

# Cell confessions

Lifer Michael Stone argues that the police have discovered an antidote to PACE - the cell confession



**B**anged up late one night a couple of months ago, I tuned my radio into the 'In Parliament Today' programme. Jack Straw (pictured), was speaking.

He became quite chatty and revealing. He suggested that even without the existence of any Human Rights Articles, today's criminals would have a much easier ride than they would have 20 or 30 years ago. He then confided that in the early 70s, when he had just qualified as a junior barrister and worked defending criminals, their situation was totally different. In the absence of PACE laws, villains were lifted from the streets and framed by being 'verballed up' by the police. Nine times out of ten, the police officer on the case would fabricate the confession of a 'suspect' who always seemed to say upon arrest, "Ok, it's a fair cop guv, I put me 'ands up, I done it and you caught me bang to rights". At the subsequent trial there was little chance of any outcome other than a guilty verdict and prison sentence, and prison was much harsher back then too.

Surprisingly, Mr Straw then confided that he knew when verbalbing up had happened and so did everybody else involved in the criminal justice process. But, like everyone else, he turned a convenient blind eye because the practice was an accepted part of the justice process - the status quo of the time.

Eventually the verbalbing up got out of hand. It got too frequent and too blatant, and it started happening to totally innocent people, people it should not happen to - i.e. collateral damage. So, following a Royal Commission, PACE and other criminal laws was implemented, which serves to protect all the Human Rights of today's criminals. Therefore according to Mr Straw we have no need for continuing the European Human Rights Articles.

Thinking more deeply about his speech, it

occurred to me that in spite of the fact that he, along with everyone else in the justice system, had no qualms about turning a blind eye to police verbalbing up suspects with fabricated confessions, the practice had to end because too many of their own kind were starting to get verbalbing up as forces turned to result-rate policing. Added to that, the verbalbing up got some high profile exposure through a growing number of longstanding murder convictions which, in the 80s and 90s, were ruled 'unsafe' by appeal court judges. Since the police practice was curtailed the incidents of fabricated prison cell confessions has increased. Nowadays, most defendants on remand awaiting a murder trial will find other remand prisoners have made untrue statements alleging confession type conversations in a bid to earn rewards or other benefits from the authorities that are under pressure to get convictions - sometimes with no evidence other than a few fabricated prison cell 'confessions'.

The problem for inmates in the prison system serving life and convicted by the unscrupulous use of fabricated cell block confessions is that if lawyers, court officials and everybody else working in the criminal justice system turns a blind eye to this practice, then little sympathy or help can be expected from elsewhere. The reasoning being that anybody decent wouldn't have been in prison in the first place to be verbalbing up by a cellmate (i.e. no collateral damage). Then there is the issue of Human Rights: but first you need to get all those people turning blind eyes to accept you are actually human.

Yes, there are English laws that should protect the Human Rights of prisoners; in particular PACE is a good law to restrain over-enthusiastic police officers from verbalbing up suspects; but the police have discovered there is an antidote to PACE - the cell confession.

Therefore I should like to suggest to Mr Straw that the European Convention Rights should continue so they can be used to ensure justice prevails when English law fails to do so.

*\* Michael Stone is currently resident in HMP Full Sutton*