



# MERCURY

## Beefing up thin blue line

**N**EW laws, new equipment, new uniforms and more officers: Tasmania's police are copping it sweet this election year.

The three main political parties are promising better funding and back-up and a range of sensible new policies. It is wonderful how an election can open the purse strings.

Perhaps it helped that all three party leaders were invited to outline their policies at the annual Police Association conference this week. It was an inspired decision by the organisers.

Facing an audience of Tasmania's finest, the politicians each did their best to impress with proposals to improve policing and boost morale in the force.

Tasmanian politics can be depressingly immature at times but Labor, the Liberals and the Greens deserve credit for their support of police and their measured approach to law enforcement.

The two opposition parties have resisted the temptation to dive into the gutter and manufacture a law and order "crisis" in a race for votes, which has been an ugly feature of elections in some other states.

As a result, law enforcement has been cancelled out as a major election issue, although there are some differences between the policies of each party.

The Labor Government plans tough legislation to deter assaults on all emergency workers, including police, with offenders facing Supreme Court jury trials and the possibility of long jail terms.

It proposes to relieve police of court security and prisoner escort duties, to free more officers for front-line work. This is an obvious and sensible move, which the other parties also advocate.

Labor promises to employ 30 more officers and the Liberals plan to match that. The Greens are more extravagant,

pledging 100 extra officers but they can afford to say that because they are not likely to be governing in their own right or in a position to deliver.

One of the most frustrating aspects of policing in Tasmania, for officers and many others, is the apparent leniency of sentences in some cases, particularly for offences such as dangerous driving.

It has become all too common to hear of idiots continuing to indulge their taste for high-risk driving even after they have lost their licences, sometimes causing death and injury as a result.

The Government has responded to these concerns by promising a new Sentencing Advisory Council to hear community views, analyse crime data and advise the Attorney-General.

Sentencing is a complex issue that involves questions about the most appropriate way to deal with serial offenders, including the need for adequate rehabilitation and education programs within and outside the prison system.

Thankfully no party has called for extreme "solutions" such as mandatory sentencing.

The Liberals do promise tough new laws to impound and auction off the vehicles of the worst drivers. Also they would establish a Serious Crimes Unit to tackle cases such as unsolved murders and the disturbing number of robberies with weapons which have frightened Tasmanians in recent times.

It is a tribute to the strength, training and professionalism of Tasmania Police that it has managed to sail through the upheaval and uncertainty of having a suspended Police Commissioner yet maintain its focus.

For all the resentment some people feel over speed camera traps and other issues, police have earned the respect and support of all parties and seem to have it.