

Don't Look Back in Anger

Tony Barton is the Secretary of Merseyside Police Federation. As the Federation enters its most critical period since it was formed in 1919, Tony reflects on some important points about modernisation, and why we need to maintain influence.



By **Tony Barton**,
Secretary Merseyside
Branch Board

In the Police Federation we often hear the term that our strength is our unity and despite the attempts to set us up to fail in 1919, we have managed to survive for almost 100 years.

So why the need to modernise if we have survived for this long?

I think the key phrase in that sentence is “survived”. We may have survived and for a time we were very influential and had a strong voice in policing but over recent years that voice has diminished somewhat as we lost our way and our purpose. The fight to retain officer numbers and protect pay and conditions wrongly led some groups and individuals within the Federation into a political arena which we were not equipped or qualified for. The focus of the police federation should never waiver from our core purpose and that is to represent rank and file police officers on matters of welfare in order to make the force more efficient and assist to deliver a first class service to the public we serve.

Although that may seem a narrow remit

it is actually extremely broad in the context of what we provide for members. The term welfare covers a multitude of areas including pay and conditions nationally; which contribute towards officers receiving fair remuneration which in turn assists officers feeling that they are valued and appreciated reflecting the importance of the role they play in keeping our communities safe.

Locally we provide representation on all matters relating to police duty from advising on variations of duties, grievances, employment tribunals, pensions, ill health retirement, postings, equality, health and safety, misconduct, promotion, overtime, regulations etc. This is only a short list of the issues that federation deal with on a daily basis and is by no means exhaustive. Suffice to say that on average one in two members had cause to use Federation services in 2013.

The police service needs a strong and effective police federation in order for it to perform cohesively and efficiently. The force has to address all of the above issues whether it would choose to or not and if there is no collective voice on representation all of these issue would become disjointed and fragmented and result in chaos.

Whilst not perfect it is accepted that

collective bargaining is the best way for large national institutions to negotiate, especially those with national pay arrangements.

In an ideal world there would be no need for worker representation as all managers would be very understanding and accommodating and all workers would be co-operative and efficient and everything in the garden would be rosy. Sadly this is not the case and where we have competing interests in the workplace disputes will inevitably arise. It is in the interest of the force to have a credible representative body to assist in resolving these disputes to ensure the individual can be confident that they have the opportunity to have the best case put forward on their behalf.

It is also in the interest of the force to have a strong representative voice that has the confidence of the members they represent if its own decisions are seen to be credible and have been robustly tested. This at times could be seen as an adversarial process but it is important that officers have a vehicle to test manager's decisions but also to understand that once that process has taken place it may be seen as the best or sometimes the only option. Hopefully members will understand that whilst they may not win every argument that have had the opportunity to put forward their



Merseyside Police Federation Representatives at the Police Federation Conference 2014.

best case with the support of their staff association.

Where we have strayed from our path recently and brought ourselves into sharp focus is in the political arena. We were not, and should not be, set up to engage in politics. We are servants of the Crown and apolitical. We should remain independent of any political party. It is right that we remain a critical friend of politicians and especially those involved in law making for this country and point out where we believe their decisions would have a negative impact on policing or indeed the public. In footballing terms, criticisms were made that the federation played the individual and not the ball.

It is precisely this area that we strayed into. Whilst trying to do our best for our members some of the federation representatives got sucked into a game they were never going to win. I cannot criticise the motivation for getting involved in such public debates but I do wonder about the judgement of such action?

We sleepwalked into a situation that very quickly and very publicly exposed

 *Whilst trying to do our best for our members some of the federation representatives got sucked into a game they were never going to win.*

weaknesses and naivety. Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread! We were sent packing with our tails between our legs and exposed ourselves to the ire of certain public officials who had their own axe to grind—they seized upon this opportunity to demonise the police and police federation.

If we did not act quickly and decisively we would have been at the mercy of politicians—which led us to announce the police federation independent review.

For those who have been following events since such time the rest as they say is history and this year at our national conference we voted to accept the recommendations of the independent review.

Recommendation 1 of the review was to adopt a new core purpose which states.

“That this conference agrees that in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities for the welfare and efficiency of its members the Federation at all levels will:

- Ensure that its members are fully informed and that there is the highest degree of transparency in decision-making and use of resources.
- Maintain exemplary standards of conduct, integrity and professionalism.
- Act in the public interest, seeking to build public confidence in the police service and accepting public accountability for its use of public money.
- Work together within the Federation and in partnership with others in the policing world to achieve its goals.”