

Conservative Central Office

NEWS SERVICE

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Extract from a speech by Mr. David HOWELL, M.P. (Guildford), and Opposition Spokesman on Home Affairs, speaking to the 1912 Conservative Club at a dinner, at the House of Commons on Wednesday, 19th July, 1978.

Very good speech - could use some more for Law, Order and Politics. Done. The speaker.

Law, Order and Politics.

The issue of law and order has now been propelled to the very centre of politics in Britain.

There are six main reasons, I believe, why this has occurred.

First, there is the enormous growth of crime and vandalism, with the trail of accumulating urban squalor it leaves in its wake.

Second, there is the patent inadequacy of police coverage.

Third, there is the widespread feeling that politicians are out of touch with the really serious deterioration in the quality of life that is going on in many of our cities and residential areas. And the strong demand, in consequence, that they should sit up and take notice of what is happening.

Fourth, there is deepening anxiety in the public mind that society is failing to deal firmly and decisively with violence, and particularly with young and violent people.

Fifth, there has been the sustained and undoubtedly successful assault by the political Left, over a period of years, on the standards and values which hold a law-abiding society together - especially through the attack on educational standards and the general undermining of the ideas of discipline and parental authority.

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Sixth, there has been the growing realisation that those in authority in a Labour Government are equivocal in their support of law and order, have made the task of the police more, not less, difficult and are prepared to stay passive in face of illegal and violent acts if it suits their political book.

Unless society can be reassured very soon on these matters then I fear that it will become almost impossible to carry forward effectively the improvements in penal policy which many would like to see or to tackle the truly appalling problem of prison overcrowding.

The outgoing Labour Government therefore bears a double responsibility on this front - and one to which it has totally failed to live up.

By its inertia, and apparent blindness to public concern about crime and lawlessness, it has allowed an atmosphere to develop which can only make the maintenance of law and order infinitely harder in our country.

Perhaps now that a Bishop has spoken vividly on the subject the Labour paladins will listen in a way that they are not prepared to do to ordinary people. But I doubt it.

In only one respect has Labour acted - and even then after much prompting from the Opposition. This is on the question of police pay.

Even here, they have failed to understand the depth of the damage that has been done to our police forces and the critical need for major and immediate repair. The Edmund-Davies Committee quite clearly recognises the need to raise police pay in one step and thus provide the sound basis upon which police strength and morale can from now on be built up.

Phasing the increase is not only bad tactics in pay policy terms. It puts at major risk the central goal of the Edmund-Davies Committee - to attract and retain adequate manpower.

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Our approach will be not only to deal with police pay without delay. It will be to do everything possible to help increase the likelihood that the guilty will be convicted. And to see that young criminals get a brisk and sharp experience of detention early on, while it still deters.

Nothing is more demoralising for the police and the public than to see young law-breakers go unpunished and straight back in circulation ready to do more damage.

Society must come first. That must be our guide. Michael Foot now tells us that 'we have to carry forward a major democratic transformation in our society'. Under his rule, and that of his colleagues there has indeed been a transformation already - towards a vandalised, lawless environment in which violence stifles care and mutual respect.

If that is the 'excitement' which people are offered under socialism, then it is the kind of excitement of which they have had enough.

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