

and, judging by the letters page, contentious in the extreme. One letter calls for immediate custody, not only for dealers, but also for persons found in possession of the drug 'crack'. Although a discourse on crack is important, the tone of the letter is hard line. If it reflects the opinion of the magistracy, then what hope is there for government initiatives into alternatives to custody or penal reform?

It is a strength of the journal that over a number of months it builds up a perspective on issues (vide the discourse on television licence offenders) and that it gives its readers

a forum for a balanced view of a subject and for its debate. Its other strong point is its educative function in the continuing training of magistrates.

## Justice of the Peace

**The Journal for the Practitioner in the Magistrates' Court. Published weekly. For details contact: Justice of the Peace Ltd., Little London, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 1PG.**

Established in 1837, the 'Justice of the Peace' is the oldest legal journal in the world. It is read by Justices' Clerks and others in criminal justice.

'Justice of the Peace' is a journal for practitioners. It deals with procedural matters, articles from barristers and academics, case notes, parliamentary issues, practise questions and answers, has healthy letters and recruitment sections and, as a weekly publication, is up to date in matters that affect lawyers in court. The coming months, following the publication of the Green Papers concerning the legal professions, will no doubt be difficult for the profession as a whole. It will be through the pages of 'Justice of the Peace' that a debate can be aired.

*Francis Charlton.*

# Not the Last Word

## The National Membership Scheme

**It has rarely if ever been possible to eradicate a whole category of crime. Yet the Government seems to believe that football hooliganism can be wiped out by a small piece of plastic.** The plan for a compulsory National Membership Scheme for football is an extraordinary intervention into the organisation of popular culture. While not as dramatic as the prohibition of alcohol in the USA in the '20s, it is just as ill conceived and has as little chance of succeeding.

The scheme requires everyone who wishes to attend a football match to become a member and carry an identity card complete with photograph. Without this card, which can be withdrawn from fans who misbehave, it will not be possible to attend a Football League match.

### Own Goals

There are so many problems with this scheme that its opponents hardly know from which direction to attack it. It won't help prevent hooliganism — most trouble now happens outside the grounds. Inside the grounds, video surveillance has been highly successful and all football league grounds are now equipped with cameras. Segregation of fans, well organised policing, escorting away fans and drink bans have also helped to diminish the extent of violence.

Fans bent on hooliganism will get in anyway, by using false names, stolen cards, bribing gatekeepers, etc. Even if violent fans are outlawed, there is always a fresh flow of hooligans into the game and those bent on violence may simply find other outlets where they will be less easy to control — witness the regular incidents in small town centres on weekend nights.

The most highly publicised incidents in recent years have involved England's away games but the scheme won't prevent fans travelling overseas.

While the scheme won't be any real use in tackling hooliganism, it will provide the sport with additional problems. Attendances will drop as casual fans and foreign visitors will be less likely to attend spontaneously. It will be a costly and cumbersome scheme to operate, it will slow admission speed, inevitably leading to irritation and possible trouble. If identification depends on gatekeepers challenging a resemblance to a photograph, the entry process could be further delayed by argument. The scheme is also open to abuse by those who have the power to order the withdrawal of cards.

The powers are out of all proportion to the reality of the problem. There is violence at football

matches but considering the large crowds, the number of serious injuries are tiny — it's much more dangerous on the streets and on the roads than in a football stadium.

The Scheme infringes civil liberties, and could presage universal compulsory identity cards.

So why has it been introduced? In major part, it is a product of the power of the tabloid press to produce moral panics around some social problems (football hooliganism, AIDS, Acid House) while ignoring others — homelessness, unemployment, racist attacks, etc. Football hooliganism is a high profile problem about which Something Must Be Done.

There must be more sober reflection on the complexities of football hooliganism, which in the end can only be solved from within the terrace culture itself. There are signs, in the massive growth of alternative football magazines and in the establishment of the Football Supporters' Association that such internal reform may already be underway.

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