

The Challenge of Appointing the next Commissioner of the Met.

In the twenty years between 2000 and 2022, the Metropolitan Police Service has had six Commissioners. In the previous century from 1903 to 2000, throughout two world wars, the trauma of depression in the 1930's, societal change in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, and the IRA Troubles of the 1980's and 1990's there were just thirteen; three of whom remained in post for more than a decade each.

Being Commissioner of the Met is not a job for the faint-hearted, it requires innate leadership ability, sophisticated strategic political and negotiating skills, a high degree of intellectual flair, integrity and vision. Sadly too many of Cressida Dick's predecessors have been 'average' at best, appointed on the basis of 'Buggins Turn', or as someone who could be trusted not to argue against prevailing orthodoxy at the Home Office or No 10. A few have been majestically incompetent.

In the wake of recent scandals, (a proportion of which should not be placed at Cressida's door, because so many of the problems pre-date her tenure), we are in real danger of the next holder of the most senior policing post in the land, being yet another man or woman whose principal attraction is that they burnish the political reputation of the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister of the day. In the view of my erstwhile senior colleagues and others who know most about the issues involved, that must not happen. We are at a tipping point in terms of policing in London and elsewhere in these islands.

The mantra 'Leadership, leadership, leadership!' is all very well and works as a tabloid headline when discussing the issue but overlooks the fact that true leadership has been signally absent on a strategic level for the past two decades prior to Cressida Dick's appointment. The role of the Commissioner is actually quite easy to define and can be set out on a single sheet of A4 paper – the trick, as with most senior appointments in any walk of life, is matching the outline to the individual.

I would suggest that the next Commissioner should not come from those who euphemistically refer to themselves as the 'leadership teams' of British policing – that ship has sailed, crewed by senior officers who were seldom up to the job. There is more than enough native ability in business, commerce, industry, academe, and

the senior echelons of the services to provide a deep and wide pool of talent. Nor should he or she be drawn from the usual suspects in the civil service, or superannuated members of the Houses of Lords or Commons.

The next Commissioner will not be investigating murders or devising public order strategies – frankly they are jobs that are below the Commissioner's paygrade and he or she does not need to be able to do anything of that sort. A true leader selects the right person for the right job and measures their performance. The Commissioner should be operating in the soaring uplands of strategy, not wandering around in the foothills of operational policing. To see Chief Officers self-consciously wearing stab-proof vests for photo-opportunities 'on the streets' whilst posing as 'tough cops' is beyond parody. Just as importantly, the Home Secretary and the Mayor for London should recognise that fact and avoid the temptation to use the individual as a convenient whipping boy for departmental or governmental failures.

Now is the time for a new vision and some brave decision-making. The next Commissioner should not be appointed on the basis of gender, or ethnicity, or sexuality, nor should he or she be a favourite of this or that politician. The next occupant of the rather drab office at Scotland Yard must be an independent-minded high achiever with an established track record for hitting targets and taking responsibility. The next Commissioner needs the respect of his 43,000 workforce and does not need to be their friend. Indeed if there is one characteristic I would like to see, it is 'ruthlessness'. The boss of any organisation should be prepared to sack anyone, particularly managers, when the need arises - quickly and ruthlessly. If we have learned anything over the past few years of scandals and incompetent leadership in the Met, it is that there have been far too few sackings.

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