part in cutting crime, but there is a paradox in this country. People have never been more in fear of crime than they are today and you are asked to take on ever greater responsibilities to protect the public from a range of threats which even ten, 15 or 20 years ago would not have been anticipated. Yet, some trust is surely being lost from that special relationship between the public and the police. I do not hesitate in saying that it is being lost because this government has centralised and politicised our police forces more than any other government in history. [Applause]

I am tired of a succession of Home Secretaries looking for favourable newspaper headlines, talking about 'getting tough', and yet another eye-catching initiative: new laws, new crimes, new tasks for the police. The trouble is that politicians in this country keep trying to outbid each other in the quest to be the toughest on crime. I have not yet met a single police officer who believes that approach is working. Violent offending is up. Prison numbers are up. Re-offending levels are up. Therefore, in the battle of ideas, we have reached a turning point, a crucial point. I do not believe that getting tougher will stop crime, but I believe that getting smarter will.

We can cut crime in this country, but only if we are sufficiently honest to take the necessary steps. Compulsory work in education and prisons to promote the skills that will discourage re-offending; contributions from work and prison for victims, to teach offenders to take responsibility for their own actions; and minor offenders in the community, where they can carry out work that really pays society back, rather than sending them to prison, where they simply learn further criminal behaviour – these are the answers to cutting crime, not populist, headline grabbing political initiatives. Moreover, you know that when the populist initiatives fail, you take the blame. When the right to protest is restricted, it is the police who have to enforce it. When individuals choose to defy unpopular laws, it is the police who must

arrest them. Police officers are too often being used to enforce the authoritarian decisions of this government. That is why I say that we must take politics out of policing. *[Applause]*

Here is what I suggest: that the current review of PACE should give more powers to the police – yes, more powers – where there is clear evidence that this will lead to the just and proper enforcement of the rule of law. In return, however, the government should set up an independent review, with members of the police forces as part of it, to consider whether there are current powers available to you which are unnecessary or which undermine that relationship between public and police.

I want to go further than that. I want to use the opportunity presented by PACE and the Booth review to suggest a new deal for Britain's police services, a deal that is aimed at ensuring a secure profession, while reinforcing public confidence. Of course, like any deal that requires give and take but let us start with a bonfire of central targets! *[Applause]* Targets set by ministers in Whitehall should not dictate police strategy in our communities, because the defining nature of central targets is a distortion of local priorities and innovation in the discretion which ought to be available locally. Of course, we all want to reduce the numbers of people who fear burglary or violence or car crime. Residents in Bristol, for example, are six times more likely to be burgled than residents in Taunton, but both towns are part of Avon and Somerset Constabulary, for which there is an over burglary target. It makes no sense to ask the whole of Avon to meet an average target for burglary when the problem is greatest in specific areas. Moreover, it is perverse to provide police officers with an incentive to issue an inflated number of fixed penalty notices and fines. That is what centralised targets do, however. They undermine the discretion and the professionalism of experienced officers on the front line. You know it and I know it.

People in this country are not blinded by averages or statistics. Local people – and they will tell you – know very well whether a problem in their neighbourhood has been solved or not, because they live with the reality of criminal behaviour, day in and day out. So I say, unequivocally, that we must move away from the distortion of central statistics and move towards more effective local accountability. That should not be used, however, as an opportunity to inject politics into local policing.

Mr Cameron will address you in due course. His party has proposed elected Chairs for police authorities. I do not believe that that is the right way forward. How would such elections be conducted? And who would stand? Would parties put forward candidates of their own? Would you be invited to vote for a Liberal Democrat Chair? Or a Conservative or a Labour one? We need our police to pursue criminals, not votes. We need local accountability – yes, but a political service? No.

We need to concentrate on what matters most. We need to concentrate on policing measures that heighten your understanding of local needs and help your officers to meet them. Safer neighbourhood teams, public surgeries, engagement with residents' groups – these are examples of good work, good work which is already going on, but more of it is needed. If we have a bonfire of targets, then for Heaven's sake, let us take a match to the paperwork at the same time! [Applause]

We all know that bureaucracy is a necessary evil but it must be kept to a minimum and you should be allowed to get on with what you do best: fighting crime and catching criminals, not wasting millions of hours each year, collectively on paperwork. You do not need me to tell you. Duplication of paperwork is a waste of your time – the national collision form, the ?dial form, missing persons' reports. When I speak to police officers, as I often do in the course of my visits throughout the country, I hear time and again that they consider their time to be wasted, entering the same information on multiple forms. Six years ago, of course, there was a promise to cut the bureaucracy in the Home Office report entitled *Policing, a New Century – a Blueprint for Reform*. But last year, police officers spent a fifth of their time on paperwork. That is almost 400 hours each year for each officer, on average. If you extrapolate those figures across the entire service, it is a staggering 56.5 million hours. They have turned you not into bureaucrats but 'bureaucops' and that is not good enough. We need a proper assessment of how modern IT systems, voice recognition technology and hand held equipment can free police time from that sort of form filling, and there should be a guarantee of funding in order to make it happen - £150 million would do it. Civilian staff in turn should provide greater clerical support to relieve officers from that kind of work. So, we should cut bureaucracy.

In return, we should encourage increased police visibility. High visibility raises public confidence in the police. High visibility helps to cut crime. Of course it is right that a professional service should have a professional pay structure and the Booth review, as you know, is now looking at fair pay for police officers. The public has the right to expect excellence from its police but excellence should be rewarded with fairer, simpler pay structures and with access to promotion. I talk to many police officers, who tell me that they feel they cannot make progress or gain skills because of the rigidity of existing structures . Others say that the service pay structures make their reward for staying beyond the age for early retirement minimal and that encourages officers to retire early. These things should change - as I said, there are two sides to every deal – and in return the service should be open minded about other reforms. It is becoming increasingly uncommon for public sector workers to retire in their early fifties – MPs certainly do not do it – and officers who want to leave the front line, or who feel unable to cope with the more physical aspects of policing,

should be encouraged to take up other positions within the force so that their experience remains available.

We can shape a more varied and experienced police force than we have ever had before and the structure should be design both to foster talent and to retain it. Within that structure, PCSOs have a role to play, but they should not replace sworn officers. They should be a complement, not a substitute. They have distinct roles to play within the service but they should not be an opportunity for policing on the cheap, nor for mission creep. Rather, they should help to provide an effective mix of skills. I say, as I think I can without contradiction to this audience, the government's proposals for amalgamations should be rejected firmly and finally. Police services should not be distant and unaccountable – I say that as a Member of Parliament who, from time to time, has to take up issues with local officers in my own constituency – and the fact that there is a close and intimate relationship often helps to resolve problems that might otherwise fester and cause disagreement. Services should be local and accessible and that means forces of a size that best suit the needs of individual communities.

Reorganisation may have its merits, naturally. I do not doubt it. But decisions should not be imposed by the Home Office and in return for increased local autonomy the public are entitled to expect their police services to cooperate with each other where that will increase efficiency or avoid duplication. 21<sup>st</sup> century police services need reform but together, you and I, politicians and police, can work to do that. We can do it by giving you the powers that you need and removing those you do not, by lighting a bonfire of centralised targets and establishing in their place local accountability, by banishing bureaucracy and increasing visible police presence, by rewarding hard work and ensuring a mixed set of skills within our forces and by defining police structures on the basis of local needs. In that way, we can take the politics out of policing and ensure a healthy future for police services that is accountable, responsible and effective. *[Applause]*

**Nick Owen:** Thank you very much indeed, Menzies. We have microphones in the hall and we have had a lot of questions come in already. To start us off, I want to put one thing to you straight away: interesting political times we live in. You might find yourself holding the reins of power – you obviously would like to think so – so bearing that in mind would you support a Royal Commission on the police?

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** I do not see why not. I have just set out a number of the challenges which we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am particularly concerned, as someone who practised law both for prosecution and defence, I must confess, about the balance

between civil liberties and the responsibility on government and police forces to provide protection for our citizens. Therefore, a Royal Commission to examine these issues and at the same time those of service conditions and pay would be entirely sensible. What we have to do is restore the sense of confidence – confidence by the public in the police service and confidence among the police that they enjoy the support of the public. A Royal Commission would seem to go a long way toward helping that. *[Applause]*

**Speaker:** Like me, Sir Menzies, you are probably regarded as a dinosaur in your profession, but dinosaurs survived a long time. I remember a reasonable way back in your party policy, at one time it was your policy to support direct entry into the service at inspector level and above. Is that still the case?

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** No. You need to have a system of recruitment which is sufficiently flexible to allow people of a variety of skills and a variety of experiences to join the force at different stages in their working lives. I have to confess, however, from my experience of working very closely with the police, as you have to if you are a crime counsel, that experience on the beat in those primary roles would seem to be a vital part of equipping people for the higher echelons of command. I do not know whether that is a popular conclusion, or not? *[Applause]* If I can take a political analogy, you would not want someone to be Prime Minister who had never been a Member of Parliament – or would you? *[Laughter]*

**Steve Edwards (Lancashire):** You said that amalgamation should be firmly off the agenda and you talk about police efficiency, public satisfaction and so on. What about forces that are volunteering to merge to improve police efficiency and public satisfaction? Surely that cannot be totally off the agenda because there are improvements to be made?

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** Of course not. The test is effectiveness and if it is more effective for two smaller forces closely linked together geographically to amalgamate, then we should be sympathetic to it. The other thing we should be sympathetic to is more cooperation. The cost of some modern equipment is considerable. For example, the provision of air services for observation and things of that kind would seem exactly the sort of things that could be the subject of a sharing agreement. But we should not be driving this according to some prescription that bigger is better. The test should be what is better and what is more effective.

**David Ewart (Wiltshire Joint Branch Board):** I am somewhat confused as to whether you are for the Booth report or against it?

**Ian Springett (Humberside):** You just said that you would not want a Prime Minister who had never been a politician. The Home Office have a plan to 'civilianise' custody staff and replace them with members of the public who have had extensive training, sometimes for as long as six weeks! *[Laughter]* On that basis then, would you ever want to see a custody sergeant who had never been a copper?

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** No!

**Ian Springett:** Thank you. *[Applause]*

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** And I most certainly would not want to be taken into custody by a custody sergeant who had not been a copper, either. On the question of Booth, Booth came about under circumstances that you know much better than I do. The fact that the recommendation was made, the government refused it, there had to be arbitration, out of arbitration came Booth. We have supported the principles of the original report in February. These are well worth serious consideration subject to one caveat, which is that I am a little concerned about the notion of differential pay rates, geographically. There may sometimes be very narrow circumstances in which these are justified, but if they were to be introduced on a wholesale basis, that would certainly undermine confidence within the police forces themselves.

**Nick Owen:** Did you want to come back on that?

**David Ewart:** I am somewhat disappointed that you are supporting such a ridiculous report. That is my view.

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** You would not expect me to come here and say things simply because I thought you might like to hear them? You are entitled to have a direct view from me as to what I consider the way to proceed. If I may say so, I would expect you to tell me what you think is the right way at the same time.

**Jan Berry:** Maybe I can help on that area? What Booth was asked to do was to try to make sure that the situation in which we found ourselves last year did not repeat itself, and I fully support that. Nobody wants to go to arbitration. The whole purpose of a Police Negotiating Board is that you will negotiate and there has to be give and take on both sides. We have been waiting for the last 18 months for people to put proposals forward

that we can negotiate properly and have been stalled in doing that by the Home Office throughout the process. That is the first part.

My disappointment with the Booth report is that it is in fact going to be suppressing police pay, not paying police officers fairly and there is nothing at all in the report that recognises the unique status of the police officer. The fact is that they are on duty 24/7. We do not have a choice when we are a police officer to be able to walk past a crime or an incident. We have accountability both on duty and off duty. Nor do we have that option to take industrial action. If I were to encourage colleagues to take industrial action, I could face two years in prison. If any of them went on strike, they could go to prison. Any other group of workers could sign a contract to say they agree not to strike, and if they go on strike they are in breach of that contract but it is not a criminal offence. So Booth, and the government, have to take account in our pay of that X factor that sets us aside from other groups of workers. *[Applause]*

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** I do not demur from any of that. If I may say so, the most powerful point is the fact that unlike others, the police forces have no right to withdraw their labour. Even barristers have that right. In that circumstance, the obligation on those responsible for paying remuneration is to ensure that police forces are properly treated. The circumstances which gave rise to Booth should never be repeated again, because of the enormous unrest and concern that they caused.

**PC Phil Suarez (Essex Police):** A few years ago, on moments of downtime I was able to prepare for my shift with the odd curry in the early hours of the morning. Nowadays, I am lucky to have a pot noodle. We have heard all week from the floor that 24 hour policing is in total crisis. Senior officers seem to have skipped around this issue and deny it point blank. Does the right honourable gentleman believe and accept that policing is in crisis? There are not enough officers out there. People are being put at risk and it is time that politicians and ACPO listened to us and did something about it before someone gets seriously hurt.

**Andy Viney (Thames Valley):** In view of your equivocal reply to the custody sergeant's question, can you give Conference a guarantee that when Section 121 of SOCA comes up in Parliament in the next two months, you will object to the enactment of that legislation, preventing civilian staff becoming custody sergeants? *[Applause]*

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** Let me take the first point about numbers. Last week, in breach of the law, the government finally published the most recent and up to date estimate of the cost of the identity card scheme, which it was obliged to do by the end of

April but somehow, contrived not to before the local government elections took place. These estimates indicated that it was going to cost another £600 million – so in round figures, £6 billion. I am opposed to identity cards – that may be not a popular view in every part of the audience – for a whole raft of reasons, in particular those connected with civil liberties and personal freedom but also on the grounds of cost. £6 billion could be much better spent in investment in the police and security services. [Applause] That would help deal with the issue of numbers.

On the question of Section 121, I have not seen the precise terms of the section but it would be inconsistent with my reply to your colleague if I were to do other than to vote against it. [Applause]

**Speaker:** With regard to the Booth inquiry, which you have clearly demonstrated an area of support for, can you explain to us here precisely how you would differentiate between the three ranks in order to make that proposal work? You would have to explain how an inspector is worth more than a sergeant or vice versa and likewise, with the constable ranks because at the moment, we all pull in the same direction. We are extremely hard working and we do not deserve to be split up and paid different amounts.

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** You would regard me as pretty presumptuous to try on an occasion like this to tell you your own business in relation to distinctions to be drawn between the responsibilities of various ranks within the service. We have just heard a contribution to this and as I said a moment ago, I do not demur from any of that, particularly because you do not have the opportunity to withdraw your labour. It is clearly necessary to have a professional force and one that is properly remunerated for its professionalism and that is the principle which should be uppermost in the minds of those engaged in Booth and its consequences. I said that broadly there seemed to be an advantage, for example, in the notion of producing a pot of money that can be used in ways which in the past have not happened and in particular, taking regard to the immediate needs of the service, including modernisation. But I am not here to tell you your business.

**Nick Owen:** That is the end of this session. Sir Menzies Campbell, we are very grateful to you. Thank you very much indeed. [Applause]

**Jan Berry:** Sir Menzies, can I also thank you on behalf of my colleagues? You were obviously quite well briefed on many of the issues that we have been addressing this week. I am not too sure about the Booth report and I expect that my colleagues and I

will need to have some long discussions with you, with Nick and with Jeremy to make sure that you are fully briefed on the implications of the Booth report and what it might do to policing in the future. But my thanks to you for now.

We are going to take a five minute break now, not longer, so that we can thank Sir Menzies and for him to leave the hall and the next speakers to get ready.

[*Break*]