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We need a Supercop [1]

Written by **Dr Eamonn Butler** [2] | Monday 8 August 2011

With the riots and looting in London stretching into another day, David Cameron's idea of making Bill Bratton [3] the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police is looking like an inspired idea. Or it would have been, had the Home Secretary not vetoed it because he was an American.

Well, if you can have a Swede or an Italian running the England football team, you can sure have an American running London's policing. Especially one who was instrumental in turning around crime in New York. His view was that crime and disorder are not caused by the economy, racism or poverty, but by the illegal behaviour of groups and individuals ? pretty much as the Home Secretary has been saying, in fact. And that if you allow such illegal behaviour to go unchecked, it undermines public confidence in the police and indeed more widely, in their society.

Successful policing, he insisted, is about leadership and focus. Not something the Yard has been noted for recently. And it is individual officers who are the key asset in getting to grips with things. Bratton cut New York's appalling murder and violent crime rates by half ? yes, half ? in just two years by his community policing initiative. He ended the domination of the gangs. Not community in the sense of the police trying to be nice to every different and mutually opposing local political group, but community in terms of being part of the community, being seen, and being approachable, so that local people saw the police as on the same side, and police saw the local people as part of the solution, not the problem. Back to Sir Robert Peel, in fact: the police and the public are the same people.

Bratton's achievements were not about spending money, but about pro-active community policing ? and, crucially, prevention. Fix the broken window, clean up the graffiti, and people will value their neighbourhood more, and be less tolerant of the criminals. Deal with the small, quality of life, human problems and then you will be able to deal with the big, organised crime and violent disorder problems because you will have the public on your side.

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