



Tony Judge

## To go or not to go

In his pugnacious response to the IPCC report on Stockwell, Sir Ian Blair said that all his predecessors had faced similar crises and none had resigned. In public life, it used to be taken as read that the man at the top would fall on his sword when things went pear shaped. Today, Ministers and high-ranking public officials, even those caught with their trousers down, ride out the storm. Some, it is true, have resigned eventually, but not without putting up a fight.

As for past Commissioners, two stand out. In 1968, Sir Joseph Simpson, at the time a dying man, was faced with the huge anti-Vietnam demonstration that, according to the media, could see the worst rioting in a century. The Home Secretary, James Callaghan favoured a ban. Simpson persuaded him that the Met would cope. Callaghan was even more alarmed when he was told that the marchers would be given the freedom of the streets. On the day, these tactics ensured that the main event passed off without incident, and a Maoist attempt to storm the US embassy was thwarted. No guns, water cannon, tear gas, not even riot gear. That day marked the zenith of public esteem for the Met, not only in London, but throughout the world.

Sir Robert Mark began by personally confronting IRA terrorists who were holed up with hostages at the Spaghetti House restaurant, and told them they were going nowhere. He then went on to wage unrelenting war against CID corruption. Mark actually did resign, partly in protest against changes to the complaints procedure, which he felt would keep villains in the job longer than they deserved to be.

Sir David Macnee was at the helm when the Scarman Inquiry blamed “insensitive policing” for the Brixton riots. When an intruder at Buckingham Palace confronted the Queen in her bedroom Willie Whitelaw urged Macnee to resign, a request he rightly ignored. His successor, Sir Kenneth Newman, was fortunate not to face a public inquiry into the handling of the Broadwater Farm riot, when PC Keith Blakelock was brutally murdered. Rank

and file officers felt strongly that senior leadership let them down on that horrific night.

The media pursuit of Sir Ian Blair is driven by politics, drip-fed by anonymous malcontents in the force. The Commissioner’s critics see him as a New Labour appointment, committed to a style of policing that is an anathema to them. The campaign ignores the inconvenient truth, that the Met has been performing well in the past three years.

The De Menezes case will overshadow the force for months ahead. The inquest will go beyond the limited area examined in the corporate manslaughter trial. Disciplinary issues remain unresolved. A civil action is to come. Just when the Met deserves to be praised to the skies for its success against the would-be July 21st bombers, it continues to be judged in the light of one tragic error. The opposition parties, disgracefully, have called for Blair’s head, and with the disgruntled ex-DAC Paddick contesting next year’s Mayoral election for the Lib Dems, the Commissioner could be an election issue. Sir Ian enjoys the support of, amongst others, the government, Mayor Livingstone, the Metropolitan Police Authority, and the great majority of fair-minded Londoners. However, his Commissionership is wounded, perhaps mortally. Would the Met be better placed to rebuild public support and its self-confidence, if a new leader takes command in the near future?

Tony Judge has been involved with the Police Federation for 50 years. He was the youngest police officer on the Joint Central Committee and founded *Police* magazine in 1968.