



People for Proper Policing in North Wales

Chief Constable's Blog Police elections?

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The absence of any recent additions to my Blog has rather **gratifyingly** caused a number of **enquiries and complaints**. So here I am back, **by popular demand!**

My absence has not been caused by a lack of suitable subject matter, as even a casual glance at a national paper will show, but rather simply by pressure of work and lack of organisation on my part. I have now got a grip of myself, if not the avalanche of work, and am back in the Blogging saddle.

Events in the Metropolitan Police have grabbed the headlines for months, a trend which shows no sign of slowing down any time soon. Out of the brouhaha has already emerged one development of value – in the wake of the forced departure of Ian Blair as Commissioner the Home Secretary has cancelled the silly plan to introduce direct elections to Police Authorities. Unfortunately withdrawing the relevant clauses from the Police and Crime Bill now before Parliament leaves the rump of it looking decidedly thin – and very unbalanced. **What now remains simply further strengthens the powers of the Home Secretary, but without the intended counterbalance of enhanced local influence on policing.**

These were ill-thought through proposals with significant adverse consequences, as the Home Office has belatedly realised. What happens next is far from clear. Policing has been arranged as a clever three-way balancing act between Home Secretary, local Police Authority and local Chief Constable since a Royal Commission in the early 1960s. The trend since then has been for a significant growth of power in the Home Office and to a lesser extent in Police Authorities, and a significant weakening of the position of Chief Constables - **in my view a good thing because we do live in a democracy**. The world has changed massively in the last fifty years or so and we in the police must therefore accept a modern view of democratic accountability. But it is also absolutely necessary in a democracy for the operational independence of the police to be protected. So far this has largely been achieved, but I fear is now under sustained attack from politicians who simply do not, or perhaps do not want to, understand the consequences of tinkering with the constitutional balance.

Policing in the UK has hitherto been remarkably free from direct political interference, as a direct result of that Royal Commission. We badly need another one – but unfortunately they have gone out of fashion because they kept coming up with solutions that governments found inconvenient. But interference is growing – and there is an undeniable ‘democratic deficit’ in the make up of current Police Authorities. Only a bare majority of the members are elected, and none of them directly so. Although there is a huge amount of sophisticated public consultation done nowadays to root our Policing Plans firmly in public opinion there remains a **really good question to ask about democratic accountability**.

The previous half-baked plans having been scrapped at the eleventh hour, what is now to be done? **Personally I'm for radical change**; our current arrangements are clearly under severe strain and are no longer fit for modern purpose. We should be considering a wide range of options such as **directly elected police chiefs, the abolition of Police Authorities in their entirety, directly elected Police**

Authorities with appointed senior officers, a national police service under central government command as in Ireland, devolution of policing to Wales (it works in Scotland, and would do here) and so on. There are lots of models deserving of serious, deep and apolitical consideration – based upon a proper understanding of the principles we wish to adopt or preserve, and not as now upon short term party political dogma with an eye on the next general election.

It's exactly what a Royal Commission does so brilliantly, and the refusal of successive governments to hold one speaks volumes about modern politics.

The PPP comments ... the great Irony is that the wild and irrational behaviour and destructive style of Brunstrom in particular and many others amongst the current ACPO members has generated an incredible level of distrust, distaste and general dissatisfaction amongst the people across the UK. In so doing Brunstrom has led the public and now the press to look critically at the whole system of Police management and control. We have found that the Police authorities are hopelessly ineffective and that the selection processes for both PA members and senior officers are seriously flawed or even corrupt. With Brunstrom you have to read his mind and here we see him angling for what?, maybe a role in some Royal Commission.

We must never forget that Brunstrom's legacy is **the failed road safety culture of the UK and Ireland and the **ever growing scourge of fixed penalties and 'points' policing**. This dangerously disingenuous man will be lucky to take his generous pension and disappear into the sunset on his boat. He must not be allowed to influence the future of UK policing. To ensure his legacy is not forgotten we will shortly publish an updated biography on this site.**

Brunstrom mentions Ian Blair, who was as much a Political appointee by the labour party as was Brunstrom. Both slavishly followed all the weird and irrational initiatives from 'Speed Kills' to 'diversity' to seriously damage the MET and NWPF.