

BOOK REVIEWS

Persistent Young Offenders, Ann Hagell & Tim Newburn, Policy Studies Institute 1994

This book offers a useful corrective to the assertions of recent Home Secretaries that juvenile crime will be reduced dramatically if the 200 hard core offenders responsible for the bulk of it are rounded up and incapacitated. This unsubstantiated belief has served as a rationale for the introduction of *Secure Training Centres* for 12 to 14 year-old 'persistent' young offenders.

The authors studied 531 young offenders aged 10-16 who were arrested at least three times in 1992. The sample was drawn from a Midland county and two London boroughs. Of this group 14% were young women and 86% young men. No information is provided on ethnicity "because of the substantial amount of missing information" (p37). This is an important possibly strategic, omission because if the proposed *Secure Training Centres* attract similar populations to those of other penal institutions in Britain and North Western Europe, the proportion of non-Caucasian inmates is likely to be very high.

The authors studied police and social services records of the 531 young people and interviewed 71 of them. The tabloid headlines notwithstanding, only 2.6% of the sample was aged 10 with the peak age being 14. On average, the young people had been arrested on four occasions and the highest number of arrests was 23. They tended not to specialise, committing a variety of offences but, predictably, the young people admitted far more drug offences than were recorded by the police.

34% of those who had left school were unemployed and the majority of those interviewed said they were not doing anything structured with their time. Rates of childbirth amongst the young women in the sample were very high. Approximately half of the young people lived in households in which the 'head' was either not working or unemployed. They reported having good relationships with their mothers but that 'friends' and drugs were a source of tension. Their experience of school had been largely negative, characterised by truancy and early departure. Several of them had reading problems. Nonetheless, they still saw study and the achievement of qualifications as important, suggesting that they continued to subscribe to mainstream values.

When the authors attempted to apply the criteria for the imposition of a *Secure*

Training Order being considered by the Government, only 25 of their sample were eligible. However, they also applied two other sets of criteria. The first, focuses on the children with the top 10% of arrests and alleged and known offences. The second focuses on all children aged 10-16 who committed ten or more offences in a three-month period. Only 8 of the children who fitted these other two sets of criteria fell within those proposed by the Government.

The authors therefore criticise the Government's criteria on the grounds of their fundamental injustice and the fact that they will encourage targeting by the bench.

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Responses to Crime: Volume 2: Penal Policy in the Making. Lord Windlesham. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1993

It is a rare book that can move between references to Anthony (Fat Tony) Salerno and Lady Margaret Thatcher, and generally encompass a whole array of many other distinguished and not so distinguished individuals in a volume entitled *Responses to Crime* (Vol. 2).

This is an eclectic work, ambitiously dealing with the complexities of how penal policy is formulated and then enacted in legislation. Lord Windlesham's access to, and use of, archive material provides the pivot to this weighty volume, and his use of contemporary sources is an interesting exercise in selection.

One of Lord Windlesham's main goals is to isolate "the diverse forces which bear on policy making" and there is no question that this is accomplished. We are presented with as many diverse forces as complex political and legal structures tend to throw up in the course of 43 years.

Lord Windlesham begins by stating that "Between 1948 and 1991 Parliament passed eight substantive Criminal Justice Acts for England and Wales". Today (1994), outside of Windlesham's purview, there is a huge and highly controversial Criminal Justice Bill currently going through Parliament - this represents the fifth such bill in only the last 7 years. One cannot help but look for clues in trying to understand this enormous speeding up of such legislative endeavours in the more recent period. I am not sure that this volume takes us much closer to such an understanding. This

may not be because such clues are absent - more that they are hidden in a complex mosaic of action, inaction and interaction that characterise the political machinations of our Parliamentary system.

Windlesham is concerned with the way in which objectives tend to alter between their inception and their implementation - the litmus test of this extensive analysis is to see what frameworks and clues are offered to take us forward to a better understanding of this more recent turbulent legislative period when touchstone common law concepts such as "The Right to Silence", part of British law for 300 years, is close to being swept away - or has he merely caught the end of an era with no clear links across to the true character of political, legal and legislative responses to crime in the 1990s?

This volume provides the criminologist with tantalising insights into the political and legal power bases of both UK and US societies, but is not formulated to take the reader much further under the surface than many other, perhaps more 'dry' constitutional textbooks. Where it scores highly, however, is in its ability to suddenly turn and turn again along a longer route than most such treatments. By dint of this, this study will take on a new importance by informing scholars of 'the way we were', which is fast being consigned to history.

Lord Windlesham, as polite in criticism as in praise, says: "...the temptation must be resisted to portray the formulation of criminal policy in the late 1980s as being more orderly and rational than it was, or perhaps ever could be" (p.253). This is a book of detail. It operates very effectively as a reference book - jogging the researcher's mind as to the proclaimed rationales, however vague, that emanate from the political machinery to stimulate White Papers: Short, Sharp, Shocks and privatisation policies. It also acts as a catalyst to the reader to ask 'Why?'. Despite its many proclaimed answers, this book poses umpteen implicit and explicit questions.

Lord Windlesham refers to the old adage of governments operating like Grandmother's footsteps - "two steps forward and one step back". One is left, however, with the feeling that given current events in this area of *Responses to Crime*, Grandmother's steps are becoming even more erratic than Lord Windlesham could have imagined.

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