

Blair pledges to fix his failures in crime crackdown

By **Tim Shipman**
Political Correspondent

TONY Blair yesterday admitted that his Government had failed to lower high crime rates and called for a crackdown to target potential criminals from the moment they are born.

He also launched another uncompromising attack on judges, calling the courts 'out of touch' with the 'brute reality' of violence on our streets.

The Prime Minister called for action to stop babies born into 'families from hell' from turning to a life of crime and an increase in prison places to deal with career criminals.

He also called for more laws to bring in summary justice in the form

'The public are anxious'

of on-the-spot fines. But there was fury that Mr Blair's call for a national debate about crime comes 13 years after he issued his famous pledge to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' - and used phrases he has consistently repeated since coming to power in 1997.

The Prime Minister said that he

BUT WE'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE...

■ Ever since he promised to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' in 1993, Tony Blair has been promising to overhaul the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, since coming to power in 1997, he keeps sticking to the same script...

Yesterday Mr Blair said:

'I am saying it is time to rebalance the decision in favour of the decent, law-abiding majority who play by the rules and think others should too. Victims' rights have been violated.'



'Victims of crime are too often neglected by the Criminal Justice System.'



Labour promised a victims bill of rights and said: 'It is time to put the rights of victims first.'



Mr Blair said his sentencing reform bill would 'rebalance the system emphatically in favour of the victims'.



'The time has come to rebalance

Yesterday Mr Blair said:

'We end up fighting 21st century problems with 19th century solutions.'



'How can we expect a criminal justice system designed in the 19th century to deal effectively with 21st century crime?'



Mr Blair referred to 'a 19th-century criminal justice system trying to solve twenty-first-century crimes'.



'The system itself is the problem. We are trying to fight 21st century crime - antisocial behaviour, drug-dealing, binge-drinking, organised crime - with 19th century methods, as if we still lived in the time of Dickens.'



Call for action: Tony Blair wants a national debate on crime

the 1,300 already planned next year but the Home Office is still in negotiations with the Treasury about the £400million cost of providing new cells.

Mr Blair promised faster and more severe punishment for those who break bail or community sentences and measures to ensure that defendants turn up in court.

There will also be new powers to force drug addicts to go into rehab and drag them back into court if they fail to attend.

Shadow Home Secretary David Davis said: 'It will be of little comfort to the countless victims of crime that Tony Blair has admitted this has concerned him for 18 years, nine of which he has been Prime Minister.'

'Why has his only response been gimmick after gimmick?'

Liberal Democrat spokesman Nick Clegg said: 'This is clearly an

of on-the-spot fines. But there was fury that Mr Blair's call for a national debate about crime comes 13 years after he issued his famous pledge to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' - and used phrases he has consistently repeated since coming to power in 1997.

The Prime Minister said that he first became aware of the failure of the criminal justice system as long ago as 1988.

But nearly two decades later Mr Blair has admitted that the entire political and legal establishment is still 'in denial' about the fact that 'neighbourhoods are terrorised by gangs and the system is not capable of protecting them'.

In the first of a series of speeches on domestic policy, he called for an overhaul of the courts to rebalance justice 'in favour of the decent law-abiding majority'.

Mr Blair said: 'In tackling the causes of crime, we come back to some unpalatable choices about liberty and security. People know what it's like to live on the same estate as the family from hell. Imagine what it's like to be

SEP 2002
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JUL 2004
'The time has come to rebalance the Criminal Justice System from the offenders to the victims.'

NOV 2005
'The system itself is the problem. We are trying to fight 21st century crime - antisocial behaviour, drug-dealing, binge-drinking, organised crime - with 19th century methods, as if we still lived in the time of Dickens.'

JAN 2006
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brought up in one. We need earlier intervention with some families, who are often socially excluded and socially dysfunctional.

'That may mean before they offend; and certainly before they want such intervention. In truth, we can identify such families virtually as their children are born.'

Mr Blair went on: 'I don't say for a moment that mistakes haven't been made. The political and legal establishment is still in denial.'

He called for judges to stand up for 'decent law-abiding folk' who he said 'think the political and legal establishment are out of touch

on the issue and they are right'.

'The public are anxious for a perfectly good reason: they think they play fair and play by the rules and they see too many people who don't getting away with it.'

Mr Blair said it was understandable that the Home Office is 'under siege' after a spate of scandals surrounding short sentences and the premature release of murderers, paedophiles and rapists.

But he rejected criticism that the Government has introduced too many criminal justice laws - 60 at the last count - and vowed to introduce yet more legislation this summer.

Home Secretary John Reid is due to publish full plans next month.

Mr Blair outlined a four-point plan that will see more summary justice, plans to fast-track cases through the courts, a pledge to make the punishment fit the circumstances of each individual criminal and a vow to make the courts more user-friendly.

He also admitted: 'The blunt reality is that at least in the short and medium term the measures proposed will mean an increase in prison places.'

Prisons minister Gerry Sutcliffe wants 4,000 new places on top of

Shadow Home Secretary David Davis said: 'It will be of little comfort to the countless victims of crime that Tony Blair has admitted this has concerned him for 18 years, nine of which he has been Prime Minister.'

'Why has his only response been gimmick after gimmick?'

Liberal Democrat spokesman Nick Clegg said: 'This is clearly an admission of failure. It is striking that after nine years in power the gap between his rhetoric and reality is wider than ever.'

Mr Blair was also forced to admit that much of Labour's social policy for the past three decades has just made the problem worse.

And in another admission that Labour's education and social policies have failed, he said: 'The disciplines of informal control - imposed in the family and in schools - are less tight than they were.'

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Killings up 35pc under Labour

By James Slack
Home Affairs Editor

LABOUR'S failure to tackle violent crime was laid bare yesterday with figures showing that 250 more people were killed last year than in 1997, when Tony Blair came to power.

Academics said it was proof that Britain has become a more dangerous place to live under Labour, demolishing Government claims that violent crime is falling.

The research, by the respected Crime and Society Foundation, reveals there were 954 homicides last year - more than 18 every week.

In 1997, the total number of homicides - cases of murder, manslaughter and child killing - was 705, 35 per cent fewer.

The main causes of death were stabbing, fatal punches or kicks, assaults with a blunt instrument and shooting.

The figures, which cover England, Scotland and Wales, are hugely damaging to the

HOMICIDES UNDER LABOUR



*Includes 172 victims of serial killer GP Harold Shipman

Government because, unlike crime figures, they cannot be subjected to 'spin'.

Richard Garside, acting director of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at King's College London, where the foundation is based, said: 'So much violence is hidden, which makes estimating overall levels of violence very difficult. But we can be rea-

sonably confident about official figures on homicide because you can't really hide a body. The homicide rate is quite a good starting point for estimating levels of underlying violence.

'For behind every homicide will be thousands of serious acts of violence that could easily have ended in a homicide.

'The dramatic rises in homicide rates places in some doubt claims that levels of violence have been falling in recent years.'

Shadow Home Secretary David Davis said: 'This reinforces what we have been saying for a long time.

'The crimes that matter to people most have spiralled out of control under this Government because of their failure to tackle drugs and alcohol, their failure to establish discipline in schools, and their failure to secure our borders.'

Norman Brennan, director of the Victims of Crime Trust, said: 'For the murder rate to have increased like this makes it clear the criminal justice system is in crisis, but what are the Government and Judiciary doing

about it? Instead of making the public safer, they are too busy arguing with each other over who is to blame.'

Ministers have used the British Crime Survey - a random sample of 40,000 householders - to claim violent crime has been falling under Labour.

But this has been contested because of doubts over the survey's accuracy, particularly its ability to get an accurate picture of what is happening on tough estates where researchers are less welcome.

A report from the Statistics Commission watchdog earlier this year called for the Home Office to be stripped of its responsibility for gathering crime figures.

Police recorded crime figures show violence has rocketed under Labour, with more than one million incidents each year.

However, the Government claims this rise is down to changes in the way officers record crime.

The crime foundation research will be officially made public on Tuesday in a lecture by its author, Danny Dorling.