

DON'T DIAL 'M' FOR MURDER

With the firm establishment of political correctness, (PC), in our society, it was fairly obvious that it wasn't going to be too long before there was conflict between PC and the Police.

Recently, Gloucester police provided cigarettes and food to a suspected thief ensconced on a house roof and who was refusing to come down. To not supply his requests apparently amounted to an infringement of his human rights. Avon and Somerset police reportedly refused to chase a motorcycle thief as the yob was not wearing a crash helmet. Apparently they could have been sued if he'd crashed.

Perhaps more intriguing is the slow encroachment of political correctness on advice given out by police forces. You may recall the incident at Boscombe, a suburb of Bournemouth, where the local beat policeman issued an edict stating that it was not worth the police turning out to investigate shoplifting offences involving sums of less than £75. Great! What a message to send to the criminal fraternity, almost a shoplifter's charter. The advice given to shopkeepers was that as a shop was private property, they could ask the offending individual to leave. If you were a shopkeeper, would you confront a six foot six, overweight, drunken lout as he helped himself to your Carlsberg Special Brew with no intention of paying? I think not! Shopkeepers were also advised that they could make a citizens arrest, but to take the utmost care that they did not hurt the thief in the process.

Thankfully, this edict was quickly rescinded by the powers that be at Dorset Constabulary. However, it does conjure up some interesting scenarios about the commercialisation of the police and the application of politically correct policies. Imagine dialling '999':

Police: (Recorded message) 'Hello, you are through to the police help line. Please note that this is a premium rate number and all calls are charged at £1.50 a minute, so please ensure that you have the telephone subscriber's permission to make this call. For training purposes, this call may be recorded. Please listen to the following options. For murder press 1, for road traffic accidents press 2, for armed robbery press 3, for assault press 4, for burglary press 5, for muggings press 6, for sexual assault press 7, for theft press 8, for all other crimes press 9. To hear the options again, press the star key'. Now, as a twelve year old, having come home from school to find your dad had discovered your mother in bed with Uncle Arthur, and was now attempting to perform an orchidectomy on him with a kitchen knife and without the benefit of an anaesthetic, would you ask permission to use the phone? And which number button would you press when you got through? Eventually, after deciding to press button 9, you get the message 'you are currently being held in a queue. Please don't hang up, as your call is important to us'. Ten minutes later and £15 poorer, the call is answered just as

Uncle Arthur's testicles roll down the stairs, to be gobbled up by Rover. At least somebody has got something out of the whole episode.

It could get worse though. Just imagine you were at home and discovered you had burglars. Having navigated the phone button choices, you press button 5 for burglary and are greeted by 'hello you are through to the burglary helpline. This is P.C. Damian speaking. How may I help you?' You agitatedly explain that you live in a large house and have heard burglars upstairs.

PC Damian – Are they still on the premises?

You – Yes

PC Damian – Ah! So technically they haven't actually committed a crime yet because they haven't taken anything have they?

You – Technically no, but it is private property and they have broken in.

PC Damian – have you seen where they broke in?

You - not yet. We are a bit too scared to move around the house at the moment.

My wife has just had a hip replacement and isn't quite up to self defence yet!

PC Damian – so you can't confirm to me that they did actually break in?

You – no, not yet.

PC Damian – Have you got a burglar alarm system?

You – yes.

PC Damian – Was it switched on?

You – Well no. It's a bit difficult to have it switched on when we are still in the house and moving around. We would set it off ourselves.

PC Damian – So technically you are aiding and abetting them, if not actually enticing them to break in by not having your burglar alarm switched on.

You – I find that really hard to accept. I have the right to expect to be able to live in my home without having the burglar alarm switched on permanently.

PC Damian – Perhaps. How many burglars are there?

You – I've really no idea.

PC Damian – Could you tiptoe upstairs and count? That would be ever so helpful. Be careful not to frighten them though or you could be sued for causing them undue stress.

You – This is outrageous, but if this is what it takes to get these thieving beggars arrested, then I'll do it.

PC Damian – Careful sir, statements like that can get you into a lot of bother.

Two minutes later.

You – there are three of them and I think one of them might be armed.

PC Damian – Did you say armed?

You – Yes

PC Damian – I'm afraid sir that if they are armed, then you need to speak to a different department. We don't do armed robbery. Phone back after lunch and ask for extension 276 and ask to speak to Arnie. He's ever so rugged.

You – Listen here Damian, this is very hard to take. I was in the telephone queue for twenty minutes and I've been speaking to you for fifteen minutes. That's over half an hour and £45 that I've spent and nothing's happened yet. I only live five minutes away from the police station. These thieving beggars are still in my home.

PC Damian – Careful sir, you seem to be a little tetchy. Why not make a nice cup of tea and phone me back when you've calmed down a bit?

You – Bugger the tea. I've got a shotgun in the library. If you won't send someone round then I'm going to go upstairs and make a citizen's arrest.

PC Damian – I wouldn't do that sir. Could cause all sorts of problems for you.

You - Such as?

PC Damian – Well, threatening them with a dangerous weapon for a start. Then there's unlawful detention and if you actually touch them, then there could be the possibility of assault or even grievous bodily harm. There's also the possibility of post-traumatic stress disorder that they might subsequently suffer and you could be liable for.

You – Well Damian, what do you suggest?

PC Damian - You could be nice about it and ask them to leave, but if I was in your shoes I'd let them get on with it. It would save us a lot of time and paperwork and you could always claim on the insurance. Our Chief Constable would be ever so pleased. Have a nice day now.

But if that's not bizarre enough for you, then just think what it could be like if it was a murder you were reporting. Having negotiated the phone buttons and pressed button 1, you are greeted by PC Julian.

You – I'd like to report a murder.

PC Julian – Are you sure it's murder madam?

You – Yes of course I am. I've just come home and found my husband lying on the kitchen floor with a big knife embedded in his back. He's not breathing and hasn't got a pulse. He's clearly dead and I certainly don't think that it was self-inflicted.

PC Julian – Oh! Madam I am so sorry. I'm afraid that we don't come out to stabbings in the back.

You – Why not?

PC Julian – Economy measures madam. Chief Constable has decreed that everyone gets stabbed in the back at sometime in their life. Look at me. PC Damian has left me for PC Jeremy. Heartbroken I am. He's such a bitch.

You – I'm quite heartbroken myself. My husband is lying here on the floor in a pool of blood and you are more concerned with your own love life.

PC Julian – OK madam, please give me some more details. How old was he for a start?

You - He was just 60 last week.

PC Julian – Oh what a shame. Chief Constable has stated that we don't come out to the over 60's. He says that they are too old then and they are going to die soon anyway so it's not cost effective. Economy measures again.

You – Look Julian, he was only 60 a couple of days ago.

PC Julian – OK I'll see what I can do. We aren't too busy at the moment. Weekends and holidays are our busy time. How far does the knife go into his back?

You – It seems to be three inches or so.

PC Julian – Could you get a ruler to measure to make absolutely sure please?

You – It's definitely three inches.

PC Julian – I'm terribly sorry madam, but it's got to be four inches deep before we come out for a stabbing. Chief Constable says it's not cost effective otherwise. Less than four inches could just be a flesh wound on a fatty. Could it be self-inflicted? Was he a self-harmer by any chance?

You – He was most emphatically not a self-harmer. He was perfectly happy; we were going on holiday next week, a cruise to celebrate our fortieth wedding anniversary for God's sake.

PC Julian – I'm afraid that there's nothing more I can do for you madam.

You – So far you've done bugger all for me except procrastinate and tell me why you can't send anyone out to investigate my husband's murder. What if he'd been shot?

PC Julian – Shot? Ooh well, that depends on the size of the calibre of the gun and the front and back rule and age of course. If it's a .22 or 9mm we're not really interested. Chief Constable says that they are like toy guns. Plenty of people have them and it could have been accidental. Therefore he says it's not cost effective to send anyone round. If it's something like a .44 Magnum then that's a different matter. A big wound like that, we ask you to dig out the bullet and send it to us to see if we can match up the markings with any of our records. With all the blood and gore, it's highly likely that the murderer will be traumatised and we like to get them in for counselling right away. If the victim's family are not sure of the bullet size, then we post them a size chart to measure it themselves. Simple really and it saves a lot of money. Chief Constable is well chuffed with this initiative.

You – Very interesting. What if it was a shotgun?

PC Julian – A shotgun Madam? Chief Constable says that shotguns use those nasty cartridges that spray pellets everywhere. Therefore it's just too difficult to tell if it was murder or an accident. So we don't come out at all. It's just not cost effective.

You – Thank you Julian for all your help. You've certainly given me one or two things to think about. I hope you make it up with Damian.

PC Julian – Thank you madam, so do I. Have a nice funeral now.

So there you are. You may laugh, you may scoff, but one day soon all the above could be coming from a police call centre near to you. However, looking into the future, perhaps to save even more money, we may have outsourced civilianised call centres in India. Now that will be fun. Have a nice day now!