

Message from The Chairman

Peter reflects on recent traumatic events for the Fed, but reassures local members it is business as usual on Merseyside



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Those who are regular readers of my Insight articles will be used to my starting with a few light-hearted words before getting down to the serious content of the piece. Normal service will be resumed next insight, but due to the subject matter of this edition and the constraints of limited space there's little humour in this editions piece.

That's not a bad place to start, as for the last few years there has been precious little to smile about in the world of policing in general (and the world of being a Fed Rep in particular). The Home Secretaries speech to the Federation Conference in May was the perfect illustration of the constant criticism and sniping that those involved in British Policing have had to contend with recently. Politicians and the entire media circus have consistently attacked the Police Service, thereby attacking each and every Police Officer in the country. Understand this— Theresa May was not just attacking the Federation during her tirade in Bournemouth this May; she was attacking the entire Police Service. She was attacking you, and every police officer in England and Wales.

After an all-too-brief comment about most officers being honest and hard-



working, the Home Secretary switched to an all-out attack, kicking off the next stage of her speech by referring to a number of concerns within policing (notably around policing by consent) that have been debated and discussed, in some cases, for decades. But if there is blame that affects policing by consent, then it surely has more to do with

the Home Office than with the Police Federation or the Police Service? Surely if the Home Office are concerned about consent, then it is their responsibility to identify where the problems are, what issues cause concern, and then set about providing guidelines to assist the service in rectifying any problems that are identified. To say there is a problem,

then blame the service for them is simply absolving all of their responsibility.

The Home Secretary then began the list of Police indiscretions; Leveson, Hillsborough, Harwood, Morgan, Ellison, Herne, and Lawrence, finishing with 11 ACPO officer's gross misconduct enquiries. All of these were sighted as examples of policing failures. There is no doubt that these incidents were not the services finest hours, and that much can be learned from the mistakes that were made in each of these incidents, but none of these incidents involved Merseyside Police. They are also largely historical. Think about it;

Hillsborough was in the 80's

The Stephen Lawrence investigation - that was in the 90's

The shredding of documents by the Metropolitan Police - that was over 10 years ago

The antics of undercover officers making suspects pregnant - was between 1987 and 2010

So an officer would need 25 years' service or more to have been involved in Policing at the time of Hillsborough. They would need 15 years or more to have been around for the Lawrence enquiry, while 10 years' service would have seen them being contemporaries to those who shredded documents. The other issue that you need to consider is— of these cases, how many involved the unsanctioned activities by incompetent, bad or corrupt officers? Apart from the case of Paul Harwood, they are arguably matters that are at the control or involvement of senior and chief officers, and not due to rogue officers acting illegally of their own volition. There was little involvement of the Police Federation, the Federation not being mentioned as a significant line of enquiry or criticism relating to any of these cases until the Home Secretaries speech this May.

Effectively, we have the failings at the top of those few forces involved in these incidents, being cascaded down onto

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those that are at the bottom. There's a saying about something smelly and unpleasant rolling downhill – sound familiar?

It's the unfairness of the criticism that angers most of us. To quote the Home Secretary "It is not enough to mouth platitudes about a few bad apples. The problem might lie with a minority of officers, but it is still a significant problem, and a problem that needs to be addressed," she said. She then criticised officers for in some instances for displaying "contempt for the public". Is this fair? Can she really think that the vast majority of honest hard-working Cops are not going to be upset by these generalisations?

So how did we get to this? How did the most respected Police Service in the world come to be so despised and undervalued by the establishment? And what is the Federation going to do about it?

You could argue that the Police Service and the Federation has been caught in a perfect storm. The worst economic collapse since the Second World War has allowed a weak Coalition Government to use austerity as a platform to drive through the cuts to police numbers, pay and conditions that the Federation had previously been able to fight off against administrations with much more powerful

majorities in the House of Commons. Look at the Sheehy recommendations of the early 1990's and compare them to what Winsor reported in his review; they are remarkably similar, and it does not require a leap of faith to suggest the Conservative Party has wanted to 'reform' the Police to suit their own ideological agenda for years.

These pressures on pay and numbers have led to some Federation members questioning the effectiveness of their representatives. Meanwhile a series of scandals have rocked the police and one of them in particular— Plebgate has mired the Federation in muck.

In answer to this the Federation nationally commissioned first a survey asking the membership what they thought about us, and once the results were analysed the Federation instigated the roots and branch review of its structure and way of operating that was headed by Sir David Normington. The Federation instigated the review and has now agreed to implement it in its entirety.

So does this matter to you, the Federated ranks on Merseyside?

Well in many respect the answer is 'No'. That is due to a number of reasons, but the main one is that most of the reforms Normingtons recommends are all about how the Federation is organised and run Nationally, and how the structure and finances at National level should change to be more beneficial and efficient. This will have little or no effect on us here in Merseyside as it has no effect on the day to day support we give. There will be some minor changes to how we are structured internally and how our Reps should meet to discuss matters, but other than that it will be business as usual for Merseyside Federation. Compared to some other Branch Boards in other forces, on Merseyside we are proud of the service and support our Reps provide to you, and while we are always open to suggestions as to how we could improve our service to you, we always try to put the needs of you, our members, at the centre of everything we do.

Stay safe