

Food for thought

Enver Solomon and Helen Mills introduce this issue of *cjm*.

Ever since the events of 9/11 the so called 'war on terror' has radically changed the nature of public and political debate. As Tony Blair famously said, 'the rules of the game have changed'. In his view and in the opinion of many others questions of justice and freedom need to be understood in a different light. Indeed the majority of MPs were so persuaded by this view they were prepared to support the introduction of 42 day detention without trial (at the time of going to press, however, the legislation has still to be passed by the House of Lords). Only a decade ago few would have thought this possible.

Balancing national security with civil liberties has often been the main focus of the terrorism debate. But there are many other issues and questions to be considered. This issue of *cjm* attempts to explore the subject of terrorism from as many perspectives as possible. It is by no means an exhaustive exploration. However, it does provide a more wide ranging examination than is found in most publications, including contributions looking at the media, the victim's experience, the Muslim community and the study of terrorism as an academic discipline.

In the nineteen years of its existence this is the first time that *cjm* has taken terrorism as its special theme. This perhaps reflects the fact that it is often seen as a subject to be separated from criminal justice policy and practice. Yet nearly all the criminal justice agencies have had to engage with the issue in one way or other another. For example, the Prison Service has been faced with considering how to manage increasing numbers of people sentenced for terrorist offences as well as dealing with the sensitive subject of Islamic extremism. Crime and Disorder Partnerships have also had to look at security as well as community safety. Some councils have even used counter terror laws to access private phone and email records.

In her introduction to the themed section Dr Basia Spalek reflects on the wide range of statutory and non-statutory organisations involved in countering terrorism and on the varied sources of emerging critiques about these practices. From a range of perspectives and in different ways, contributors challenge much about the current construction of the 'terrorist threat' and question states' response to it. Their critical analysis and experiences suggest more can be learnt, and crucially, the challenge of violent extremist can be better countered, by an approach which takes greater account of historical and ongoing injustices.

Alongside the heated parliamentary debate on the extension of detention without charge for suspected terrorists, the summer months were also consumed with media inspired panics on knife crime (see the last issue of *cjm* for a discussion of the use of knives in crime) and girl crime. The publication of official statistics by the Youth Justice Board showed a rise in the number of offences committed by girls over the last three years. The increase was explained in the media as being a result of a new 'ladette' culture with more girls turning to crime. As Tim Bateman explains in his article in the topical issues and comment section, there is in fact little evidence of a girl crime wave. Instead policing targets have resulted in more girls being 'brought to justice' as part of the overall criminalisation of greater numbers of children.

Following the publication of a consultation document in June the government is expected to push ahead with its plans to build super sized 'titan' jails. Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberal Democrats have proposed a halt to prison building. Instead the main political parties appear to be locked into a race to provide more prison places. However, in Scotland there is the possibility of different direction being taken in penal policy. Jamie Bennett highlights the Scottish Nationalists call for a reduction in prison numbers and their support for prison re-nationalisation. He suggests the approach developing north of the border 'could break the current penal consensus'.

In recent months there has also been much public debate over the reclassification of cannabis. It overshadowed the launch of the government's updated drug strategy earlier this year and in the opinion of the former deputy drug czar, Mike Trace, reflects the focus 'on the symbolism of drug policy, rather than its substance'. He provides a detailed assessment of the government's progress in tackling substance misuse and concludes that whilst there have been some positive results there have also been missed opportunities. What is needed are more 'creative new initiatives' to improve programmes and delivery structures.

By providing comment and reflection on some of the topical criminal justice issues making the headlines we hope that readers find *cjm* provides up to date critique and analysis. Together with the in-depth look at terrorism this issue offers much food for thought on some of the most pressing and controversial issues of public and political debate. ■

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