

Sergeant's Central Committee Chairman's Speech to Conference 2012

Conference,

Good morning to you all, and welcome back to Bournemouth.

I have no regrets since speaking to you from this very platform at last year's conference and saying, this Government "hate the police service" and "want to destroy it", for what have they done before or since to prove otherwise!

As the 20% cuts really start to bite, the past year has been without question one of the most difficult and challenging in the history of the Police Service of England and Wales. But don't worry we have the support of the Home Secretary. Remember her words at our Conference in May 2010: "I will always back you, I will always support you. I will always fight for you." What hollow and insincere words they have proven to be.

There seems to be no end to this uncertainty that is affecting us all, irrespective of rank or role within

policing, but especially for those teams at the sharp end of operational policing that are ably led from the front by sergeants, the backbone of the service, who on a daily basis make a real difference to members of the public in all our communities, who are: **Proud to be Sergeants and Proud to be Professional!**

This past year we have witnessed the service responding to significant demands on resources that have stretched resilience and capacity to the limit, particularly during the widespread riots of August, which was one of the greatest public order challenges in the history of British policing; but the thin blue line held fast and did not break. Whilst every aspect of policing has felt the effects of the budget cuts as the service endeavours to maintain the best possible service it can to the public with significantly less funding.

Our rank has been no exception. Between 1st January and 31st December 2011, our numbers dropped by over 4%. The impact of such a drop in supervision levels is that the sergeant rank is having to stretch itself even more, and as the inspecting ranks are being decimated, it means that responsibilities have

cascaded down and the buck stops with us, placing even greater strain.

Every day throughout England and Wales many crimes are prevented or solved and dangers encountered and dealt with in an effective and efficient manner.

Despite criticism from some quarters, there is much that we should feel quite justifiably proud of in what we do and how we do it, and the vast majority of the British public know this to be true. The Home Secretary wants us all to be crime fighters, but you know we do a lot more besides.

There is real concern as to how the future landscape and environment of policing will look like when the Government's radical, sweeping and unprecedented reforms have run their course. Without question it will permeate through every facet of policing as we know it. We all wait anxiously to see how the push towards localism can be balanced against those aspects that need to be preserved at the national level. And, as 'old time reaps on' and solidity eventually takes hold, it will all become clearer what the impact of Winsor's two reviews into pay and conditions will be, together with Lord Hutton's review of pensions, the coming of Police and Crime Commissioners, moves towards

privatisation and the introduction of a Police Professional Body; notwithstanding, the significant challenges of ensuring the safety of all those attending the Olympic Games in London.

However, we can be sure of one thing: the professionalism, dedication and bravery of police officers will shine through and be an inspiration to all in rising to meet the challenges head-on as protectors of the public. Therefore, it has never been more important a time for us all to stand together united in the face of adversity. Sergeants as the guardians of excellence in service delivery will, I know, shoulder their share of the burden that rank and responsibility brings with it. Not just our rank, all those who hold the unique Office of Constable. All have a stake in the preservation of this great British institution that is policing and the public we all swore an oath to protect.

It is worth remembering that over one hundred and eighty two years ago, the founding father of policing, that great and enlightened Tory statesman Sir Robert Peel, brought forth upon this island of ours what was to become that great British institution, conceived in good faith, based on key fundamental principles and dedicated to serving the public as citizens in uniform,

without fear or favour, through the proud auspice of the Office of Constable. In this compact, the police are the public and the public are the police. Citizens locally appointed attested and sworn agents of the Crown, answerable to the law, and with full warranted powers.

Now we find ourselves engaged in a struggle with a government that know the price of everything and the value of nothing who's first duty is the protection of its citizens; testing whether that institution, or any institution so conceived, principled and so dedicated, can long endure.

In the early Nineteenth Century a Metropolitan Police Magistrate called Patrick Colquhoun said something quite profound that has resonated through the ages:

“Everything that can heighten in any degree the respectability of the Office of Constable, adds to the security of the state, and the safety of life and property of every individual.”

In June 2010, the Police Minister, Nick Herbert said:

“Public safety is the first responsibility of an effective government. The public services which keep people safe are more important than any other.”

It begs the question. As a result of the cuts to policing and the impact it is having on public safety. Is this an effective government? I will let you be the judge of that.

At this time we have a thoroughly demoralised and disenchanted police service that is struggling to cope, as the cuts slash deeper and deeper, and with no end in sight. We have made a great contribution to the national debt; we have shouldered our share of the burden along with everyone else, but the cuts cannot go any deeper than they already have, without consequences too horrible to imagine. Our pay and allowances are being cut or done away with, our conditions of service are changing, and we have seen our pension contributions increase and millions of pounds have been removed from police pay. So, it begs the question, why are we being singled out for 'special treatment' and treated so unfairly by this government, unlike the banking sector? You don't need to destroy us to improve policing. It's true to say a police officer's lot is not a happy one these days.

As police officers we are vulnerable, as we do not have industrial rights, so we cannot lawfully go on strike as can many other citizens. That is why we feel we have

become a victim of a government that is determined to drive through ideological and detrimental reforms to the police service that is resulting in a poorer service for the public. Everyone is a loser here, for we're all citizens. Only a philistine would tamper with the natural order of things; one that has stood the test of time in maintaining true observance to duty, professionalism, the rule of law and good order. Policing of the people, by the people, for the people should not be allowed to wither on the vine and perish.

In London on 10th May: Your country needed you... Your public needed you... Your police service needed you... We needed you... And you were there in your thousands to send a strong and clear message to Government, as proud and professional police officers, and in a courteous and dignified way, that you are extremely angry at the shameful way you are being treated and are really concerned about the impact the cuts to policing are having on public safety.

Every police officer who could, came to London to join the march in order to display their anger, frustration and concern over the future of the finest police service in the world. The truth is, as we all know through our own experiences, the Government imposed cuts to the

police budget are hitting the frontline of policing and we are losing many of our finest colleagues, not least through that disgraceful abomination that is A19. As a consequence, even the pips are starting to squeak under the relentless imposition of cuts to policing services. It is little wonder that police officers are becoming an endangered species and police stations are fast disappearing from our high streets; surely, enough is enough!

Your collective presence and voice was heard loud and clear on the streets of London, where our forebears first patrolled back in 1829, true to their salt and to Peel's principles. It was truly humbling to see our police service can produce such fine men and women who are driven by the strength of their convictions, and in their own time, to collectively gather and unite as one to show their displeasure at what is happening to policing. Your Sergeant's Central Committee are proud of every single one of you.

Some have played into the hands of government in advocating that cuts to the police budget will have no visible effect on policing. A proposition we in this room know is ridiculous. The Government need to appreciate that if police numbers are reduced, there

will be serious consequences. At last year's Joint Conference our national chairman Paul McKeever, predicted riots and there was.

It was Martin Luther King who said, "A riot is at bottom the language of the unheard". Well we all heard them last August, whether in fear of one's life at flashpoints throughout London and other major cities, or on television safe in the comfort of our own homes, far from the madness that left death, injury and destruction in its wake. Who could believe this was England at the commencement of the twenty-first century and in one of the greatest cities on earth, and with the Olympic Games less than a year away. London was burning in scenes reminiscent of the 'Blitz.'

The Government's cutbacks in the number of police officers are partly to be blamed for the riots. The police service of England and Wales is to be slashed in size by 16,200 police officers in the next four years. Ironically, this was the same number of police officers that were drafted in from all over England and Wales to keep the people of London safe and quell the mayhem. The bravery shown and injuries sustained by police officers in protecting persons and property was in the best traditions of British policing. We owe them

a debt of gratitude. But let's be really clear, these riots were not stopped by politicians, but by police officers putting their lives at risk on behalf of the public.

Last September, I attended the Superintendent's Conference and heard Mr Winsor speak. He had the audacity to tell the audience that some lawyers spoke in "contemptuous terms" of the quality of police evidence and that some officer's present evidence in court that is "barely literate." I suspect there are many police officers who would say the same of some lawyers. For him to state quite openly on a public platform that some officers are barely literate because the educational standards required to join the police service are so low was a disgrace and incorrect. To put it bluntly Mr Winsor thinks we're all thick and our natural leaders intellectually challenged. No Mr Winsor, we're not plodding rustics or something akin to Constable Dogberry, from Shakespeare's "Much ado about nothing." An idiot who continuously botches everything he tries to do. Is that what you had in mind when you spoke ill of us?

And then there was the Home Secretary who addressed the conference. Now you're really going to like this bit of smoke and mirrors. She stated that the

police service will not need to make 20% budget cuts. She said, “In cash terms, once precept forecasts are taken into account, we’re talking about a 6% reduction in total funding over four years. That is the actual reduction in their budgets that forces will have to deal with.” Come on Home Secretary, we’re not as daft as Mr Winsor thanks we all are!

George Orwell was right when he concluded: “Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give the appearance of solidity to pure wind.”

Also in September, I had the honour to attend the first ever National Custody Officer’s Seminar in Kegworth. We all know how vital the role of the custody sergeant is to policing and the wider criminal justice system. This is an awesome responsibility and lives depend on it. That is why the role is the ultimate specialist post within the police service. However, the role is once more under attack. Successive governments have made constant threats to the role and function of the custody sergeant, but have never walked in their shoes or seen the world through their eyes, as we have done.

The only truly holistic and fundamental Royal Commission into Policing back in 1962 prepared the way and set the scene for the development of the tripartite relationship of policing that has stood the test of time up until now, but I fear end of the road is in sight. The Police Federation has been calling for another Royal Commission for over twenty one years, but consecutive governments whilst in power would not allow it. We now face the political imposition of Police and Crime Commissioners in every police force, which will skew the natural order of things and create new and unprecedented tensions, and what if it goes horribly wrong? On a more positive note, I hope the Independent Commission on the Future of Policing led by Lord Stevens can make sense of this mess and do something about it before it's too late.

When the Home Secretary asked Tom Winsor to carry out an 'independent' review of police officer pay and conditions, she asked him to do it in two parts: first to make some initial short term recommendations, and then to follow this up with a set of final recommendations for longer term reform.

The Winsor Part One negotiations hit a brick wall and were not agreed despite alternative proposals from the

Staff Side of the PNB that would have saved millions of pounds for the police service. It was extremely frustrating and disappointing that we were unable to reach agreement and it was referred to the PAT, as your representatives on Staff Side fully engaged in the negotiations from the outset despite extremely challenging timescales. Unfortunately, instead of negotiation, the Official Side were intent on pushing through Winsor's recommendations. We were extremely disappointed over the PAT decision which left many police officers angry, dismayed and out of pocket. Whilst disappointed we stood by the arbiters decision, which was binding on both the Official Side and Staff Side. The decision was later ratified by the Home Secretary. However, without the evidence submitted by Staff Side, we believe the Winsor recommendations would have been forced upon the service unchallenged.

The Winsor Part Two report is now out with its many recommendations that could see police officer pay cut by thousands. We have called for the Home Secretary to reject outright the proposals contained within the report, which has been referred to the PNB and PAB. We believe this massive-scale police reform to be a

reckless and headlong rush, which could have unintended consequences for police officers and the public we serve.

We are outraged about what is happening to police officers. Officers will now be balloted on whether they want industrial rights enabling them to strike. Most police officers see strike action as a last resort, and would not want to put the public in danger; but at a time when the service is seeing creeping privatisation and the erosion of the Office of Constable through Winsor's recommendations, they believe policing as we know it is on the precipice of oblivion and the public are in real danger.

Back in March, I read with interest the think tank 'Policy Exchange' report on police pensions, as no doubt did many of you, but it was an article in a national newspaper titled 'let's be brave' that struck a chord with me. The article started with the sad death of our brave colleague PC David Rathband, which made the author re-think his approach to the shake-up of public sector pensions. He went on to say, "those courageous folk – police, fire and military personnel – who are prepared to die for me while I'm safe in my bed should keep their pensions." But what particularly

struck me was the last paragraph, when he said:
“When a police officer goes to work, he or she never knows what danger lurks. For the rest of us, the biggest problem we face is: Pret or Costa coffee? The author of the Policy Exchange report is a Mr Boyd. I would like to ask him: What is it then Mr Boyd, Pret or Costa coffee? We believe our well-earned pensions to be a fair reward for a job well done after a life time of public service.

Following quickly on the heels of the Policy Exchange’s attack on our pensions, we have another issue to contend with that could have grave consequences for the future of how England and Wales is policed. That issue is the privatisation of our police service, as two police forces have invited tenders from private companies to carry out the core role of police officers.

For some time we have been vociferous in warning those that are prepared to listen, that this government’s plan for policing is all but the virtual destruction of the finest police service in the world, in order to open the door for the private and commercial sector. By the imposition of budget cuts in the region of 20% on policing they are forcing some chief officers

to do the unthinkable in balancing the books, in order to maintain the current level of service to the public.

But let's be under no illusion, this is an extremely hazardous road to take, and once initiated there is no going back. The priority of the private and commercial sector has been, and always will be, the making of profit. Such enterprises are answerable to their shareholders and not to the public. Madness now reins in a world turned upside down, where folly has ascendancy over wisdom. It takes several lifetimes to create a great British tradition and momentary delusional foolhardiness to destroy it.

A former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, once said: "We must reject the privatisation of religion." We say: You must reject a privatisation of policing!

We know we're professional, the public know we're professional, as do other professionals we come into contact with. We do not need to be members of a professional body to be professional.

However, the Home Secretary thinks otherwise, that's why she commissioned in 2010, a review of 'Police Leadership and Training' within the Police Service of

England and Wales. The subsequent report in 2011, recommended the creation of a new professional body for policing, embracing the whole of the police service.

It is thought that this body will be implemented in two stages:

Firstly, an interim company limited by guarantee and probably owned by the Home Secretary;

Secondly, as soon as Parliamentary time allows, the body will be established in statute and its roles and responsibilities enshrined in law. Once the statutory body is up and running it is envisaged that the policing profession would determine the funding mechanisms, the standards that will apply to policing, the method of assessment and degree to which training will be offered by the body or outsourced to approved suppliers.

We believe the police service is already a professional service and police officers are highly accountable to the public they serve. As holders of the Office of Constable this is exemplified by the possession and use of expert or specialist knowledge, the exercise of autonomous thought, judgement and responsibility to the public. This allows for the protection that other

professions have sought to achieve through their professional bodies.

Prior to joining, police officers must undertake a pre-join assessment process to evaluate their suitability. Once appointed they are granted warranted powers reserved to police officers by statute. They are then subject to a strict disciplinary code and must undertake further training to achieve promotion or to specialise in a specific area of policing.

However, we are committed to promoting professionalism in the police service for all warranted police officers by improvements in the delivery of training and leadership programmes. Many of the building blocks are already in place for this. The NPIA has developed a number of training and leadership programmes which are excellent, but are not always adopted by forces. Building on the good work done by the NPIA, and developing quality assured standards of recruitment, training and promotion, which are mandated by Government, is the key to increasing the professionalism of the service. Any delivery of training and leadership development that passes the cost onto our members is unacceptable.

Whilst we do not support the introduction of a Police Professional Body, we do support remaining part of the discussions in order to influence it in the best interests of our members.

Therefore, we seek clarification and reassurance in the following areas:

What would be the benefits for our members in joining such a body?

Where is the evidence that it provides a better standard of service to the public?

Would it be voluntary or compulsory?

What would be the role of the Police Federation?

What are the governance arrangements?

To ensure national standards will products and services be mandated to forces?

Will police officers have to pay to be members of it?

What will be the role of the private and commercial sector?

What will be the role of Further and Higher Education institutions?

Who will be allowed to become members of it?

As you can see, there are more questions than answers.

Conference, policing is at a watershed and my message to the Government is this. Don't gamble with the future of the finest publically accountable police service in the world. One that has taken many generations of nurturing and tender loving care in order to grow and flourish in delivering to all our communities irrespective of post code, income or position in society. Neither we nor the public will forgive you if it all goes horribly and terribly wrong and your legacy is one of the complete destruction of a great British institution, together with the Office of Constable, who served it and the public so well, true to their oath, the law and the Crown. We call upon the silent majority within Government to wake from their slumber and flex their voice and muscle in support of the police service as the sword and shield of law and order throughout England and Wales. In the words of Henry Newbolt: "Play up! Play up! And play the game!" Your country and police service needs you.

It is a great honour and privilege to be your Chairman. We will continue to fight with all our strength on behalf of our beleaguered membership. This is a time for us

all to stand united as the Police Federation of England and Wales, all for one and one for all in the face of adversity and threat. **We're Proud to be Sergeant's and Proud to be Professional.**

Thank you Conference.

John Giblin

Chairman SCC

May 2012

