

Commissioner

something like 90 per cent of the force, including a large part of the CID, and in particular the Joint Executive Committee of the Met branch of the Police Federation were as anxious for change as I was and were desperately keen to improve its tarnished image. Thirdly, I had the solid support and wise counsel of Jimmy Waddell and Philip Allen at the Home Office, who not only lent encouragement but protected my flank against interference by both politics or vested interest. With the Home Office, many senior colleagues, the Police Federation and the bulk of the force firmly behind me, there was no reason to doubt that radical changes could be made and would even be welcomed. They posed no constitutional or legal problems. But they did involve the abandonment of attitudes which had dominated the force for many years. They were also certain to impair vested interests, particularly those of the detective and the crime reporter, and thus were likely to be deliberately misrepresented to an already confused public. Paradoxically, the more wrongdoing brought to light, the more adverse publicity to be exploited by the supporters of the status quo. Much depended, therefore, not just on deciding and making the changes but on the way in which the need for them was explained to public and police alike. My last few days as deputy commissioner were therefore spent in careful consultation with the Home Office not so much about what to do but about how best to do it. The result was to rock the Met to its foundations, to enforce more significant change in five years than in the preceding century and to put the Met almost continually in the forefront of the news.

Putting our House in Order

the techniques of public interview would be given to members of the force at every level. I emphasized that this change in policy was not in expectation of any favours, such as restriction of adverse criticism or comment, and that in no circumstances would we withhold information which ought to be made generally available from a journalist or newspaper against whom we thought we had grounds for complaint. Nor did the policy mean that we accepted the Press at their own evaluation. It arose from my belief that the acceptability of the police in a free society depended, amongst other factors, on our willingness to be an accountable and open administration. A free and open relationship with the Press was, in my view, the best way to demonstrate this.

A similar meeting with representatives of the regional Press was held in November. The minutes of the meetings were circulated to the editors for comment and from the result a revised force-Press policy was drafted, put into effect and circulated with the agreement of the Home Office to every Member of Parliament by way of an appendix to my annual report. Looking back, I think this was one of the most important changes in my time at the Yard. It was full of risks and potential friction. It might have involved us in unpleasant situations with ministers, civil servants, Members of Parliament, the courts and private individuals. It was likely to be all the more difficult because of the healthily competitive nature of the Press. But in fact it was the only way to convince the Press and the public of the changing climate of police feeling and to gain public support. It succeeded beyond our most optimistic hopes and I must say that this was largely because the Press, whilst initially finding the change hard to believe, were obviously determined to give it a fair chance. There were occasional difficulties and disagreements, none of them insuperable, and relations between the force and the Press underwent a gradual but far-reaching transformation.

I feel bound to emphasize that the Home Office deserve much credit for agreeing the change to open administration, knowing, as they must have done, that some of the issues to be aired in public for the first time would be controversial, some would be opposed and some

In the Office of Constable

would, in any case, establish firmly the practice of police communicating direct to the public matters some of which had hitherto been regarded, rightly or wrongly, as more within the province of the Home Secretary, as policy authority for the metropolis, than the commissioner, as leader of the force. The effects, of course, were not felt immediately. Words and good intentions are one thing. Actions are another. But without any doubt relations between the force and the media were transformed to the benefit of both but, more importantly, to that of the public interest.

Whilst all this was going on, Colin Woods, in consultation with his colleagues, both CID and uniform, was drastically revising CID priorities, free from the constant worry of the fast dying friction between CID and uniformed branch. Some forms of serious crime, notably bank robbery, had got out of hand, and a concerted effort was needed to direct our combined resources to the best advantage. The arrest of one or two detectives, including a detective chief inspector, was making it clear to criminal and police alike that the change was here to stay and that the leaks which had for so long impeded our crime-fighting effort were soon to be plugged.

It is one of the more engaging aspects of the police job that whilst so much of extreme gravity is going on there is always some interesting sideshow to relieve the gloom. This was provided by a Mr Raymond Blackburn who applied unsuccessfully to the High Court for an Order of Mandamus directing me to enforce the laws relating to pornography. Five years earlier he had pursued a similar action against my predecessor in relation to gaming. That action lapsed when my predecessor withdrew an Order in relation to enforcement but did not vary his policy in any other way. This time I was determined to air the issue more fully. I arranged for the research necessary for an affidavit to satisfy the Court that the fault lay as much with unsatisfactory laws and pusillanimous courts as much as with the pusillanimous police to whom Lord Denning had referred in the case five years earlier. The application was dismissed by the High Court and Mr Blackburn appealed unsuccessfully to the Court of Appeal, where we were not

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them in the Press and elsewhere is inaccurate or speculative. The Ian Fleming school of fiction is responsible for a good deal of spurious folklore.

Most Special Branch work is boring, unromantic and certainly not dangerous. I know. I did it for several years and was glad to escape from it. Keeping watch on ports and airports for terrorists and extremists of the left and right sounds exciting. It isn't. It is dull, unrewarding and not to be endured for any longer than necessary. I was the proud possessor, if that is the right word, of the only scrambler telephone in Manchester for two or three years. It was even made available to the Prime Minister during his occasional visits. No message of any special significance was passed over it in my time even though Manchester was far from being free from subversive activity. The simple truth is that fascists, communists, Trotskyites, anarchists *et al* are committed to the overthrow of democracy and to the principle that the end justifies the means. Democracy must therefore protect itself by keeping a careful eye upon them. It is not difficult because they have never represented a serious threat. Paradoxically, they are less likely to do so if the state continues to treat them, as at present, as a bad joke. In my time in Manchester the Special Branch numbered three rising eventually to twelve, many of whom were almost wholly concerned with processing a flood of applications for certificates of naturalization. Hardly a threat to democracy in that great city!

Criminal intelligence gathering and target criminals were both born from the refusal of successive governments, Conservative and Labour, to allow the police adequate resources to fulfil their primary function of prevention. We were therefore driven, as in wartime, to selective fire-watching. We have long had a shrewd idea of the patterns of major crime and of those involved, but have always been hampered by the reality that our system of criminal justice encourages rather than deters it. Moreover, the public and Press are more concerned with the incidence of daily crime affecting individuals and therefore newsworthy, burglaries, muggings and assaults, rather than with sophisticated crime on a larger scale against commercial enterprises commanding less

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