

Constabulary

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Truth or myth?

Leaked reports and conflicting articles fuelling tension; has crime surged due to huge influx of migrants or not?

It's not surprising that the public are confused as to whether the influx of one million Eastern Europeans over the past four years has caused a surge in migrant-related crime or whether, as the headlines proclaimed recently, it is a myth.

If the Home Office and senior police officers can't agree on the facts then it's hardly surprising that the rest of us can't uncover the truth.

This extraordinary saga started when the *Guardian's* front-page headline read "Migrant crime wave a myth – police study."

The article stated "ACPO report concludes offending no worse than rest of the population" – leaving readers in little doubt that the influx of immigrants was not something to worry about.

It described the report as wide-ranging and quoted an unnamed senior source with close knowledge of the report as saying: "Any rise has been broadly proportionate to the number of people from those communities coming into this country. People are saying crime is rising because of this influx. Given that one million people have come in, that doesn't make sense as crime is significantly down."

This was supported by an official ACPO press release quoting Chief Constable Peter Fahy of Cheshire Constabulary, the co-author of the aforementioned ACPO paper on the impact of migration on policing.

"Migration has had a significant impact on UK communities in past years but while this has led to new demands made on the Police Service, the evidence does not support theories of a large-

scale crime wave generated through migration. In fact, crime has been falling across the country over the past year.

"Many migrants are young professionals looking to earn money and return to their home countries. Cultural differences such as attitudes to offences like drink-driving may exist, but can be exaggerated.

"The influx of Eastern Europeans has created pressures on forces in some areas, including local rumour and misunderstandings fuelling tensions which police have had to be proactive in resolving, leading to significant increases in spending on interpreters, which can also make investigations more complex.

"Better forecasting and data-sharing between local agencies to pick up changes in local populations quicker is necessary to help anticipate the issues.

"Ministers acknowledge some of the challenges arising for the Police Service and we welcome the opportunity for a proper debate about the issues."

This story was then repeated on BBC TV, Radio 4 and other broadcasters throughout the day so it's hardly surprising that the public would now feel they have the full story.

Not so, as the very next day the *Daily Mail* devoted a double-page spread to this story. Claiming to have seen a leaked copy of the report, the article did not support the previous day's claims by the media and went on to say that the ACPO report warns of an increase in violence, extortion, human trafficking and a growing sex trade.

It claims that the report says front-line police have to pick up the consequences of new forms of criminality, community tensions and the complexity of using interpreters and gaining intelligence.

To add credibility, the paper quoted Cambridgeshire's Chief Constable Julie Spence and described her as leading calls for a cash boost to fight the significant challenges of migrant crime committed by Eastern



Human trafficking: Eastern-block girls persuaded to come to UK and charged extortionate fees then forced to work in sex trade to pay debt

Europeans. This was last year when she said: "The growth in our (migrant) population has brought about significant policing challenges, not least the amount of time and effort we put into dealing with offenders whose first language is not English.

"We have seen an increase in specific offences such as motor-ing offences, sex trafficking and worker exploitation – a form of modern-day slavery."

The article went on to allege that another chief constable had also expressed concern in a leaked letter about migrant crime in his county, which saw violent crime increase considerably in 2007.

It is clear that the timing of the whole episode, being the day before senior police officers were to meet Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, was highly significant as demands for extra funding were to be discussed at the meeting.

The ACPO comments on the study would certainly be very

helpful to the Home Secretary but not helpful to those chief officers seeking extra funding.

Regardless of who is right or wrong, the public are not getting a clear picture of the effect of migrant crime.

At the time of going to press, neither the Home Office nor ACPO had released any clarification to these stories, which is a shame as, clearly, the public are left confused and this confusion may lead to problems in communities that have large numbers of Eastern Europeans.

Once again, the public are left to rely on information supplied by the national media which, as we have seen in recent weeks, is often conflicting and sometimes misleading.

If you are an officer with experience of working in an area with large numbers of migrant workers please email your comments to chrislocke@constabularymagazine.co.uk



Eastern-block immigrants: most are good hard-working people but "migrant crime surge" issue could create tension between communities

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The good life

Tim Roberts says he doesn't have a single contribution to make to the human race but if he did he'd like it to be a way to maintain the relaxation and joy of a holiday in the midst of work and the daily grind. He still has a long way to go and was recently taught a wonderful lesson by elderly bus drivers on the precious sense of community

The attitudes in this part of New Zealand where I now live are laid back, to say the least. I use the bus most days to get to the train station. The bus drivers in this small coastal town are a chatty bunch who seem to be around or past the age of retirement, with one exception.

Several drivers are women in their mid-sixties who drive their buses with a finesse and precision that some of their own grandmothers may only have been allowed to demonstrate on the sewing machine or church organ. Thankfully, times have changed here in the first nation on earth to give women the vote.

All of the older drivers freely offer laughter to passengers and advice on politics, wineries, essential beach lifestyle questions and, of course, sport.

I guess that they are all, with one exception, driving buses after they have retired from their first careers. A few of the drivers are immigrants, I can detect accents from Europe and Asia, but there seems no difference in camaraderie.

The exception is a woman in her early thirties who is noticeably grumpy and reticent. It seems that she finds it difficult to smile at strangers, which is quite unusual here. I have been wondering what the reason for this is.

Perhaps, when you have had a career and then retired and chosen to be a bus driver in a quiet town, that may be quite different to being a bus driver in the quiet town early in a career

when all the media is telling us that the city is the place to live with juicier wages and more opportunities.

Maybe grumpiness is a mask that hides confusion and fear about the financial future. I think this is one of the tragedies of Western life.

I'm not suggesting that the other bus drivers are all ex-merchant bankers, and it's dangerous to generalise, but the older ones have a very different attitude.

It could be the wisdom of age, it could be a good pension plan, or it may be that priorities change and that the present moment is to be enjoyed because we will probably have less of them than we would choose.

Bus protocol

Before I tell you about a recent bus event, I need to explain bus protocol here.

Whenever anyone gets onto the bus it is considered rude if you do not exchange pleasantries with the driver. When you exit the bus, either from the front or back doors, it is a social requirement to say thank you to the driver. The driver will then call back "mind how you go" or something similar.

Many children travel unaccompanied on buses here and they can be quiet young. Even young children shout "thank you" when they exit and the bus drivers always shout back "mind how you go". It is a joy to behold.

People talk to each other, are quick to make jokes and will talk to the driver from any position

in the bus at any time.

If the bus driver needs a newspaper, a coffee or the loo then he or she pulls over if it's quiet and gets a paper, a take-out coffee or spends a penny. No one minds. Bus drivers are important and liked here.

All buses have radios similar to the old unencrypted personal radios I used to use in the police.

Recently, I was on my way to what I considered an important business meeting in the city. I caught the bus as usual and it is only a short ride to the train station. Train timetables here are rough guides, rather like they seem to be in the UK.

The big difference is that no one here pretends any differently, and they certainly don't experience the neurosis that surrounds late train arrivals in Britain. It's not that they don't care; they just have more important things to do, such as relishing their days.

The bus was taking the usual route to the train station and was, as usual, about half-full. Most passengers were business commuters or schoolchildren.

Cow search

As we rounded a bend in the road the radio crackled and another bus driver said: "We've got a missing cow up here. Anyone passing by?" Our bus driver grabbed the radio and offered to help. She swung the bus round and headed off the route and down smaller residential roads.

"Sorry folks," said the driver, "another driver needs some help



to find a lost cow. Sing out if you see it." Several other bus drivers also answered and between them they conducted an area search for this cow.

Passengers were pressing their faces to the windows trying to locate the cow and all were talking to the bus driver, offering insights or just making jokes.

All except me. I was worried that I would miss the train and then miss my meeting. I was also thinking, when did finding missing domestic animals become the core business of the bus company? I had missed the point entirely.

The bus company had no core business with the cow. But there is still a sense of community here and the community cares if someone loses a cow or if a car hits the cow and causes injuries.

There are many immigrants

in this town, especially British, American and South African. Perhaps one in five people here is from another country yet the sense of community is strong enough to absorb newcomers.

After a few minutes we heard on the radio that the cow had been spotted and was now being taken back to the field by another bus driver and some of his passengers. Our bus driver seemed genuinely happy with this and thanked us all for our patience. She then drove at an amazing speed to the train station.

There, sitting in the station was the train. By now it was several minutes late. I ran to the train and only as I did so I noticed something very odd. None of the other passengers quickened their pace.

The train conductors welcomed us all and as we took our

seats the train passengers already in the carriage were relaxed and chatting, reading or dozing, as if everything was just dandy!

I guess that buses here hunt in packs, and they try hard to find good deeds to do. Drivers will often radio other drivers and tell them to wait for a passenger who is late and running towards the bus as it prepares to move off.

Somehow the message had got through to the train driver that there was a stray cow and the train driver had waited.

So, the lesson I learnt was that this sense of community is something precious, and something I have not experienced before and it is every bit as important as the lifestyle, the job, the beach and the mountains.



Italian police magazine hits the right note

During the past few years *Constabulary* magazine and a number of police magazines around the world have joined forces to share information about police initiatives and strategies and policing in general.

Much of this association has come about through the work of Nicola Zichella, a police officer from Rome who has devoted huge amounts of his spare time making contact with police magazines from Australia to the USA.

Nicola is now the Foreign Affairs Editor of the excellent Italian police magazine *AtlasOrbis*. *AtlasOrbis* magazine is the

brainchild of Fabrizio Locurcio and it is run on a non-profit making basis, with all contributors providing their services free of charge.

Fabrizio, who is an employee of Polizia Anticrimine at the Rome headquarters of the State Police of Italy, is also the magazine's editor-in-chief.

Nicola, along with Gianluca Guerrisi, Enzo Poluzzi, Cesare Guaglianone and Massimo d'Anastasio, all contribute to the magazine.

The magazine includes a section in English so that overseas officers can read these stories



and Italian officers can improve their English.

AtlasOrbis has conducted many interviews with senior

police officers, politicians and celebrities. The current issue features an interview with former police officer and world-famous tenor, Alessandro Safina (pictured).

Alessandro served as a police officer in Florence, Italy, and still has many friends there. While serving as a police officer Alessandro studied at the Conservatorio di Musica "Luigi Cherubini" in Florence before giving up his police career to sing full-time.

He said: "I was in the police for five years and it is still in my heart. It was not easy leaving the

police as I had so many good memories."

His singing has received much praise over the years; the most recent was last December for his role as Count Danilo Danilowitsch in the operetta *La Vedova Allegra*.

In January this year he featured in two duets in a Public Broadcasting Service TV special with Sarah Brightman in her concert, *Symphony in Vienna*, and he will be singing with Jose Carreras in Rotterdam in May.

More information about *AtlasOrbis* can be found at www.atlasorbis.org



Visit Alessandro's site at www.alessandrosafina.info/ for concert details.