

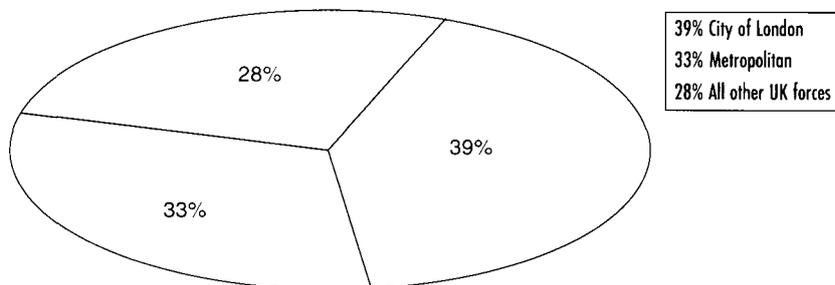
# Punishing white collar crime

By then, Parnes had been certified fit to return and, pale faced, he insisted on standing to take his punishment. Some of the jurors - who, like *tricoteuses*, had returned to the Hall of Justice for the *finale* - seemed to sneer, approvingly, as if to say 'show your bottle, you rich bastard'. Vanity of vanities, all is Bonfire of the Vanities. The judge - less stern in tone this time around, but still speaking at length - allowed him month-for-month what he had served in Terminal Island while successfully resisting extradition. The judge did not have to, by law, but it indicated that he had taken the line of propriety in not treating him as a refugee from justice. Parnes got two and a half years.

There followed the most disgusting scenes, familiar to the families of gangsters and terrorists, and to the victims of disasters, as the television interviewers and the 'popular' press - who had previously been absent from the trial - harassed the families on their way out for the shots of emotional bereavement so beloved by their readers and viewers.

Jonathan Guinness afterwards praised - as well he might - what Ernest Saunders had done for his company and added the classical allusions that Saunders had flown so high he must have touched the sun. This was *hubris*, followed by

## THE SERIOUS FRAUD OFFICE Police forces involved in SFO cases during 1990-91



All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number  
SOURCE: SFO Annual Report 1990-91

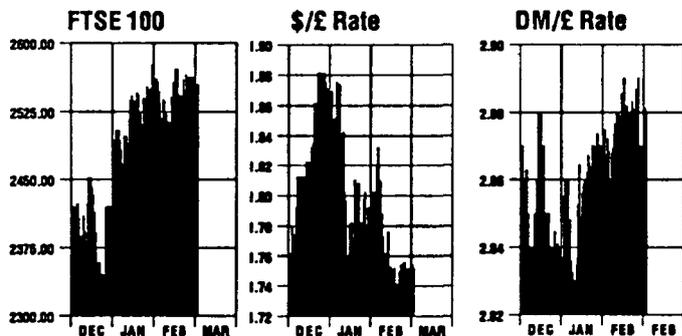
prospect of conviction).

Then came the appeals, Saunders' sentence for stealing £5.2 million was reduced to two and a half years on the grounds of his well-certificated Alzheimer's. Parnes' sentence was cut by six months, and the rest stayed as they were. Soon after his release, Saunders' mental health miraculously improved: his specialists, apparently, had not realised that his symptoms were attributable not to Alzheimer's (from which one doctor stated that he had been suffering at the time of the Distillers' takeover) but rather to the cocktail of drugs that he had been taking in prison. Will the doctors who testified for him adver-

Four? Other frauds are far more serious, and the retributive/deterrent impact of weekend imprisonment (or a fortnight in a closed prison) plus extended community service, outside the Friends of Covent Garden charity circle, would surely be at least as great as a spell in Open Prison?

Different considerations may apply to others with less stake in society and less money than these defendants who set out upon preconceived fraudulent schemes, but crude populism is no substitute for reasoned justification for sentencing. Is other offenders' perceptions of justice a valid reason for severity for all powerful offenders? The pity is that sentencers seem less exercised when punishing those for whom they have less empathy. Barbarism rules, OK?

Michael Levi is Professor of Criminology, University of Wales College of Cardiff.



Nemesis. Fall from Grace was the overwhelming theme experienced by everyone. Some weeks later, Sir Jack Lyons was given a £3 million fine, avoiding imprisonment because of ill health, though he did lose his knighthood (which probably would have been a sufficient deterrent had he seen even a remote

tise their inadequacy at diagnosis, or will the GMC take action? No wonder that so much cynicism is evinced by ordinary prisoners about the fairness of the sentencing process.

Yet at another level, what is the point of imprisoning the Guinness

