

# NEWS ROUNDUP

## Police Privatisation

Private security companies are estimated to be running more than 1000 policing patrols on private housing estates, shopping precincts and other public areas around the country, according to a survey published by *Policing Review*. This 'creeping privatisation' of police duties is causing concern at all levels of the police service.

The increased privatisation of the police may 'undermine the willingness of the general public to cooperate with them' said Roy Hattersley, the shadow Home Secretary, as plans were raised to 'hive off' the police national computer and forensic science services. This news follows the introduction of Britain's first privatised police force. Twenty five security guards at Harwich, Essex, have been sworn in as 'Special Constables' under a 150-year-old Act which gives them the same powers within the port as policemen. They are employed by Protective Security Systems - and unlike ordinary special constables, the guards, who do not wear police uniforms were not vetted by the police.

## Special Constables

Research carried out by Rob Mawby and Martin Gill on volunteers in the Criminal Justice System (*Crime Victims: Needs, Services and the Voluntary Sector*, Tavistock, London, 1987) found that special constables differed from other criminal justice volunteers in that their views on sentencing were more severe, and their view of contemporary Britain was slightly more likely to constitute a picture of a society in which crime featured as a major problem. They were likely to see offenders as a distinctive sub-group of the population, and were unwilling to accept that offenders could be society's 'victims'. Special constables were more conservative than their fellow volunteers in victim support and probation.

The deployment of special constables, however, is valuable and their commitment is long-lasting. The authors stress the role of organisation in maintaining commitment amongst its volunteers. The greater 'corporate identity' of special constables, involving a commitment both to the nature

of the work and to the police as an organisation, may suggest that in other areas of voluntary work, 'the relationship between organisation and volunteer is strengthened.'

## Race

A confidential survey carried out for Scotland Yard found that two out of three young blacks would not consider joining the police, believing the service to be racially prejudiced. The report advises the Metropolitan Police to clean up its image if they are serious in their hopes of boosting their ethnic minority recruitment. While London has an ethnic minority population of 14.6 per cent only 1.5 per cent of Metropolitan Police officers are black or Asian. Walter Easey, policing adviser to the Association of London Authorities, has supported calls for a Royal Commission on policing, and wants the police to clean up discrimination in the Force. An editorial in *Policing Review* said that better information and statistics on the racial element in crime would help.

## Lay Visitors to Police Stations

A national survey of lay visiting schemes carried out by Charles Kemp and Rod Morgan (*Behind the Front Counter: Lay Visitors to Police Stations*, HMSO, 1989) assesses the implementation of such schemes since their introduction in 1983. At the time of writing the report (Autumn 1988) only six police authorities in England and Wales had not introduced lay visiting schemes. Lay visiting 'has become an integral part of the local police-community scene', following a recommendation put forward by Lord Scarman after the 1981 Brixton disorders that provision be made for 'random checks by persons other than police officers on the interrogation and detention of suspects in the police station.' Such visits represent an attempt to promote more open stewardship and greater professional accountability on the part of the police. Lay schemes have parallels with prison Boards of Visitors, with all the advantages and limitations that such a comparison suggests. There is no spe-

cific requirement that lay visitors include Home Office prisoners held in police cells in their visits.

## Police Complaints Authority

Under Part 1X of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the procedures for handling complaints against the police were altered. The most prominent change has been the introduction into complaint investigations of 'lay supervision', which in practice is undertaken by a new body, the Police Complaints Authority, and which tends to be carried out in relation to the most serious complaints. At the other end of the spectrum, minor complaints can now be dealt with by way of Informal Resolution, which avoids the need to invoke the weight of the full complaints machinery. Mike Maguire and Claire Corbett have recently completed a two-year Home Office funded study at the Centre for Criminological Research, Oxford, which has taken a broad look at how the procedures are working, and has sought views on the system of those who make complaints, investigate them and are on the receiving end of them. To supplement their examination of complaints made at a local level, they spent some time at the Police Complaints Authority examining the nature of its more serious caseload and the nature of supervision by members. As yet only one paper from the research has appeared, and this is included in 'Coming to Terms with Policing', edited by Rod Morgan and Robert Reiner (Routledge, April 1989).

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