

## ***Health, Safety and Wellbeing – The briefest of history.***

There are many people who have been pivotal to British Policing through the ages and Sir Robert Peel must top the list, but there are two others that are not so well known whose actions or involvement in an event not readily linked to Policing have helped shape and focus attitudes toward health and safety in modern day British Policing.

### **A disaster waiting to happen.**

On the morning of Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October 1966, after days of downpours, a subsidence occurred on a mountain in the South Wales Valleys which caused a sea of thousands of tonnes of debris from a colliery spoil heap to career down to the village below.

That village was Aberfan. We should all know the rest.

### **The tribunal.**

On 26th October 1966, the Secretary of State for Wales, appointed a tribunal to explore the causes of the disaster. The Welsh judge and Privy Councillor at the time, **Lord Justice Edmund Davies**, was appointed as it's chair; **Mr. Davies** was a very well respected member of the judiciary and was born only a few miles from Aberfan.

The tribunal lasted 76 days and questioned amongst other things the foreseeability of the disaster by the **National Coal Board**. Its findings put the blame squarely at the door of the **National Coal Board** and many of its **managers** specifying their **ignorance, ineptitude** and **failure to communicate** dangers of which they were already aware, as the overriding causes.

The report pulled no punches and its introduction included the damning sentence :-

**"... our strong and unanimous view is that the Aberfan disaster could and should have been prevented."**

**(Lord) Alfred Robens** was the Chair of the **NCB** at the time of the disaster and history shows that he made a number of calamitous errors of judgment during the disaster and the subsequent tribunal proceedings. Both his reputation and the NCBs were severely dented and irreparably damaged by the whole sordid affair. It was known that Robens backed himself to be a future Prime Minister, but this would now never transpire.

### **The Ironic twist on the road to Perdition.**

Forward wind 3 years later to 1969 and **(Lord) Alfred Robens** becomes appointed as the Chair of a Committee on workplace health and safety. The findings of the committee were contained in the **1972 Robens Report** and this led to the pivotal and far reaching **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**. This spawned the formation of the **Health and Safety Commission** and the **Health and Safety Executive**.

At its inception, the Health and Safety at Work Act did not apply to the police; The Police as Crown Servants and not employees were not afforded its protection.

It was the ***Police (Health and Safety) Act 1997*** that formally brought the police within the provisions of the ***Health and Safety at Work Act 1974***.

The ***Police (Health and Safety) Regulations 1999*** apply the provisions of all existing health and safety regulations to police officers but with some aspects amended to allow the police to use items of work equipment with appropriate force against others during their operational activities.

### **History repeats itself.....**

Forward a further 3 years to 1977. Policing in England and Wales was suffering severe problems with **retention** and **recruitment** (any of you

hear alarm bells yet?). This was without doubt a direct result of **chronically low pay of the Police** which had **fallen** well below that of comparable occupations. Newspapers of the time report of Police pay being below that of bin men.

The home secretary of the day, Merlyn REES, appointed **Lord Justice Edmund Davies** to chair a commission of inquiry into the negotiating mechanics for police pay and conditions. His report, published in 1978, recommended a **45 %** increase to police pay (yes **4** and **5** together it is not a typo).

The incoming Conservative Government of 1979 under **Margaret Thatcher**, implemented **Lord Justice Edmund Davies'** recommendations in full and they remained largely untouched for 30 years, (even after some meddling by **Patrick SHEEHY in 1992**), until 2010 when the **CUT N SHUNT** deeds of **MAY** and **WINSOR** undoubtedly sent police pay and remuneration back to pre "Edmund Davies".

~~~~~