

## Use the force

Sir: The problem with Alasdair Palmer's argument against police reform ('The coalition's police reforms will fail', 21 August) is that it merely echoed Gordon Brown's mantra for the last ten years. According to this view, what matters most is how much money is spent on public services. The more we spend on our police, schools, etc, the better they are bound to be. Some of us questioned this idea from the beginning. Others began to have doubts when services failed to improve in proportion to the substantial resources pumped in. Most people finally rejected the age of big spending when the country went bust.

Actually — and quite contrary to Palmer's assertion — the steepest recent falls in crime pre-dated the rise in police numbers. A better line of enquiry might be: why, when we have one of the most expensive criminal justice systems in the world, do we still have such high crime compared to our peer group countries? Why, when we have a record number of police officers — over 140,000 — are only a tenth of them visible and available to the public at any one time? (The answer, in a word, is bureaucracy.)

Palmer asserts that spending restraint must mean fewer police. I've no idea where he gets his numbers from when he says that 20,000 officers will go, and neither does he, because the budget hasn't been set yet. But I do know that last month a report by the robustly independent Inspectorate of Constabulary said that, by working more efficiently, forces could save over £1 billion a year — 12 per cent of their funding from central government — without it impacting on frontline services.

The founder of modern policing, Sir Robert Peel, knew the real measure of success. 'The test of police efficiency,' he stated, 'is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it.' Our reforms will reclaim policing for the people: and the people know very well that what matters is not how much money you spend, but how wisely you spend it.

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