



View from the sidelines

ACPO's Marie Antoinettes leave crumbs for the junior ranks

Following the 'ConDem' government's announcements of the eye-watering cuts that they are to impose on public services, it has been difficult to trace anyone who will admit to having voted either Conservative or Liberal Democrat at the recent General Election.

Even some MPs and party members seem unhappy with the idea of a coalition government led by David Cameron and Nick Clegg. As a quick aside, have any other children of the '60s noticed a similarity between our Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister to Bruce Wayne and his youthful sidekick Dick Grayson (aka Batman and Robin)?

The same absence of responsibility applies to the current police bonus schemes, including special priority payments (SPPs). There isn't a single member of ACPO who will admit to wanting them – even though they were represented at the Police Negotiating Board, agreed with the Official Side and signed up to the police reform deal in 2002.

The payments, by design, have been deeply divisive, incredibly unfair and unpopular with the 60 percent of police officers who do not receive them. They were the brainchild of former Home Secretary David Blunkett and the scheme was designed so that only a maximum

of 40 percent of police officers in a force can receive the payments. As well as being riddled with conflict this also makes them chronically bureaucratic to administer and I suspect that chief officers have found them difficult and de-motivating, but hey, what did you expect from such an aberration of a system?

Notwithstanding all of the above, I still feel that it was a somewhat quixotic gesture by Met Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson and other ACPO luminaries to volunteer not to accept any bonus payments to which they may be entitled, while also suggesting – in true Marie Antoinette fashion – that the junior ranks shouldn't have any either. We can have cake, I suppose?

It seems that as soon as Theresa May's size eight red high-heels slid under her desk in the Home Office, ACPO were parading at the door like a troupe of wannabe Uriah Heeps attending a casting audition for Dickens's *David Copperfield*.

As universally unpopular as SPPs and bonus payments may be, they were part of our negotiated pay deal. The schemes were funded by 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' as detectives lost their plain-clothes allowance, firearms officers lost theirs, and a whole string of other allowances disappeared. If the schemes are to go something must be negotiated to replace them, which hopefully will be fairer. It is certainly not right for the best paid officers in the service to offer them up without even a thought for consultation.

Picture this!

You may have seen my recent column dedicated to Sir Ian (soon to be Lord) Blair. I now understand that the Metropolitan Police Authority has just paid £9,000 of public money on commissioning a painting of his Lordship to hang in Scotland Yard. At a time of supposed economic restraint this has to be one of the best examples of a shameful waste of public funds. No wonder they are cutting public spending if they think we have this sort of money to fritter.

Members of ACPO have adopted a Marie Antoinette attitude



We thought we'd repeat this image of Sir Ian – perhaps it could be a guide for the portrait painter

Photography: PA Photos/iStock

