

# The labours of Sisyphus?

Will McMahon and Tammy McGloughlin  
introduce this issue of *cjm*.



*This year the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies is celebrating its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary (see page 3). Throughout these 80 years there have been a number of recurring myths about 'crime' and criminal justice that the Centre has sought to challenge. So it is appropriate that the contributors to this issue's themed section, edited by Rebecca Roberts, systematically tackle a number of the most enduring myths about criminal justice. The debunking of one myth may be achieved by appealing to another, so it is only when reading the articles as one piece that the true scale of the myth-busting that is required becomes clear.*

In the topical section, surveillance technology is considered. Is it the efficient harm prevention measure we have been led to believe? Articles by **Suki Desai** and **Imran Awan** focus on how cameras have been introduced with the rationale of having beneficial effects, but with the practical implementation revealing adverse consequences. Desai describes how the use of surveillance within mental health hospitals, introduced as a measure to reduce violent attacks on staff in practice, 'has the potential for undermining the intimacy and therapeutic relationship between ward staff and patients.' and explains that, to date, there has been no full evaluation of their efficacy.

Meanwhile, Awan considers the use of surveillance in the predominantly Muslim areas of the West Midlands. He argues that the police targeted specific areas using tactics that 'are both heavy handed and counter-productive' and suggests that the deployment of CCTV, ostensibly introduced to tackle 'anti-social behaviour', has, in fact, marginalised the neighbourhood by using the cameras as a means to 'spy' on residents. He concludes that in order to mitigate against the damage caused to the community, the police will now have to attempt to rebuild trust by admitting their mistakes.

The targeting of particular groups is also addressed by **Robin Wilson**, who reports on the lack of due process for asylum seekers. He cites their experiences of being held in police custody over time and without automatic access to legal assistance. Wilson highlights the arbitrariness and humiliations of being treated as 'criminal or even terrorist' where customary norms of the law are not applied.

A subject often on the periphery of the law, the protection of endangered species, is described by **Jasper Humphreys** and **M L R Smith**; they discuss how, in spite of international legal conventions and protocols, wildlife and biodiversity are severely threatened. Trading in, for example, ivory and rhino horn, provide low-risk

profiteering for poachers and the consequent falling numbers of already endangered species. While there appears to be no impetus to enforce legislation, conservationists have engaged public awareness and support in an effort to protect species from extinction.

Our debating section considers the proposal, put forward by the Justice Minister Ken Clarke, for a 9 to 5 minimum wage work routine for those in prison. This has sparked a widespread debate, with some regarding the proposal as a viable route for the incarcerated getting a dose of the 'work ethic', while others have a much more critical view. Part of this exchange takes place in this issue's debating section, with contributions from **Joe Black** representing the Campaign Against Prison Slavery who sees the idea as 'a vision of a neo-Victorian rehabilitation regime', while **Mark Day** from the Prison Reform Trust argues that the plan is 'in principle, absolutely right.'

From a trade union perspective, **Steve Gillan**, General Secretary of the Prison Officers Association, suggests that if we are to get prison numbers down then getting to grips with the problems those in prison face should be our first concern. He also believes that the idea of private companies laying off workers outside the walls, to employ cheap labour inside, is a moral problem.

Meanwhile **Gemma Lousley**, of the Criminal Justice Alliance, asks a crucial question: 'If prisons remain overcrowded, how will there be enough staff to supervise prisoners working a 40-hour week?'

Finally, in a short but potent article, **Professor Rod Morgan** offers his personal reflections on a recent conference on youth justice he attended in Italy, and describes the impact, on him and others, of images presented at the conference. The first, a montage of film clips drawn from a drug centre and youths in custody in Chile, left many in the conference stunned; the second, a series of photographs from a Texas boot camp that reveal 'embed[ed] hate in Good Ole Texas'.

This last article reminds us that attempting to radically change criminal justice can appear a Sisyphian task. After 80 years there is still much to do. Is it true, as Camus wrote in his 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* 'The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.'? However you answer the question yourself, we hope you can support us in our efforts by making a contribution to our anniversary appeal. ■

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