

# News release

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## *Press Release from Tony Blair MP*

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### **MODERN POLICING FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES**

Tony Blair MP, Shadow Home Secretary, speaking today at the Police Foundation Lecture: at 6pm on Tuesday, 14 June 1994.

"The case made tonight can be summarised as follows.

**First**, we need urgently to review the aims and objectives of modern policing, involving the public in that debate before the nature of policing is changed out of recognition through ill-considered policy executed in haste.

**Second**, that we must decide as a society the extent to which we wish the police to be a crime prevention as well as merely a law enforcement agency.

**Thirdly**, that the true role of a modern police service lies in developing the notion of strong community policing, where more not less power is devolved to a local level and where the police share responsibility with other local agencies in a proper partnership against crime.

**Fourthly**, this notion of community policing should be part of a much larger programme of national renewal and change, in which we encourage and develop a strong sense of civic duty and community values.

There is no more basic civil liberty than the right to live in peace, free from fear. Daily, in our country millions are denied that right. Crime is perhaps the single most destructive force

undermining the ordinary citizen's quality of life. It is not just the savage and brutal crimes that dominate the headlines or the statistics inadequate as they are but the breakdown of standards of respect for other people - the hassle, the anti-social behaviour, the abuse. The incidents may seem petty in themselves but they intimidate and unsettle the most vulnerable in our community making their lives a misery.

We are not going to recreate the world of fifty or sixty years ago; and in any event we should have the wisdom to recognise the difference between remembering the past with all its flaws as well as its virtues and simple nostalgia.

But we do need to rediscover a strong sense of civic and community values, the belief that we must combine opportunities and responsibilities and the realisation that true self respect can only come through respect for others.

For that respect to function we need to create a nation in which each individual has a chance to succeed, to have a stake in society, but where with that chance and stake comes the duties of citizenship in return.

This is not an impossible task. But it cannot be achieved without changing our society and renewing it, making the establishment of such strong social obligations a key purpose of our public and political life.

The phrase "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" is dismissed by our political opponents as mere rhetoric. It isn't. It is an attempt to break through the traditional divide

of left and right and acknowledge that whereas in the past the left has tended to undervalue the notion of duty, the right has disregarded the importance of creating a society of opportunity which is the only sure way that notions of duty can take root.

Because policy has alternated between the two strands of thought - falsely posed as a choice - it has failed. In the mid '80's the stress was on punishment. In the late '80's the Government reduced the prison population and switched to prevention. Here we are now back in the '90's with a supposedly new slogan that is actually a very old one - "prison works."

This policy pendulum is the core reason for the Government's ineffectiveness and the failure of its record on crime. It confuses those who administer the system and it leaves the police uncertain and demoralised.

We can now make a fresh start, combining a criminal justice system that works with a society prepared to act to tackle crime's causes, a new national programme around which the public and policy-makers can unite in the interests of the country and act in full and proper partnership with the police to combat crime and the fear of crime.

Absolutely central to this purpose is the need to determine sensibly and without prejudice, the modern role of policing because the police will in many ways symbolise the sincerity or otherwise of this approach. But policing should not be treated as if it were a separate, self-contained part of the system, but integral to the nation's drive against crime derived from our overall view of society.

The police service in 1994 is facing up to the most sweeping organisational change in 30 years. Change of course is needed in any dynamic organisation to ensure that it is able to respond to new demands and pressures, and the police service itself is constantly striving for and achieving improvement. But in planning change we must be quite clear about what we as society want from the police, and what the police service can realistically be expected to deliver.

Over the last couple of years we have been faced with a flood of proposals which have profound implications for the nature and structure of policing. One after the other we have seen the Sheehy Report, the Police and Magistrates Courts Bill and the review of core functions. Yet there could not be more of a contrast between the approach to change adopted 30 years ago and now. The 1964 Police Act was preceded by a Royal Commission, allowing for proper consultation, discussion and scrutiny. The 1994 Police Bill is being pushed with minimal consultation, driven by a Government frustrated by its inability to deal with rising crime levels and blinkered by its dogmatic attachment to concepts such as centralisation and privatisation. What is so extraordinary is not just that there has been so little debate on the philosophy and principles that should underpin modern policing, but that the proposals show so little understanding of the reality and practice of policing. Nor does there appear to have been any rigorous analysis of the facts of offending or the policy implications that flow from them.

Yet the changes that are being proposed for the police service have profound constitutional and practical implications.

What do we as society want from our police? Do we want the police to become more of

a law enforcement agency and less of a public service ? Are the public prepared to make less use of the police as a 24 hour social service ? What should the balance be between crime detection and crime prevention , between improved clear up rates and enhanced crime reduction work ? How much time do we want them to give to the victims of crime ? What are the implications of hiving off aspects of police work for other parts of the job ?

Decisions about the core duties of policing cannot be made on the basis of an economic feasibility study alone. Of course we need to ensure that officers' skills are used most efficiently and that the service is not overwhelmed by the sheer volume of tasks entrusted to it. But policing is a complex task. We are not dealing with a commercial undertaking and simply determining what functions can easily be hived off. Analysis must precede not follow Government decisions.

In relation to crime, how much can the police alone do to stop offending ? I suspect that much of the current Government concern to overhaul policing is based on their dissatisfaction with what they perceive as the police's poor record in tackling crime. The facts about crime since 1979 do indeed make grim reading.

Recorded crime has doubled in the last 15 years and is damaging the lives of individuals and communities throughout the country. The serious acts of violence hit the headlines and engender fear, while the daily round of abuse and petty vandalism diminish the quality of life. There has been a fivefold increase in robbery, the number of home burglaries has tripled and theft from cars has increased more than three fold.

We are led to believe that during the same period money has been poured into policing. In fact since 1979 the police establishments have increased by just 7.5%.

But in any event there are limits to what the police and indeed the whole criminal justice system can do to tackle crime.

We know that only 1 in 50 crimes results in a conviction and 1 in 750 in a prison sentence. That is why the Home Secretary's approach with its rallying cry that 'prison works' is so misleading. It is no good basing a policy on punishing only a tiny fraction of all offenders with prison. We must move away from the false choice between punishment and prevention and recognise that a sensible policy to tackle crime has both to strengthen the criminal justice system to deal with offenders more effectively, and to ensure that the penalty is appropriate to the crime, but also to put in place a national strategy to stop crimes being committed in the first place. Such a strategy would tackle both the underlying causes of crime and would ensure that action is taken now to reduce offending.

Nowhere is this more evident than in dealing with juvenile offenders. Some persistent and dangerous young offenders must, of course, be detained in secure accommodation, but we also need a range of measures in every area of the country to nip offending in the bud, to prevent the first time offender becoming a persistent offender.

At the moment there are gaping holes in provision across the country -

A 1993 Nacro survey of local authorities showed that

- nearly a third do not have bail support programmes.
- almost a third had no arrangements for cautioning -plus
- nearly two thirds have no remand fostering arrangements

•half have no motor projects

•and 10% do not even have intensive intermediate treatment programmes even though they are under a statutory duty to provide them.

Yet to stem the tide in youth offending we need to do more than put in place all these programmes to deal with juvenile offenders. We must also tackle the underlying causes of youth offending - youth unemployment, poverty, family breakdown, truancy and critically drug abuse.

There can, of course, be no excuse for committing offences and those who do should be brought to justice. But it requires only a moment's thought and a degree of common sense to see that if children grow up in a culture of low opportunity, poor education, little hope of achievement, unstable family life, then notions of mutual respect and good conduct are less likely to be fostered. Children are affected by families, families by local communities and local communities in turn by society as a whole.

The police do not create these conditions, but they are left all too often picking up the pieces. Policy makers must be realistic about what the criminal justice system can achieve, but there is much that can be done now to prevent offences occurring and in this the police have a major role to play.

There are two facts about offending which point the way forward:-

Firstly, despite the growth of national and international organised crimes such as drug trafficking and terrorism, the vast majority of crime is still local in nature and must be tackled locally.

And secondly, with such a small percentage of offences ending in court, it is vital to place far greater emphasis on crime prevention

I believe that the future lies in the development of the concept of community policing. And here I am not referring simply to putting more bobbies on the beat. Community policing involves the police in a shared approach to tackling crime problems. It starts from the premise that the police are part of the community and that they must work closely with the community to deal with crime. The police service must be in touch with local people - their concerns and fears and be accessible to them.

A partnership approach to crime prevention flows from this analysis. This entails the police, local authorities local people and local business in a joint approach to tackling crime.

There is no doubt that locally based crime prevention measures of this kind can reduce crime.

The Home Office's own Report, the Morgan Report, produced in 1991 recognised the need for a multi-agency approach. It concluded :

' The case for the partnership approach stands virtually unchallenged but hardly tested.....A successful multi-agency approach to community safety requires the formulation of an overall crime prevention strategy and the structure within which agencies can co-operate as well as deliver their own particular contribution.....At present crime prevention is a peripheral concern for all the agencies involved and a truly core activity for none of them.'

Despite this there are examples of successful partnerships from Birmingham to Wigan from Brighton to Sheffield . What is needed now is urgent action to develop a national crime



prevention policy to ensure crime prevention is prioritised across the country.

The package of measures that will be required to tackle crime in each will depend on careful analysis of local crime problems. The package may include :

- \* preventative community policing in high crime areas.

This involves targeted patrols in residential areas by known officers committed to working closely with the public.

- \* action to tackle drug and substance misuse.

The importance of tackling drug abuse cannot be over stressed at a time when the use of drugs particularly by young people is rapidly increasing. Here in London Operation Welwyn in Kings Cross provides an example of what can be achieved with a partnership approach. In Kings Cross the number of drug dealers has been dramatically reduced by a combination of robust enforcement techniques by the police and by local authorities using their licensing powers to prevent cafes staying open all night and providing refuge for dealers , and by making changes to street design and lighting.

In addition it is imperative that far more attention is given to drugs education and prevention to reduce the demand for drugs. It is surely the wrong allocation of priorities that the Government has ended national funding for drugs education co-ordinators , thereby reducing the number of co-ordinators from 135 to 75, but is wasting over £20 million on a Police Bill which no-one wants.

Other measures might include

- \* Ensuring that children who are difficult at school or truanting, who are often also the group most likely to offend are reintegrated into main stream schooling.

We heard earlier this evening of the innovative work of the Staffordshire police in the anti-truancy scheme in Stoke-on Trent which received the Ernst and Young / Police Foundation.

- \* we need where appropriate to provide supports to strengthen families so they are better able to supervise their children and divert them from anti-social and criminal behaviour
- \* we must provide training and supported work programmes to engage young people who are currently unemployed and have few if any job prospects.
- \* we need adequate recreational and youth provision in high crime areas.
- \* we need to consider better security measures such as locks and bolts and CCTV
- \* we must take action to stop repeat victimisation. Research has shown that people who are victims once are likely to be victims again and that providing immediate assistance to victims not only helps them to come to terms with the offence but also helps to prevent them from becoming victims once more.

To be effective the police also need I.T. systems and skills and training to analyse crime patterns to see where, when and how crimes are being committed in a locality and therefore how best to tackle the problem. This could involve crime prevention but it might entail targeting criminals in a particular area as in Operation Bumblebee. Yet under half the police services in this country have the I.T. systems to allow them to work in this way.

Of course some of these initiatives are happening in some parts of the country, what I am saying is that we need a proper national strategy and framework in which they become much

more widely and effectively available and where the same political impetus and energy is devoted to their development as is given to punishing the criminal in the small number of cases which actually lead to a conviction.

We need a police service that is close to the public, but has at its disposal the latest in modern technology.

It is precisely because of the growing recognition that the police are most successful locally and in partnership with key agencies such as local authorities that there has been such concern about the Police and Magistrates Courts Bill. There is genuine concern that the proposals are not only wrong in themselves but will harm the fight against crime in our local communities and that their effect will not only be a denial of constitutional principle but contrary to the practical ways in which crime can be countered. It is, in other words, literally a counter-productive measure.

Although some of the worst excesses of the Bill were removed in the House of Lords it remains a centralising measure which gives greater control to the Home Secretary.

The Government is hoarding powers which enable it to create larger police forces under greater central government control.

For instance:-

\*The Bill gives the Home Secretary power to amalgamate police forces without a public enquiry.

The basic right given to the most minor local property developments is to be denied in the case of something as important as local policing. No amalgamation should occur without the

consent of the local community.

The creation of larger police forces will make the police more remote from the public they serve.

We should instead be moving in the opposite direction - to greater local accountability and closer co-operation with the community.

\* the composition of police authorities is to be changed to reduce the number and percentage of local councillors and to introduce independent members whom nobody wants and who will be selected by the most absurdly bureaucratic method that could conceivably have been devised.

As a result there will be less democratic input from councillors in touch with their local communities.

\* The Home Secretary will set national objectives for all the police forces in the country with which local objectives will have to be consistent. He will be able to direct police authorities to establish performance targets to meet these objectives and he will be able to impose conditions with which the performance targets must conform.

When this is combined with the power to direct grants to police authorities in aggregate, which is not in itself wrong, and the fact that chief constables will be on short term contracts, the effect of all these measures will be substantially to remove local discretion in determining local policing priorities and to replace it with central control.

What is more, whilst there is no objection to police authorities and chief constables setting

goals and objectives, there is a real danger that pressure to achieve success in the more easily measured national indicators of performance such as clear-up rates for offences will begin to skew police priorities away from crime prevention.

Modern policing is about partnership, shared responsibility and a service fully integrated into the life of local communities. We must build on the proud tradition of policing by consent.

These are not just fine words ; they are an essential part of the fight against crime. To fight crime people must have confidence that their local police are approachable and in touch.

The police cannot fight crime on their own ; the whole community must be enlisted on their side.

The challenge is to work together to reduce crime. That is the way forward for policing.

That is what this country desperately needs."

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