



Tony Judge

## Waiting for Gordon

There were so few dry eyes among the massed ranks of activists at the Labour Party Conference, as they gave such an emotional response to Tony Blair's positively last goodbye to the not-so faithful, that for a moment we were back on the 18th green at the Ryder Cup.

Now we look ahead to the apparently assured coronation of Gordon Brown, and wonder how his approach to law and order will differ from the first ten years of New Labour.

My mind goes back to the early 1990s, when Tony Blair was an up and coming new MP and shadow Home Secretary. He came to the Police Federation Conference in May 1993 and delivered a cleverly crafted and erudite address that earned him a standing ovation. Afterwards, we wondered what it meant in terms of Labour forming the next government, as they did, and concluded that it was strong on sentiment and devoid of commitments. He had not then coined the "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" sound bite that convinced many voters that the public would be safe in his hands.

A few months later, Mr Blair was expected to be the star speaker at the massive rally at Wembley, where about 20,000 Federation members said "No" to the raft of changes to policing proposed by Sheehy. He was late. We were sending frantic messages to his office. Where was he? A hapless aide assured me that he was fairly certain that Mr Blair was on his way to Wembley. The surprise star of the night was a virtually unknown Liberal Democrat MP, Robert MacLennan, who got a standing ovation after reading the words written for him by a bright young adviser. When at last a flustered Home Secretary arrived, he too got plenty of applause for his speech. A few of us recognised it as virtually the same address he had given to our conference. Every other speaker had torn the Sheehy report to shreds; he said he would study it with care.

Last month, Mr Brown gave a long interview to *The Times* during the Labour Party Conference week in

which he dwelt upon his Christian upbringing in a Scottish manse, and he talked about bringing greater compassion to the role of government. "Compassion" is one of Mr Blair's buzz words, but it takes on a deeper meaning when spoken by the dour Mr Brown. He suggested that his administration would eschew populist rhetoric and there would be fewer instant fixes in response to media campaigns. This would please Labour's left wingers, and it has an added attraction for a new leader, it would be cheaper.

Assuming that Mr Brown inherits the leadership next year, perhaps after defeating a challenge by John Reid, what can the service expect? As Chancellor, he has approved massive spending on the police and criminal justice system, but he is said to doubt if he has had value for money. Will he be equally generous as Premier? Or will his own inclinations, and a worsening economic situation, lead him to a period of retrenchment. Instead of "Things can only get better", will we hear, yet again, the haunting refrains of "The Party's Over?" As another long term Prime Minister would have said, "Wait and see".

Judgement

Tony Judge has been involved with the Police Federation for 50 years. He was the youngest police officer on the Joint Central Committee and founded *Police* magazine in 1968.