

**Speech to Police Federation of England and Wales Annual
Conference**

Bournemouth, England

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Greg O'Connor - Chair

International Council of Police Representative Associations

Kia Ora Tatou.

Thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of the International Council of Police Representatives Association and can I acknowledge my United States, Canadian, South African, Swedish and Scottish colleagues who are in the Audience today, as we gather for our annual Executive meeting to coincide with this conference.

ICPRA represents 1.5 million police officers from 39 countries around the world, and of course includes Eurocop, represented by my colleague Anna Nelburg, my fellow ICPRA Executive member and speaker today.

We chose this conference as the backdrop for our gathering, because England and Wales has been at the sharp end of policing reform in the Western world. And experience has taught us that what happens here is likely to be revisited upon the rest of the policing world at some stage.

Obviously, the impetus for this reform has been the Global Financial Crisis which, although an expression still on every politician's lips,

occurred over seven years ago. The fact we are still talking about it today is evidence that it has become the rationale and a club for governments of all hues, to attack hard won conditions and rights police have gained over many years.

Your Chairman has asked me to discuss the impact of the GFC on different countries and forces around the world, especially our member jurisdictions.

It would be easy to stand here and roll out a list of budget cutbacks, of tales of disaster, and the impact of them on Police and Policing, but I think to do so would be to take too simple a view and waste an opportunity to understand some more fundamental issues.

It might make us all feel a little better to know that we are not the only ones being expected to do much more with much less, which essentially is the situation in every country, with the exception of Australia.

Australia's eight police forces have been generally sheltered from the cuts the rest of us have experienced, but the economic slowdown in China means they postponed GFC is now upon them.

The reality however, is that none of our members can say they have really been successful at doing any more than maintaining the status quo at best, and even then often with significant concessions, mostly loss of civilian jobs. My Scottish colleague Callum Steele tells me that the significant cuts to the police budget in that country have been absorbed by civilian layoffs, echoing the situation in New Zealand.

What I would like to do is focus on what we have learned from the impact of massive budgetary pressures on Police wages and conditions.

And what has been the consistent message? Our bargaining power as Police unions has been reduced.

The tools and tactics we have successfully employed in the past to encourage politicians to increase policing budgets and pay, are simply not working and are outdated.

Because if we are really honest with ourselves, our best lever has always been, public fear of crime.

Let me just digress and share a story with you.

I grew up in a part of New Zealand where the main industry was coal mining, and coal was king, mostly because the national rail network was powered by coal driven engines.

Consequently, the coal miners' union was all powerful, and used its power to prevent the government from purchasing the more efficient diesel engines. They went on strike when government bought five locomotives, and after an unsuccessful battle, government bought 40, and coal locomotives became obsolete overnight.

So unfortunately, did the coal miners' union, who disappeared and was absorbed into another union not long thereafter.

The lesson to be learned was that they failed to realize that they were not in the coal industry, but the energy industry.

Could they have survived by adapting? We will never know, but the lessons are there for us today.

The question I ask is what industry are we, as Police Staff

Associations and Unions representing Police Officers, really in?

I argue we are in the fear of crime industry. In the past, Governments who have failed to adequately address public concerns and demands around crime have been punished electorally.

Fear of crime has been the impetus for the private security industry, increased imprisonment, and until recently, increased policing budgets.

Fear of crime has remained higher than actual crime rates. I'm not going to bore you with figures, but in preparation for this presentation today, I looked at the reported crimes rates for our member countries. And with the exception of South Africa, reported crime rates have dropped significantly over the last decade. And they have continued to drop since the GFC.

The United States has led the way, with the celebrated decreases in New York from the 1990's being replicated in all major cities across the US and Canada. Interestingly, only New York was able to drop the fear of crime, and one result which we should take note of was that the Police Benevolent Association, their union, could not get a contract for five years following those drops. Mayor Giuliani

essentially decided that since New Yorkers believed their city was safer, he didn't need to increase police numbers or pay.

The reduction in fear of crime has lagged actual crime rates. The response of opposition politicians and police unions has been to query the statistics, but of course the murders have come down by the same percentages or even more, and one thing you can't hide is the bodies. There is a myriad of research and commentary on crime rates, and most credible research does support the evidence that crime is dropping.

It is more difficult to quantify the drops in fear of crime, but the best indicator it is dropping, and beginning to reflect the actual drops, is the fact it has stopped featuring in political campaigns.

Watching your recent general election from afar, I did not see law and order featuring as a major issue. The modern political party polls constituents ad-nauseum, and the fact Opposition parties can't get purchase on law and order in their campaigns is pretty good evidence that they perceive the public don't rate it highly.

But the real story is what is occurring in the United States, where the GFC has had a longer burning but ultimately, a far more sinister impact on the bargaining power of police.

An article in this week's Time magazine really draws attention to the new world in which police and police associations in the US and eventually the rest of the world are going to have to operate and negotiate.

Both Democrats and Republican presidential hopefuls, far from competing on who could be the toughest on crime, are using recent police killings of poor blacks to focus on things like over use of imprisonment, and military equipment, and over aggressive policing tactics, as they discuss inner city poverty exacerbated by the GFC.

A recent national poll found that 77% of Americans favour eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, the most tangible policy emanating from the tough on crime rhetoric.

This is at a time when killings of Police Officers are up considerably. In 2014 they were up 89% from the year before.

In the past, that would have led to an auction in outrage by politicians, and demands for increased sentences and protection for police.

Now, those killings are being ignored politically, the discussion still being around what happened in Ferguson Missouri, Baltimore, and other incidents where Police have killed black suspects.

In the past, the public outcry following increased killing and assaults on Police Officers provided Police Unions leverage in arguing for improved wages and conditions.

Woe betide the politician who failed to heed such calls.

Now the conversation has changed diametrically.

And it is the police officers who are bearing the brunt of the change in political rhetoric.

The FOP President Chuck Canterbury, summed up the situation when he publicly blamed politicians for leaving police to try to control broken communities abandoned and ignored by Governments.

Whatever we as Police advocates think, we need to recognise that the environment we thrived in has changed, when even the right wing traditional 'tough on crime' parties are talking not soft, but rationally on crime.

This is a topic which deserves a session of its own, certainly more than I can do justice to here, but we would be foolish if we wrote the change of mood off to a few rogue cops, and ignored the political shift that has eventuated in the US and I believe, elsewhere in the CNN and BBC watching world.

So the real change emanating from the GFC, has been the virtual disappearance of the 'get tough on crime' policies which were the lifes blood of police unions and associations.

Of course there is one major exception, where fear of crime is rising, and that is around terrorism.

However, Police unions have been unable to leverage that situation, as the public and politicians look to Security and Intelligence organisations to protect them from Terrorism. Ask people in your community who they are relying on to protect them from Terrorism,

and very few will say police. Foolish and misguided perhaps, but real, and not anything being corrected by politicians or the media.

I would like to leave you with a message as to what the real lessons have been around the world, and that is that either because of it, or coinciding with it, the real impact of the GFC on Police Unions has been to weaken our leverage, our bargaining strength.

That what has worked in the past, and got our members into a pretty good salary position, ie leveraging public fear of crime, won't continue to work in future.

Governments and funding authorities are unashamedly attacking public spending, and police are seen as a major overhead.

And they are no longer afraid politically of standing up to us. You have seen that dramatically in the UK.

Public service unions, especially police unions, are seen by some influential groups as the last bastion of unionism and must be broken, like the private sector unions largely have been. Groups like Reform we heard from yesterday are well linked in to other such bodies internationally, they share research and policies, have good access to

governments, and are very well funded. That is why organisations like ICPRA must exist to counter this influence, and I congratulate the the Federation for recognising that by inviting us to speak today.

So to sum up, the lesson is that if we are not to go the way of the miners unions and other once powerful workers bodies, we have to change. Recognise where the strength and bargaining power of the future lies, and it's not where it was in the past.

Because post the GFC, our world has already changed. Are we as Police Unions going to be like the coal miners union hoping all the diesel locomotives break down and they have to resurrect the coal ones, or ensure we become part of the diesel industry as well.

You might argue the cheaper second tier of police being introduced all over the world, along with technology and private security, are our industry's diesel engines. And whatever happens, there is no way anyone is going back to the proverbial coal.

I'll leave that as food for thought.

Thank you again for this opportunity on behalf of ICPRA.

Nga reiwa, tena koto, tena koto, tena koto, katoa.