

Embargoed until 1100hrs Wednesday 19 May 2010

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Paul McKeever
Chairman, The Police Federation of England and Wales
Conference Keynote Speech

INTRODUCTION

Conference, every day 140,000 police officers across England and Wales routinely commit acts of bravery, heroism and compassion which go un-noticed or even disregarded by the media, politicians and the communities they serve.

Only when things go wrong as it did so tragically for our colleague, Constable Bill Barker, is the job that we do and the dangers that we face brought into the full light of day.

Make no mistake Bill Baker was a brave man; a man who we should be proud of; a man who represents the British police service at it's finest. In times of adversity, such as the dreadful floods in Cumbria late last year, police officers went about their work, helping their communities and doing what we do best.

There are many tributes been paid to Bill Barker including one by HRH Prince Charles, Patron of the National Police Memorial Day. However, the one I feel is the most moving is from his wife Hazel who said "How do you put into words, how you feel about somebody you are so proud of. Bill was my best friend, my forever friend and an amazing dad. I have the comfort of knowing that Bill died doing the job that he loved and the fact that he was helping others was just typical of Bill".

This year PC Bill Barker, along with other fallen colleagues will be remembered at the Police Federation Bravery Awards at the Dorchester Hotel and at the National Police Memorial Day service in Belfast in September.

Home Secretary - congratulations on your appointment and the success of your government. We are very much looking forward to working with you and assisting you in one of the most prestigious, yet difficult, jobs anyone could undertake. A job that is going to be made so much more difficult by the economic tsunami that you have inherited from the previous administration.

We will do whatever we can to help and support you at this most difficult time. What we do ask for is fairness and recognition of the dangerous, difficult and complex job that police officers do; officers like PC Bill Barker.

And can I say, thank you to you and your political colleagues for your timing of the election, which is perfect for your annual appraisal here at the Police Federation conference each year.

Home Secretary you will be surrounded by advisors, many of whom have little knowledge of policing and whose errors have got past Home Secretaries into trouble. The best advice that we can give you is - don't always believe what you're told by your advisors.

POLITICAL DYNAMIC

Home Secretary, we appreciate you have only been in office for a matter of days. Upon your appointment I extended my congratulations and I do so again on behalf of all police officers. I appreciate we may be a little biased, but the Office of State you hold is the most important position in government. In your hands rests the safety and security of the nation. Your important decisions have a direct impact on the lives of people in this country, whether they are the law-abiding, victims of crime or those of us tasked with maintaining the Queen's peace in the criminal justice system.

Over the coming weeks I know you will be further familiarising yourself with the complexities of policing. Home Secretary, we are here for you. We are the voice of 140,000 police officers across 43 forces and we are ready and willing to assist you with information, advice and guidance. We know public safety is a priority for you; it is for us too. We know you want to put victims at the heart of the criminal justice system; we do too. And we know that you appreciate the difficult and often dangerous circumstances in which we conduct our duty. Regrettably, some pay the ultimate price tackling this danger, but many police officers are also injured in the line of duty.

At this point I am going to make a bid and a plea to you on behalf of police officers. The police convalescence homes in Goring and Harrogate are almost wholly funded from police officers subscription donations and they are run as charitable concerns. The benefits that the police services gains from these facilities is enormous. They are highly efficient and effective at getting police officers back to work earlier than they otherwise would. All we ask of government is that you assist with capital build project funding when there is a need.

Home Secretary, during the past few years we have been subject to a constantly changing landscape of Police Ministers and Home Secretaries that we have had to deal with.

As Home Secretaries we've had Jack Straw, David Blunkett, Charles Clarke, John Reid, Jacqui Smith and Alan Johnson.

Police Minister's have faced an even quicker turnover. In the last five years we have had Hazel Blears, Liam Byrne, Tony McNulty, Vernon Coaker and David Hanson. Liam Byrne lasted less than two weeks, but still managed to make an appearance at our conference. Liam Byrne is an intelligent and capable man, but even he could not get a real grasp and understanding of his brief within the 350 or so hours he was in office. That is why it is a problem Home Secretary, we are in a constant state of flux with Ministers who come in, learn a little, change a lot and leave. But most of the changes are superficial and don't change the fundamental problems that are inherent in the criminal justice system.

This is not a new phenomenon - even 250 years ago, the writer Alexander Pope, recognised this. We will come back to the problems later, but all I would like to say now Home Secretary is that we are glad that you are here and would like to see you in post for sometime to come. Unlike the last Home Secretary, Alan Johnson – he was a postman and even he couldn't deliver.

Home Secretary, for the last twenty years we have had nothing but change; we have reached initiative fatigue. We want to be left as professionals to get on with the job

that we do. We want to see the preservation in numbers of those who perform the job of police officer in the service, rather than seeing an increase in the numbers of those that produce little, but earn a living by criticising, double-checking and analysing what our members do.

We are in the ridiculous situation where we have people checking, people checking, checking people. What I want to know Home Secretary is - who are the people checking the people checking the people, checking the people.....?

As the ex-Essex chief and now HMI, Roger Baker, said” We’re becoming an army that increasingly has no soldiers”.

We are now at the stage with some forces where there are more civilians than police officers. What are they doing?

Are they the people checking people, checking.....don’t get me started on that one again!

What we have to remember is that we are an emergency service. There are times when we need all hands on deck. We need flexibility and resilience and we are fast losing it. With the Olympics Games coming up this is a very dangerous path to go down.

Home Secretary, give the public the police service that they want and deserve - a force that recognises what we are there for - to serve the communities we police.

The previous government, aided and abetted by some in ACPO and the Police Authorities, are creating an ethos that appears to value and prioritise support staff roles above what the public want - which is warranted police officers.

In some forces for every police officer recruited, up to eight support staff have been employed. We are not against civilisation but it should not be at the expense of warranted police officers.

If we continue like this we risk the police service becoming as surreal an environment as the Alice in Wonderland world. You can stop these Mad Hatters who seek to turn the service upside down Home Secretary. Further civilianisation must be in addition to warranted officers; not instead of.

We are pleased to you understand the value and benefit of fully warranted officers and that you will maintain their numbers centrally rather than allowing them to float ever downwards, and by as much as 28,000 if certain members of ACPO and the NPIA have their way.

SENTENCING

During the past 13 years there seems to be one policy in relation to sentencing and sanctions - that is keep as many people out of jail as possible, with little regard to the gravity of the sentence or danger to the public.

It seems the offender’s human rights are put above the rights of the decent law abiding majority – this cannot be right. If it wasn’t so serious it would be funny, but we have found ourselves in a position where if recent history were to be made into a film it would be called, in the tradition of great British comedy acts - “Carry on Offender”

Home Secretary we have said this before - we don't mind what the sanction is but it has to be effective and stop people reoffending. And if we can't stop them reoffending, then the human rights of the law abiding public must come above the so-called rights of the offender. And if necessary the offender should stay in prison for as long as necessary.

We recognise there should be a balance in the Criminal Justice System; victims should be at the centre of the Criminal Justice System hard nosed criminals should be at the centre of a prison.

SUTCLIFFE

I make not apologies for what I am about to say Home Secretary. It might be considered not very modern, perhaps old fashioned - but I don't like criminals.

And it actually hurts me and my colleagues when I hear consideration among certain sections of the media and commentators about the rights of some of the most vile criminals.

Take the case of Peter William Coonan – do you know who he is?

He comes from the West Ridings in Yorkshire.

Still in doubt?

You probably know him better as Peter Sutcliffe – the Yorkshire Ripper. He murdered 13 victims and attempted to murder several more.

Sutcliffe has been described as a low risk. Does that mean instead of killing 13 women he may only kill one or two.

What an absurd suggestion to make. That a man like Peter Sutcliffe should be released back into the community because he is deemed to be only a low risk.

We have seen care in the community and we know that all too often it does not work.

Recently the murderer of a police officer, a man who also attempted to murder two other police officers, has been released on parole from prison. His name Von Bulow.

In 1965 then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, gave us an absolute assurance that life would mean life and murderers of police officers would end their lives in prison.

How shallow that now seems. What a pitiful reflection on our criminal justice system.

What next – that piece of scum Harry Roberts to be released or David Bieber? You must stop this madness Home Secretary and put justice back into the Criminal Justice System.

With the current policy you may as well just paint a target on our backs because police killers will know, whatever the gravity of their crime, they will get out one day. That has to be wrong.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Home Secretary, I said that we would come back to the Criminal Justice System and I am going to.

Whilst, on the one hand, we have a policy based on a lack of capacity to deal with those already in the system, on the other hand, we have had a government who has been legislating like there's no tomorrow.

A government that introduced 4,700 new offences, 1000 of which have the power of arrest. Here are just a few of these offences.

- Disturbing a pack of eggs when directed not to by an authorized officer. Unauthorised fishing in the Esk River.
- Entering the hull of the Titanic without permission.
- Wilfully pretending to be a barrister.
- And here is my favourite..... causing a nuclear explosion.

Can I ask my colleagues in the audience today - have any of you had cause to arrest anyone for any of these offences?

And if you put hand up to having arrested someone for causing a nuclear explosion I will know that you are not telling the truth.

Home Secretary we recognise the need to legislation but all too often it is merely duplicating laws that will do the job perfectly well.

It's another scene in our film "Carry on Offending". Pulling the wool over the public's eyes by creating unnecessary laws in an attempt to show that government is doing something about crime.

Home Secretary, we want sound law not sound bites. We've had so many sound bites ringing in our ears that I have Criminal Justice System tinnitus.

IPCC

Home Secretary, we often hear more calls from pressure groups that we ought to be more accountable. And yet we are the most accountable group of individuals in the country.

We are accountable on the front line through sergeants; inspectors who inspectors and superintendents who superintend.

We have lay visitors who can visit custody suites at any time. We have cameras in police vehicles, custody suites and even on police officers' headgear.

We are accountable in what we do to the Crown Prosecution Service, to the courts and judges. We are accountable to HMIC, the Audit Commission, Police Authorities, Home Office, local councils and the IPCC.

Why is this? Why is there such distrust of the police? The pollsters, Ipsos Mori, show the public are satisfied with us to a level of 60%.

We need to be accountable, but we appear to have such an unnecessary number of quangos and bodies created to check on us that one wonders if this is merely to create jobs than fulfil any useful function.

When you look at who we deal with on a daily basis – people with drink problems, people with drug dependency issues – yet, if they regrettably die in custody there are some who immediately wonder what we've done to them. Yet if someone dies in hospital, there's an investigation to ascertain why – people don't immediately start pointing fingers are the hospital staff.

Please trust us, allow us discretion. Don't assume that if things go wrong it is our fault.

PUBLIC ORDER

The last group who we are obviously accountable to in their eyes are the media. We recognise this, but there will be occasions Home Secretary where we need your support and leadership. Not least when there are occasions of great public disorder, where police tactics will be put under the greatest scrutiny and assumptions often made about our motives and actions.

It seems to me that there are some who wish to make our job in policing public events and demonstrations almost impossible in an effort to achieve their own wider political goals.

We are in danger of operational decision making by commanders on the ground being routinely second-guessed by the ill informed and politically motivated.

I have been through the riots in Brixton in 1981 in 1985 and many other events where there is major disorder. I was accustomed to being attacked by rioters from the front. But the brave men and women who undertake those public order duties today do not expect to be attacked from behind by the media, some politicians and other commentators.

You won't have heard this Home Secretary but in my conference address last year I outlined an analogy after the G20 demonstrations.

At the same time that the police were under scrutiny here by the media, the CIA in the USA was facing similar criticism about tactics. But let's compare and contrast what happened here and there.

In America President Obama went to the CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia, stood side by side with the CIA operatives and thanked them for the work they did on behalf of America.

That is true leadership Home Secretary. Where were our leaders - from the service and politics - putting some perspective into what happened here?

CONCLUSION

Home Secretary we are delighted that you have come here today.

I know from many of the comments that you have made already that you actually care about us – police officers, policing and the public we serve.

The 140,000 men and women of the police service of England and Wales are some of the finest people in the country.

I am extremely proud to represent them and you should be extremely proud to be their Home Secretary.

Home Secretary I invite you to address the Police Federation of England and Wales conference.

-ENDS-