

editorial

just policing

With approximately eighteen months to go until the start of the next century, the bulk of popular and academic discourse appears to be affected by a general millennial fever. 'Millennium', '2000' or 'Future' now seem to appear in every other book title, and contemporary social theory has it that we either already inhabit, or are entering, a profoundly changed social order. Our major social institutions are held to reflect these broader changes; indeed, they are apparently postmodern themselves.

Whatever the 'truth' of the matter, it is clearly the case that concerns about the future are dominating much of what is currently written and said. This is just as true of policing as it is the case, seemingly, with all else. How policing is changing is currently at least a popular topic as, for example, how effective policing is. And yet, as any even brief flirtation with the subject of history should teach us, continuity is likely to be just as visible as change.

In this issue we focus on policing and, in doing so, we are concerned to look at the past and present as well as turn our attention to the future. Our interest in the continuities in policing is, unfortunately, stimulated in part because of the refusal of many of the problems that have confronted policing in recent decades to disappear. One of these is racism. The relationship between the police and minority communities has long been characterised by tension and conflict. If anyone thought that this had radically changed then the evidence currently being given in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry should act as a corrective. In this issue we consider the issues of racism and sexism. While, as **Frances Heidensohn** and **Pauline Clare** argue, there are some optimistic signs in the increasing number of women in senior positions in forces around the country (the position now may be compared with **David Wall's** brief presentation of the history of chiefs), the continuing problem of racism within forces, and between forces and minorities is, as **Simon Holdaway** points out, something that needs radical action.

With continuing concerns about the behaviour of police officers, how the police are to be controlled or held

accountable is therefore of considerable importance. Local police authorities have recently been reformed and **Ruth Henig** suggests that they are much more effective as a result. There can be little doubt that the police are now subject to considerably greater scrutiny than has ever before been the case. Local police authorities do appear to be becoming more active. **David O'Dowd**, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, argues that HMIC is also more energetic, and other bodies such as the Audit Commission are becoming increasingly influential all the time. The continuing concern is that beneath the ever-broadening array of performance indicators and measures, fewer and fewer people are asking questions about policy and practice. One of the perhaps intended consequences of these changes is that the governance of the police is becoming steadily more centralised, though in examining this process **Stephen Savage** points to the increasing visibility of a process of regionalisation as well.

Another problem that refuses to go away is, of course, crime. The changing ways in which we understand crime and the police role in responding to it are, in part, reflected in television and film argues **Robert Reiner**. There have been times in our relatively recent history when we were told that increased expenditure on policing, allied to new technologies and policing styles would have a dramatic effect on crime rates. New approaches to policing continue to develop - **Mike Maguire** examines 'problem-oriented' and 'intelligence-led' policing, for example - but the almost ever-present use of the word 'partnership' in most discussions of policing is testament to the recognition that it is the broad range of institutions in civil society, and not simply the police, who hold the key to reduced crime rates. This process is visible in the continued rise of private security - described by **Trevor Jones** and **Tim Newburn** - and in the ways in which police forces are responding to the issue of drugs. As the UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator, **Keith Hellawell**, argues in this issue the police "cannot resolve the social conditions in which people live, they cannot resolve the circumstances in which they're brought up. They cannot resolve poverty and hopelessness. But they can contribute in some ways and many police services do".

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