

Is the force

High-ranking Asian officer chief superintendent Ali Dizaei has broken with tradition by writing a book criticising the Met Police while still serving in the force. Tony Judge writes a review of the controversial, *Not One of Us*

If an opinion poll asked the British public to name the police officer with the highest profile, it's likely the top three would be Sir Ian Blair, his predecessor Lord Stevens, and Ch Supt Ali Dizaei. If such a poll had been taken last month, Ch Supt Dizaei would have been the outright winner. Love him or hate him, he cannot be ignored.

March saw the publication of his scathing book relating to the Met's costly investigation into allegations made against him, which would later amount to nothing. I can think of no precedent for a serving officer publishing such a sustained attack on the integrity of his senior officers and colleagues.

Ch Supt Dizaei is the legal adviser to the National Black Police Association (NBPA). Ever since he joined Thames Valley Police in 1986 he has been a critic of many aspects of current policing, especially racial equality. He recently slated some of the anti-terrorist measures following the London bombings, describing



Ch Supt Ali Dizaei

with you?

proposals to increase surveillance of Asians travellers as creating a new offence of “travelling while Asian”. In a notorious speech to the NBPA Conference, he accused the service of “ethnic cleansing” because no black officer was, at the time, being fast tracked to the top.

In 1999, at the invitation of Sir Paul Condon, Ch Supt Dizaei transferred to the Met as a superintendent. It seemed that nothing stood between a bright and ambitious officer with a law degree and the highest posts in the service, but the force received anonymous complaints, alleging that he was involved in drugs, theft, prostitution and, bizarrely, “spying for Iran”. The Met mounted an undercover investigation, and in the manner of too many such cases, this mushroomed to the point where it began to lose all sense of objectivity. Officers probed Ch Supt Dizaei’s somewhat flamboyant social life, including his BMW car and expensive clothes. More than 40 officers were engaged on the case. Ch Supt Dizaei, blissfully unaware of what was going on, was followed to the USA and Canada, where he was on NBPA business, apparently because another unidentified source had suggested he was involved in a passport racket.

The inquiry, code named Helios, even used two undercover Iranian Canadian police officers to contact Ch Supt Dizaei in the USA to discover if he was up to something sinister. Meanwhile, his phones were tapped and conversations dealing with NBPA matters were recorded. Last December the Investigatory Powers Tribunal ruled that such intercepts were unlawful. Ch Supt Dizaei’s bank accounts and those of his family members were scrutinised. The investigation is officially estimated to have cost £2 million, Ch Supt Dizaei puts it closer to £7 million.

In January 2001, Ch Supt Dizaei learned, for the first time, that he had been under constant surveillance for two years. He was confronted by three

senior officers, served with a number of disciplinary complaints and told he was suspended from duty. Meanwhile, officers were raiding his home in Henley. Television crews, tipped off in advance, were outside the house, filming what went on.

More than two years later, Ch Supt Dizaei appeared at the Old Bailey, on charges of conspiracy to defeat the course of justice and misconduct in public office. After a trial that lasted four weeks, the jury deliberated for only an hour and a half before finding Ch Supt Dizaei “not guilty” on both counts.

The Helios mountain had brought forth a molehill. He was cleared of dishonesty and charges of fiddling expenses were dropped. The force, deeply embarrassed by the outcome, was obliged to make amends in a deal, brokered through the government conciliation service, ACAS, that included a £60,000 payment and an undertaking that Ch Supt Dizaei would be allowed to attend the Senior Command Course, an essential requirement for chief officer posts. If Ch Supt Dizaei had chosen to resign and sue for constructive dismissal, he would have got something close to £2 million. The deal almost collapsed because the force proposed that he should work under the terms of a “service confidence agreement” which is normally applied to officers who have been disciplined for serious breaches of professional standards. This meant that Ch Supt Dizaei would not manage staff or have dealings with the public.

Ch Supt Dizaei refused to resume duty under these circumstances, and the NBPA threatened that 1,000 black officers would march, in uniform, through the streets of London to Scotland Yard, to protest against his treatment. They also announced that they would ask black minority ethnic people not to join the force. This created panic in the Home Office, Scotland Yard and the Mayor of London’s office.

In his book, Ch Supt Dizaei reserves his contempt for the officers who worked on the abortive investigation. He distances them from the force hierarchy, which is hardly surprising seeing that he remains determined to become “one of us” in the not so distant future. Many non-police readers may be shocked by the lengths to which the investigation team went to find some evidence of criminal behaviour. They should not believe that this inquiry was atypical, or that Ch Supt Dizaei was treated in this way because he was a black officer. Over the years, dozens of officers have been subjected to such methods, which if applied to common criminals would outrage civil libertarians and the courts. Public money has been poured down the drain in futile over-the-top enquiries. Decent, hardworking and successful officers have had their careers destroyed, even though they have never been convicted of wrong doing. This could be attributed to an excess of zeal on the part of investigators determined to rid the service of rogue officers, but civil rights go out of the window.

The officers who conducted the enquiries were doing what they saw as their duty. Their work was constantly monitored by senior officers, overseen by invigilators, and in some cases endorsed by the Crown Prosecution Service. Since Ch Supt Dizaei’s book appeared, the Met has staunchly defended the inquiry team. Even so, there are lessons to be learned, to the benefit of the service and those who come under scrutiny in the future. It remains to be seen whether the findings of the current Essex Police inquiry into the conduct of Helios will see the light of day, and whether they will lead to more proportionate investigations.

Not One of Us: The trial that changed policing in Britain forever. Ali Dizaei with Tim Phillips, is published by a Serpent’s Tail for £16.99