

The Foreword

Lord Woolf

Sir Louis Blom-Cooper richly deserves to be honoured by a *festschrift*. On 27th March 1999 he celebrated his 73rd birthday. It is timely and appropriate that his many friends and admirers should have this opportunity to celebrate his gigantic contribution to the well-being of justice over the 45 years since he was called to the bar by the Middle Temple in 1952.¹

His contribution has been made in so many capacities. Of course as an advocate and an eminent Queen's Counsel (both in England & Wales and Northern Ireland); he frequently appeared for those who are disadvantaged against the establishment. He is a member of Doughty Street Chambers. I am sure he feels very much in tune with the spirit of those chambers, which hold themselves out as being 'committed to its liberal tradition of defending freedom and citizens' rights irrespective of the popularity of the cause or client'. Louis' commitment has been on an international scale and in many out of the way parts of the world he has a near hero status. Not many Queen's Counsel will, for example, have been prepared to make the 6-week journey to St. Helena to defend a client. However, he never allowed his personal opinions to interfere with his professional obligations as a member of the bar. No better proof of this is the fact that he gallantly took on the impossible task of defending the Isle of Man's policy on corporal punishment. As an advocate he was not afraid to advance novel arguments which initially were not received sympathetically by the judiciary. He has since had the satisfaction that many of these arguments, particularly those which related to natural justice and delay in the carrying out of the death penalty, are now accepted by the highest courts as correctly reflecting the law. He has undoubtedly played a part in educating the judiciary!

There is the contribution he has made as a judge; surprisingly as a Justice of the Peace at the City of London Magistrates' Court; in addition as a dep-

¹ This was after learning his law at no less than three institutions; Kings College London, Municipal University of Amsterdam and Cambridge.

uty High Court Judge who was one of the select band authorised to hear applications for judicial review, and thirdly as an appeal judge in the Court of Appeal of Jersey and Guernsey. He has also taught law and criminology. This was at Bedford College and Queen Mary College, London. Then he was responsible for law reporting on *The Guardian* and joint editor of the *Common Market Law Reports*.

His extraordinary range of writing should not be forgotten. Besides his numerous articles for legal journals, he was the author of books on the *Law as Literature*, *Bankruptcy in International Law*, the *Language of the Law*, *Separated Spouses*, *Final Appeal*, one of the few books on the House of Lords in its judicial capacity (which although written in 1972 I would still recommend as essential reading to any new Law Lord), *Law and Morality*, *The A6 Murder* and *A Calendar of Murder*. His writing demonstrates not only his erudition but also the breadth of his interests. Alas, not many lawyers or judges share Sir Louis' concern about the literary quality of their writing. I still suspect that a very old friend was sending me a message when out of the blue I received a copy of the *Law as Literature*.

As part of his contribution to justice, I include his Chairmanship of the Press Council and, possibly of lesser significance, his Chairmanship of the Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services and his Chairmanship of the BBC London Local Radio Advisory Council. One of the most difficult and sensitive areas in which to achieve justice arises where the freedom of the media and the press come into conflict with the rights of the individual to have his privacy respected. No one who knows Sir Louis was at all surprised that he was called on to play a central role in this hazardous area. As Professor Barendt in his contribution to this book makes clear, not only was Sir Louis a distinguished last Chairman of the Press Council, he was responsible for the issue of a Code of Practice which was in some ways the precursor of the Code of the new Press Complaints Commission.

Louis has also been a great campaigner for law reform. He has many achievements to his credit but I suspect that the cause which was closest to his heart was penal reform. Certainly, I was the beneficiary of his wise advice when conducting the inquiry into prison disturbances in the wake of the Strangeways riot. A number of the extremely authoritative contributions to this *festschrift* therefore focus on some of the areas of reform for which Sir Louis campaigned. Thus we have *The Politics of Capital Punishment* by his collaborator, Gavin Drewry; *Mad, Bad or Simply Dangerous?* by Terence Morris dealing with a subject of the greatest importance to Sir Louis (he was Chairman of the Mental Health Act Commission), namely homicide and mental disorder, and Lord Lane discussing *Penal Politics*. The Howard

League for Penal Reform grew in status and influence during the 11 years he was Chairman and the even longer period he has continued to be Vice-President. As recently as January 1997, together with Sean McConville he published *A Case for a Royal Commission on Crime and Punishment* for the Prison Reform Trust. It provides an obvious example of how his ideas motivate others since his proposals have since been endorsed by Lord Chief Justice, Lord Bingham of Cornhill, in two public lectures and been the subject of a successful division in the House of Lords during the progress in that House of the Crime and Disorder Bill.

However, it is in connection with the Inquiries that he has conducted that Sir Louis has found the most important outlet for his abundant talents. His creativity, his powers of analysis, his understanding and ability to relate to the public have again and again been called on by the government of the day and other institutions, both in this country and abroad, when matters of great public concern have arisen. Again, the range of subjects he has been called on to investigate is striking. They cover a special hospital, arson and corruption, the death of a child and a review of mental health services. His is a most remarkable record of service for the benefit of the public.

This is but a flavour of why a *festschrift* in honour of Louis is so well deserved. Others who, like myself, know Louis would no doubt cite many other reasons. Prominent among those I am sure will be my last reason; the fact that he is such a splendid person. Always cheerful, bubbling with energy, never complaining, kind and most generous with his friendship. This is not only to the established but also to the young lawyer and the ex-offender. He is in every way a very special person who fortunately is supported by an equally warm, charming and generous wife, Jane. He is undoubtedly among the most distinguished of the 'great and the good'. We are all in his debt.

Harry Woolf