

## David Cameron speech to the Police Federation 17 May 2007

Speaking to the Police Federation, today in Blackpool, Conservative Party Leader, David Cameron will say:

“Thank you for inviting me to speak to your annual conference: it’s a privilege to be here.

I know that police officers, when they talk about what they do, describe their work as “the job.”

But we all know it’s no ordinary job.

We all ask you, every single day, to do things most of us would never do.

To put yourselves in the front line of situations that the rest of us might prefer to run away from.

To put up with abuse, and aggression, and disrespect.

Often, to put yourselves in danger on our behalf.

Sometimes that has meant police officers making the ultimate sacrifice.

We saw that again recently with the tragic death of PC Richard Gray.

I want to add my voice, and that of the Conservative Party, to the many tributes paid to PC Gray.

Twelve British police officers have died as a result of attacks in recent years.

They died for us, the public.

That’s not a “job.”

That’s duty, dedication, a true vocation – and it deserves the highest

respect and gratitude from everyone in this country.

## **POLICING AND SOCIAL BREAKDOWN**

So we ask a lot of the police.

But increasingly, I think, we ask too much.

You don't need me to tell you how urgent a political priority crime and anti-social behaviour have become.

These issues are at the top of the political agenda because they're at the top of most people's personal concerns.

Whatever satisfaction you may get from that better job, better car, better house or better holiday, it disappears pretty quickly when your son comes home from school with a black eye in exchange for his mobile phone.

I spent the last two days teaching at a secondary school in Hull.

The most chilling moment came when children in one class were asked to put up their hands if they'd been victims of crime.

Almost every hand in the class went up.

There's nothing that does more to destroy people's quality of life than crime and the fear of crime.

But I believe that the entirely appropriate political prioritisation of crime and anti-social behaviour has, in recent years, given rise to a dangerous distortion.

There's a total lack of clarity about the responsibilities of the police and those of wider society.

You can see how it's happened.

If you're a politician, you know that the public are concerned about crime.

You want to respond to that concern.

You want to do something about it, and to be seen to be doing something about it.

What are the most obvious levers to pull?

The ones marked 'police' and 'criminal justice' – after all, police forces are things you control, unlike the social forces that contribute to crime.

So you pull, and pull, and keep pulling on those levers.

Thirty – yes thirty– criminal justice bills in the last ten years.

More laws. More offences. More targets and initiatives – “look at me, I’m tough on crime.”

And so gradually, the perception builds that fighting crime is simply a question of law enforcement and policing.

And that if crime goes up, the police are to blame.

The reality is different.

Crime, anti-social behaviour, disorder and incivility on our streets: these are the consequences of a breakdown in society – of a collapse in social responsibility.

In the home. In schools. In our culture and values.

And ultimately it is you, the police, who have the responsibility of picking up the pieces of our broken society.

But if we actually want to reduce crime - instead of just responding to it - we can't go on just picking up the pieces.

We have to mend our broken society.

And that is not your responsibility.

We broke our society – all of us, as parents, as citizens, as members of society – we broke it, and we have a shared responsibility, with

government, for fixing it.

If we sit back and expect the police to do all the work, we will forever be managing the social problem of crime, rather than solving it.

But just as we are undermining social responsibility by placing too heavy a burden of expectation on the police we are at the same time undermining your professional responsibility by placing too heavy a burden of central management and direction on the police.

Targets, directives, inspection and centralisation that take away your judgment and discretion, and undermine your morale and your vocation.

The effort to control crime through policing alone ends up controlling the police too much – making it harder for you to do the job you want to do, and we need you to do.

## **CHANGE**

So I want to be absolutely clear with you today about what I as Prime Minister would expect from you, and what you can expect from me.

I'm standing in front of you because I want to see real change in our country.

Real, lasting, positive change.

For years, we've been going in the wrong direction.

Instead of the serious, long-term analysis we need of the social breakdown that contributes to crime we've seen a short-term, superficial approach based on the utterly misconceived view that passing laws and 'rolling out' initiatives can make people good.

Night courts.

Marching jobs to cashpoints.

ASBOs for unborn children.

These are some of the initiatives, thank goodness, that were announced but never happened.

The trouble is that far too many headline-grabbing gimmicks were actually introduced.

And when it comes to the police and criminal justice, instead of the serious, long-term reforms we need to help fight crime more effectively we've seen a short-term, superficial approach which substitutes targets, micro-management and centralisation for real professional responsibility.

Just look at what they've done to policing.

There are five Public Service Agreements.

Five key priorities in the National Policing Plan.

Another six key priorities in the National Community Safety Plan.

Twenty three Baseline Assessments.

Thirty two Statutory Performance Indicators.

Police forces are overseen or directed by the Home Secretary.

The Police Standards Unit.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

The Audit Commission.

The National Policing Improvement Agency.

ACPO.

There are just too many top-down bodies interfering with local policing, often competing for the same territory.

And there are targets.

Targets that conflict with each other.

Targets that have to be met even if they relate to crimes that aren't a problem in your local area.

And along with the targets have come the paperwork and the reporting.

This top-down approach is completely, damagingly, one hundred and eighty degrees wrong and it's got to change.

We must trust the police, not second-guess them.

All of us fighting social breakdown so all of you can focus on fighting crime.

## **SOCIAL BREAKDOWN**

Let me first spell out what I mean when I talk about fighting social breakdown.

I mean a social policy revolution as far-reaching and lasting in its positive effects as the economic revolution the Conservative Party led in the 1980s.

It is necessary because social breakdown is the great challenge of our times, just as rescuing our economy was the great challenge of two decades ago.

You see this not just as professionals.

Police officers are mothers and fathers, neighbours and friends.

You can see that things have gone badly wrong in our society.

Family breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, truancy and poor discipline in schools.

These are some of the most important causes of crime and they're getting worse, not better.

We're bringing up a generation of youngsters, many of who are simply not equipped to be responsible adults.

It's no use just blaming them.

We set the rules and we lead by example.

A year ago I made a speech about young people and crime.

Yes, the one about hoodies.

It has been more misunderstood and more misrepresented than anything I've ever said.

In fact it was three words I never said.

So let me try again.

Aggressive hoodies who threaten the rest of us must be punished.

They need to know the difference between right and wrong, and it's our job to tell them.

But what do we really want, a society where more and more kids are out of control, a rising tide of crime and punishment?

Or do we want those kids to behave properly in the first place?

If we do, we've got to stop the problems before they start, and that means making sure every child grows up in a stable loving home.

That's not soft – it's serious.

Politicians who attack me for saying it, even though they privately agree with me, are not tough – they're cynical, short-term and profoundly wrong.

But let me tell you, the public have had enough of politicians who tell them what they want to hear who talk tough while behaviour gets worse who pretend that every social problem has a state solution.

So do not expect the next Conservative Government to pass a criminal justice act every five minutes.

Do not expect an ever-increasing array of offences for you to police, new

laws to uphold or initiatives to unroll.

Instead, expect us to ask society as a whole to address the causes of crime to focus on social breakdown and the family breakdown that lies at the heart of it to work towards the proper drug rehabilitation we so desperately need and to acknowledge that changing our society for good is not the work of a weekend's headlines or even a parliamentary term, but a whole generation.

## **PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

And just as I am clear about society's responsibility for fighting the causes of crime, so too am I clear about the police's responsibility for fighting crime itself.

You accept that responsibility when you choose to become police officers, and I believe it's time for reform to set you free to do the job you want to do and to give you the full professional responsibility you deserve.

Too much discretion has been taken away from police officers by a system which no longer trusts professionals.

Your discretion to bring charges has been removed – and it's you who have to deal with the delays in custody, not the CPS.

Your discretion to choose how to deal with minor crimes and resolve conflict on the streets has been diminished – and it is local communities that suffer.

Police officers used to be street corner diplomats.

Now, too often, you are agents of Whitehall.

You should be crime fighters, not social workers or form writers.

Look at the effects of the Human Rights Act.

I see the Home Secretary has now criticised it.

The same Act his government brought in, despite the warnings.

Over the last few years we've seen a series of disgraceful incidents.

Prisoners given access to pornography.

Burglars given Kentucky Fried Chicken.

One Chief Constable prevented from publishing wanted posters for murderers on the run, on the grounds that to do so would infringe their human rights.

No wonder the public thinks that the authorities are on the side of the criminals.

So a key part of our reforms to the criminal justice system will be to replace the Human Rights Act with something that works.

## **SCRAPPING TARGETS**

And at the heart of our plans for police reform is my commitment to bring common sense to the law and to policing.

Restoring discretion to officers.

Sweeping away the arbitrary national targets that skew performance, leading to police officers going for easy detections of minor crimes.

I'm delighted that the Federation has raised this issue so effectively.

Because we have been saying this for some time.

Last year I said that national targets should be scrapped.

In our recent proposals we argued that detection targets are distorting performance.

We called for a far simpler measurement of police performance, based primarily on levels of crime, not how well forces are meeting targets.

I see that the latest line from the Home Office is that they don't have a

sanction detection target, they have “an overall desire” to bring offenders to justice.

Well I have an overall desire to put a stop to this nonsense.

## **LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Like any public service, the police must be accountable.

But I believe that this accountability should primarily be local.

After all, police forces grew out of the localities.

In my judgement, police authorities are too weak and too invisible to exercise that local accountability so we plan to replace them with directly elected commissioners – commissioners, not police chiefs - who will answer to their communities.

In doing so, we will of course protect the operational independence of forces.

We have a vital duty to prevent the politicisation of policing.

## **TERRORISM AND SERIOUS CRIME**

But giving police officers more discretion and local responsibility is only part of the story.

We also need to a police service that can address the most complex challenges facing our law enforcement agencies today fighting terrorism effectively and tackling serious crime and incidents that cross force borders.

That either means forces collaborating more effectively, or a national Serious Crime Force to do the job.

Either way, the era of forty three fiefdoms is over.

## **WORKFORCE REFORM**

The world is changing, and no organisation can be immune from that.

That's certainly the lesson which we in the Conservative Party have had to learn.

When you look at antiquated IT systems that aren't joined up when you look at processes and paperwork that a modern business would streamline when you see police officers still doing jobs that a civilian could do, releasing those officers for frontline duties when you look at pensions that aren't portable then it seems to me there is an overwhelming case for change.

Change isn't always easy.

In fact, it's frequently pretty tough.

But the questions are tough, and in the 21st century, we must face them directly and honestly.

Do you really want to work in an organisation where your reward bears little relation to your skills or how much you've put into the job?

Do you, with all your training and experience, really want to do clerical jobs because someone has objected to hiring a civilian to do them?

Do you really want to work in an organisation where you can't move jobs before retirement because of the impact on your pension?

I suspect not.

The changes we have proposed to the way police workforces are managed are all intended to produce better trained, better motivated officers, better enabled to do the job.

It would be easy for us to ignore these issues, to choose a quiet life.

But I don't believe that would do you, me or the public any good.

I've had literally hundreds of communications from police officers, by letter, by email and in private conversation - and I get the same message again

and again.

Please, just let us get on with the job.

So when I talk about reform I emphatically don't mean more performance measures or national targets in fact I mean sweeping those things away.

So here's the deal.

We will scrap unnecessary paperwork such as the stop form.

We will update and integrate inadequate police IT.

We will scrap central targets and interference.

We will reduce the number of top down central bodies attempting to direct policing.

We will radically simplify the performance measures.

We will restore officer discretion.

In return I want you to agree to the changes we need to make to build a police force where motivated, committed officers can succeed.

Last month, the Conservative Party's Police Reform taskforce published a two hundred and fifty page consultation document on how to improve policing.

I know that Jan and her team will be responding to our proposals and I'm very happy to answer your questions about them in a moment.

Our direction of travel is clear: more local policing, stronger accountability, better performance, reforms to let you do the job.

But we can only do this with your help.

We need to get the detail right.

Nick Herbert has been here all week.

As Gordon Brown might put it, he's listening and learning.

## **OTHER AGENCIES**

One thing Nick and I understand very clearly is that while the police will always have the lead role in the fight against crime, other parts of the public sector must also fulfil their responsibilities.

Local councils must work in effective partnership with you to develop crime reduction strategies: they cannot just leave it to the police because you are the 'can do' service.

And we need to improve the rest of the criminal justice system.

When the police assemble a case, you must have the support – and availability – of the CPS to take it on.

The courts must work properly, with the same understanding of local criminality that you have.

There must be honesty in sentencing, so that when offenders are brought to justice they serve a proper sentence.

We need a penal system that rehabilitates offenders so you don't find them back on your doorstep within months.

So this is what you can expect from the next Conservative Government.

Reforms that join up the criminal justice system make each of its components more effective and which give you the freedom to do your job the way you want to do it.

Let me repeat my offer to the police.

You make the changes which will improve police performance.

And I will stop the centralisation, bureaucracy and political interference that gets in your way.

I will ensure that you have the strategic direction, the support and - above all - the freedom to deliver effective policing in the 21st century.

The essence of any police force is its people, above all its police officers.

That's where most of the resource goes.

You are the investment which we, society, make to keep us safe.

We rely on you, the thin blue line.

You swear your oath in the office of constable, to "cause the peace to be kept and preserved and prevent all offences against people and property."

In turn, we the people – and the politicians – owe you something: our support.

As Sir Robert Peel famously said, the police are the public and the public are the police.

As one officer recently remarked when we were discussing options for change, "at the end of the day, we all want the same thing".

And so we do.

We all want to see a safer society.

That means more professional responsibility for the police, so you can do your job – fighting crime.

And it means more social responsibility from the rest of us, so we do our job and address the long-term causes of crime.

Committed to our shared objectives.

Clear about our distinctive responsibilities.

Let's work together, to build a society we can be proud of."