Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Impact of police reform on local policing

Written submission from Jack D. McGregor

Although doubtful of any effect this may have I feel that in response to the recent press release I should once again put ‘pen to paper’.

Back in 1965 I joined the Scottish Police Service as a member of Perth and Kinross Constabulary. As a new recruit I attended the Scottish Police College where I was informed and expected to act on the basic principles of ‘Guard, Patrol and Watch in order to protect life and property and to prevent and detect crime’. Ultimately, and apparently in order to reinforce those principals, a number of civilian posts were created in order to release more police officers to attend to those police duties. Found to be of success, more civilianisation took place in order to release more trained police officers to those duties. It was also found to be cheaper to employ civilians to do the more mundane tasks of answering telephone calls and other office duties than using trained officers. During the next few years a greater and wider expertise was gained by those civilians in many different departments, thereby allowing police officers to continue to engage more fully in their stated duties.

Then along came regionalisation and with it the closure of the majority of single stations and some other small community units. The men previously working them being drawn into larger stations, leaving large areas being decimated of their previous police presence. I am quite sure, indeed positive, that the cover given by the majority of men in those small stations towards those early learned principles of police duties, was not appreciated by any others than those who actually worked them, including very senior officers. Instructions, orders and expectations from some central source at the hub of the new area, who had no idea of the distances or the geographic location of the area involved. Further efforts to centralise only made matters worse. The rural communities in particular seeing less and less of patrolling police. The early principles of guard, unless you happen to be a ranking parliamentary figure, gone. Patrol, less and less, to all point gone. Watch, yes, watch yourself, particularly your back, your stature, your speech, your demeanour, your political correctness, but watching out with regard to protection purposes extremely difficult to find the time. And still, parliament when faced with a problem will legislate against it to solve that problem. By whom? The ever stretched police service.

If regionalisation was a disaster, nationalisation of the police service is a catastrophe waiting to happen. Public consultation, warnings from retired police officers of all ranks, including former chief constables, meant nothing. The Government just bulldozed its way through along with the Fire Service legislation, gay marriage legislation etc. etc. Now we have a reversal of earlier policy whereby civilian staff are being ousted to be replaced by police officers, whose expertise is ever more needed, off the street. We have left, a fire brigade type service where an officer is sent to an incident by somebody he doesn’t know, to somewhere he’s never been and no idea how to get there. It’s not the city centre which suffers most, it’s the large rural areas of this country which have to bear the shock, and the poor suffering victim who lies
there. If this madcap idea is to continue, you are going to need every local control room and service centre you've got for any success to be achieved.

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21 November 2013