



View from the sidelines

Clive Chamberlain, chairman of Dorset Police Federation

Retiring grace-fully

Has anyone told Sir Ian Blair that he is no longer commissioner of the Metropolitan Police? If not, someone ought to. He was on TV only the other evening and from what he said I wonder if he believes that he is still involved in command-corridor-decision-making and that current chief officers want his advice.

I had settled down to watch *BBC Newsnight*, for a piece that had been billed as a *Vision for the future of policing* only to be disappointed when it transpired to be Sir Ian - a ghost of policing past, who had made a film regurgitating some of his old ideas and setting out what he thinks we need to do.

I must admit that while watching this my mind strayed to news footage I have seen of soldiers that have been discovered 30 or 40 years after the Second World War, deep in jungles, living in their own world oblivious that it is all over and that there was no need for them to continue fighting.

The ex-commissioner waxed lyrical about community support officers (nothing new here as he was the driving force behind their creation) with the main emphasis on them costing less. Police officers, he dismissed as "expensive" suggesting that PCSOs could replace "trained police officers" as a means of cutting costs. He said: "The police needs to restructure and bring in auxiliary staff to do some of the simple tasks currently being carried out by expensively trained officers," he added: "The total number of police officers would fall."

It did concern me that others could also be under the illusion that Sir Ian still holds ACPO rank, as during the film when he called in on a Safer Neighbourhood Team,

they all stood smartly to attention as if greeting Royalty. (I was just relieved we were spared the spectacle of someone actually genuflecting). The visit brought to my mind episodes of the seventies sit-com *Are You Being Served* when young Mr Grace, the department store owner, would descend from the Boardroom to the shop-floor, wave benignly towards the staff and say: "You've all done very well."

What is it that compels some former senior officers to publicly offer unsolicited advice on how things should be done now? Do they get paid for being pundits? It's not as if they need the money. Perhaps they have been seized by debilitating attacks of status-anxiety, a condition which prevents some from retiring gracefully to shire cottages and days filled contentedly with Suduko and *Countdown*. In Sir Ian's case I am aware that he is the first commissioner since Sir Kenneth Newman (1982-1987) not to have been rewarded with a peerage - so maybe he's feeling unappreciated?

Interestingly, only now that he has retired is Blair advocating a strategic review of policing whereas the Police Federation has been calling for a Royal Commission for years, unsupported by him when he was commissioner. I wonder why the change of heart? Perhaps he sees this as an employment opportunity - but as he didn't exactly ride out of the police service on the crest a wave I don't think he that should hold his breath for too long. In the meantime Sir Ian, Please leave policing to your successors - I am sure that Sir Paul Stephenson and others will call if they require your expertise.

What do you think?

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Sir Ian: ghost of policing past?



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CSOs could prompt a 'fall' in police numbers



Photography: Alamy