

Briefing Note

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UPHOLDING THE LAW

At the Conservative Central Council Meeting at Harrogate on 26th-27th March, both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary dealt with the problems of law and order (see also Briefing Note No.3, 2nd February 1982.) Crime figures published on 12th March 1982 showed that, although there had been a reduction in the numbers of killings, rapes and other sexual offences in 1981, total crime recorded had risen by 10 per cent to reach some 2.96 million offences in England and Wales. The increase in violent crime against the person was less than 3 per cent, but increases of 10 per cent or more in recorded robbery, burglary and theft have caused public disquiet.

A Less Disciplined Society: Restoring Standards. As the Home Secretary pointed out:

"The police, the courts, and the law and order services are faced with picking up the pieces in a society where too many individuals have turned to crime ... We have laid too little emphasis on parental responsibility and the role of family, too much emphasis on material possessions and too little on the hard work needed to earn them. We have seen discipline decline in school, in workplace, and in society. Violence and greed have been too readily excused; law breakers glorified. Order has become a dirty word for some political groups: duty derided as a concept of the past" (26th March 1982).

Taking up this theme, the Prime Minister deplored the vilification of traditional standards and said that "the time for counter-attack is long overdue" (Harrogate, 27th March 1982).

The Conservative Record. Mr. Whitelaw reminded Conservatives of the inheritance in 1979: a police force whose pay was held down, whose morale was low, whose experienced officers had left in large numbers; neglected prisons; a criminal justice system which lay too little emphasis "on the impact of suitable sentences, and the interests of the victims of crime."

He said that the Conservative Government had strengthened the police force by over 8,000 officers in England and Wales; widened the range of penalties available to the courts; looked after the interests of victims of crime; introduced the short, sharp, shock in detention centres; and were making more parents financially responsible for the consequences of their children's crimes. Mr. Whitelaw referred to the prison building programme, the largest for decades, and the considerable successes of the police against organised crime and terrorism, and the improved effectiveness of their equipment and methods against riots.

Commenting on this record, the Prime Minister paid tribute to Mr. Whitelaw "who, throughout these past three years has shown himself to be superbly qualified for the high office which he holds." (Harrogate, 27th March 1982).

Further Measures

Police Powers. Mr. Whitelaw said that the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure ('Philips Committee'), which reported in January 1981, recommended extensions of police powers, "in particular by rationalising the

existing powers to stop and search for stolen goods, and by introducing powers to stop and search people for offensive weapons, and to search premises for evidence in difficult cases. I intend to bring forward proposals for legislation on these lines" (Hansard, 25th March 1982, Col.1118).

Juries. Mr. Whitelaw also announced that he would "take the earliest suitable legislative opportunity" to debar from service on juries for ten years anyone convicted of an imprisonable offence. At present, only those who have served a prison sentence of more than three months are disqualified.

Curfew Orders? In debates on the Criminal Justice Bill, Mr. Patrick Mayhew, Minister of State at the Home Office, supported a Conservative proposal for curfew orders which would make it possible for courts to order young offenders to stay at home at night or at weekends for a designated period.

Labour Reaction. The Shadow Home Secretary, Mr. Roy Hattersley, made the absurd comment that the "new police powers ... would detach the police even further from the community". There would be "a consequent increase, not reduction in crime" (Hansard, 25th March 1982, Col. 1112).

Labour Disrespect for the Law

Attacks on the Police. Sir Kenneth Newman, former head of the RUC, has been appointed to succeed Sir David McNee as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in October 1982. Sir Kenneth has immediately become the target of fierce attack by the Labour leader of the GLC, Mr. Ken Livingstone: "We do not want to see police-Army methods that have been fashioned to meet the needs of colonial war ... Five years of Newman could leave the working-class areas of our city in much the same state as the Catholic areas of Northern Ireland" (Daily Telegraph, 26th March, 1982).

Mr. Livingstone said that Labour must redouble its efforts to establish GLC control of police appointments and policy. He commented: "I know a large proportion of the Metropolitan force is clearly racist and should be pensioned off" (Daily Mail, 30th March 1982).

Even Mr. Livingstone was surpassed by Mr. Chris Knight, a Labour Council candidate in Lewisham, a self-confessed vigilante, who dismissed the police as "ultimately incompetent to perform any useful function whatsoever ... It may be we'll have to take over the policing of London ourselves" (London Labour Briefing, March 1982).

Encouragement to Law-breaking. The Labour GLC has recently used ratepayers' money to urge people to break the law over transport fares. Two GLC councillors have written "often the only way to defend the gains the Labour Movement have made is by breaking the law" (London Labour Briefing, March 1982). Over 100 Labour Borough Council candidates in London have signed a pledge to put the Labour Manifesto above the law: "We will as necessary defy not only the rulings of the district auditor but also the whole undemocratic rule by unelected judges" (Guardian, 25th March 1982). It was of such people that the Prime Minister said: "These are the men and women who are guilty of eroding respect for the law and the values by which society lives." (Harrogate, 27th March 1982).

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