

EDITORIAL

ARE YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING?

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If you had decided that the Liberal Democrats or the Green Party were not going to form the next government then you would be hard pressed to find a positive edge to the campaigns on crime policy by either of the two main parties. Michael Howard did a good job in reminding us what he was like in government by reprising policies New Labour had at least tried to leave behind including the 'build more prisons' sound bite redolent of the popular punitiveness of the Howard period as Home Secretary. We also saw a somewhat ironic argument against electronic monitoring by Howard. Vilified in the 1990s as a measure which would dehumanise and degrade offenders Howard bizarrely objected to it as too lenient a measure whether gaudy orange coats became standard issue for all offenders or not!! So we were left with New Labour and their vision for crime policy over the next four years.

It was reading Hazel Blears' first ideas post-election that starkly confronted me with the realisation that the New Labour election strategy on crime had been an attempt to conflate policies in a way not dissimilar to the successful tactic employed by Thatcher in the 1980s who had conflated law and order. You will recall this had given us generations of political and social protesters re-branded as criminals. New Labour were employed in a re-branding exercise all of their own. Clues come in Blears' words on ASBOs. Firstly regretting the spread of anti-social behaviour to prosperous areas she commented:

That's not about poverty, that's not about deprivation,' she said. 'That was just terror (Hinsliff, 2005).

And, warming to her theme of naming and shaming, she went on to say:

The minister backed the Bluewater shopping centre's ban on 'hoodies' and baseball caps: 'If you think that your child is wearing that kind of clothing in order to be part of a gang that wants to terrorise people, then I think you have a responsibility to sort it out' (Hinsliff, 2005).

What we see in these quotes is the conflation of two areas of policy: crime and terrorism and this feels to be the main message from New Labour's election campaign. The New Labour manifesto contained measures for anti-terrorism intermingled with proposals in the mainstream criminal justice system. The emphasis was clear. It is only a matter of degree which distinguishes anti-social behaviour from terrorist activities. Impression management was seeking to plant a collective image in the minds of ordinary citizens that alienated,

deprived and disenfranchised young people are as big a danger as and compatible with any terrorist threat. Indeed as Hazel Blears states above they are in fact terrorists of a uniquely domestic kind. It follows from this conflation that we must then have a punitive programme of legislation to defeat this internal wave of terror. So in this mood it tells the law-abiding citizen, let's name and shame people subject to ASBOs and then get them to wear uniforms so we all know who they are, then ID Cards are an obvious next step to come in as this can then ensure that no employer or public venue need allow access to these domestic terrorists. The bankruptcy of this approach was illustrated in a response to these policies penned by criminologist and film maker, Roger Graef, in the London Evening Standard. He writes:

The toughest-talking gang of all - Home Office ministers - are at it again... the hardest thing for jobs is not more punishment, but learning to take responsibility for their actions. We've already got ASBOs and the largest prison population in Europe. It is time to learn from our successes, not our failures (Graef, 2005).

So the crucial question for practitioners in the community justice field is where does that leave us. Crime policy continues to be dominated by this excessive and largely inappropriately conflated and censorious language. Whilst it seeks to ferment in the minds of citizens a nervousness and sense of insecurity as we walk the streets (here the terrorism link works well to endorse this foreboding atmosphere) it also must be read alongside New Labour's developing policies on victims which appear to contrast victims to offenders as if the two categorises are mutually exclusive.

Re-balancing the system in favour of victims was a dominant pre-election theme of New Labour. Various long standing due process protections for offenders are being re-engineered under this agenda. This is despite the context of an average of 770 wrongful convictions per year in court (Naughton, 2005). It is unclear whether the system is in need of an overhaul at all. Should it not be about recognizing that victims and offenders are not so distinct categories and that the rights and responsibilities they share as citizens is a better starting point for policy innovation. Thus a more positive balancing would be in the promotion of policies which emphasise the ways in which offenders can be reintegrated into communities rather than further stigmatized and alienated. This agenda could include the following: recognising that prisoners are citizens and considering more pro-actively their right to vote and participate in society; protecting the offender as victim by rejecting the Tory supported 'Tony Martin Law' which would allow householders to be able to take more active action against intruders; enhancing and engaging more ex-offenders as workers in the system supporting and mentoring their peers in ways which can help their re-integration rather than further stigmatise them; making sure that whatever organisational arrangements are decided upon for the National Offender Management Service (and that in itself is a huge policy issue for the next 2 years) ensuring that individual offenders remain at the heart of the process and are actually given the end-to-end services, support and treatment they need to move away from crime. A positive

re-balancing through these and similar measures suggested would protect victims by giving all individuals a stake back in society.

Beyond the ballot box and the soap box of election rhetoric New Labour has initiated some challenges to the criminal justice system to meet the demands of reducing re-offending. Much of its pre-election practice - the Drug Intervention Programmes for end-to-end support of drug offenders, the civil renewal agenda in policing and the possibility of regenerating community involvement; the Resettlement Strategies to ensure transition from custody to community is enhanced; the Reducing Re-Offending Action Plan and its focus on key pathways; the Offender Management model; the protection for victims and witnesses of crime; and the restorative justice agenda in youth crime belie the rather more worrying sound bites of the past few weeks.

The mind-set of the average citizen remains potentially negative, stigmatizing and afraid of our fledging 'terrorists'. It is to be hoped that these more positive policies actually succeed in persuading people on the ground that the reality of crime reduction is not a fiction of criminological research but an everyday fact which can and should be heard and acted upon by people. After all, the youngsters I meet on the street don't conform to the menace of the Blair's sound bite. As one teenager said to me about the banning of hoods.

This is so ridiculous. It's just a fashion statement and tomorrow it will be something else - get real!!

This edition features articles which offer us a glimpse of key themes for the next few years. The Red Hook Community Justice Centre inspired the development of one such centre in the UK, in Liverpool and Greg Berman and Adam Mansky's article talks about some of the issues raised by such centres in a round table discussion on the innovation. Anne Berman reviews the What Works approach in Sweden and, using a challenging methodology, argues that programmes work best where a supervisory relationship is maintained and this will have relevance for the Offender Management agenda in the UK.

We have two articles on policing in this edition. Chris Crowther-Dowey reviewing the Lambeth Policing Experiment seeks to demonstrate that communitarian values have influenced police work in relation to drugs and notes the emphasis on community consultation and community engagement. He warns however that escalating violence in the distribution of hard drugs remains a key and unresolved issue. Matt Long and Eli Silverman focus on the impact of new public managerialism in two apparently contrasting police cultures in the UK and the US. They demonstrate that, two systems of public accountability, that of Compstat and Best Value, offer some interesting parallels in development. This theme is continued in the article by using the notion of censure to assess the difficulties and contradictions presented to middle managers working in this system.

The final article by Beth Hodgson challenges policy makers to improve their practices in supporting victims through the criminal justice process. Her research highlights poor practices in supporting victims and suggests that approaches based on restorative principles and including mediation and apology would help victims cope with the emotional distress of victimisation.

It remains to be seen how New Labour's agenda will impact on the policy areas discussed in this issue. New Labour's potentially progressive achievements may be undermined by their conflation of separate issues which are, in fact, worlds apart: on the one hand, a new and unpredictable conflict over globalised injustice fought on an international stage versus the ever-present 'problem' of young people. Geoff Pearson's (1983) *Hooligan* ought to become compulsory reading for politicians of all hues!!

References

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