



Metin Enver, Editor

# Editorial October 2006

## Brunstrom's barmy brainwave

With a sickening irony, as hundreds of families gathered in Belfast to remember their loved ones at the third National Police Memorial Day this month, *The Times* newspaper carried a front page lead announcing the government and ACPO are considering extending Penalty Notice Disorders (PNDs) to a range of offences including assaulting a police officer.

Whilst the Home Office were quick to distance themselves from the lunacy of the ideas, confirming that no firm proposals had yet been put to ministers, ACPO would only say that it had been in discussions about implementation. So, crisis over?

Well not quite. ACPO lead on PNDs and North Wales chief constable Richard Brunstrom, decided to put his views forward, not least because the Police Federation had reacted angrily and with disgust at proposals which appear to give a green light to offenders to assault police officers.

Mr Brunstrom decided to put the record straight and explain the merits of PNDs on his web blog. Now, perhaps I'm missing a trick, but having read the words of wisdom I am still none the wiser. No-one is disputing that PNDs have a place in the criminal justice system, nor that they can help tackle some low level offences. What is disputed is that a thug who assaults a police officer should just get a fine and escape the full impact of the law and the prospect of a custodial sentence.

As the Federation vice-chairman, Alan Gordon, rightly said, this appears to be nothing more than a master plan to keep prison numbers down whilst bringing cash into the Treasury, all at the expense of police officers.

Fortunately, within 24 hours of the story breaking and a furious reaction from the Police Federation and Magistrates' Association, the Home Secretary, John Reid, was reported to have ruled out the possibility of on-the-spot fines for violent assaults. Well, I suppose despite assurances at the Superintendents' Conference that he will not be throwing his hat into the ring for the Labour leadership, Mr Reid is one media savvy politician who realises the power of the press and the impact a good or bad story can have on those who may yet just vote for him.

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