Crime and Business: a culture of (declining) control

Roy Coleman, Steve Tombs and **Dave Whyte** explore some negative consequences of involving businesses in local crime prevention agendas.

For all its attendant problems, the concept of 'community safety', and the rhetoric around the conducting of the post-1998 community safety audits, has clearly allowed the inclusion of corporate and white-collar crimes within crime prevention agendas – in the words of Home Office guidance, "nothing is to be ruled in and nothing ruled out". However, such crimes – including exposing workers and members of the public to the death, injury and disease, to food poisoning, to buying unfit and over-priced goods - have been completely absent from post-*Crime and Disorder Act* crime prevention agendas (Whyte, 2004), and remain distant from the community safety debate. This is perhaps unsurprising, but there are some even more insidious features that need to be explored in any consideration of the emerging relationship between business and crime control and these point directly to the entrepreneurialisation of urban centres and the advent of the 'business friendly city'.

Business and crime control

Business organizations – particularly in urban centres – have been formally offered, and have enthusiastically accepted, an active role in the growing area of private crime control in recent years. The role of the private sector was significantly consolidated under the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* (in particular, section 2.33), where business organisations were indeed *expected* to participate more fully in the funding, planning and delivery of crime control agendas via crime prevention partnerships and strategies. In most British urban centres it is now expected that businesses will participate in: CCTV and electronic surveillance systems coordinated across the city centre; pro-prosecution and exclusion policies to deal with small unlicensed traders, shoplifters, beggars and protestors; business watch schemes; security guard communication networks; and themed anti-crime campaigns.

For Garland, the growth of the commercial security industry and the rise of the corporate anti-crime initiatives has led to a new 'private justice', where highly developed forms of surveillance and exclusion from commercial zones have become more and more routine; indeed, perhaps more routine than under regimes of public forms of justice (Garland, 2000). While this literature has much to offer in understanding the trajectories of crime control, within it Garland and others have reproduced criminology's myopia regarding what 'crime' and 'criminals' look like. This account of high crime societies, characterized by cultures of control, rather omits the implications of these new landscapes of crime control for businesses themselves – who are, for some of the very reasons Garland and others point to, enjoying greater freedom from, not subjection to, regulation of their activities.

Redefining targets of control

Given the expansion of the crime control industry, and with it new markets for goods and services, it is no surprise that a growing range of private actors might want to get involved in the business of crime control. In addition, the costs of shoplifting and other forms of theft to business are (claimed to be) substantial and a proportion of those costs may be effectively controlled. But there is a much bigger prize at stake here. Some studies are beginning to show that the targeting process formulated within entrepreneurialised crime control networks can be described as a spatial ordering strategy aimed at the least powerful inhabitants of the city: potential shoplifters, unlicensed street traders, beggars, *Big Issue* sellers, football supporters, young people in general, and those who might form a source of cultural opposition such as graffiti artists (Coleman, 2004). In other words, crime control has become a means of asserting entrepreneurial rule in city centres.

What is missing from the burgeoning commentary on urban crime prevention is an analysis of how corporations have used crime reduction partnerships and coalitions to facilitate the commercialization of space on one hand, and to facilitate a *hegemonic* strategy on the other hand. Private sector crime control provides businesses with new opportunities to enhance their *moral* authority as participants, and at the same time to enhance their ability to shape public and social policy, to reshape definitions of crime and to refocus crime control efforts.

Business as victim

The conservatism of the highly partial approach to 'crime' control on the part of local crime control partnerships contrasts starkly with the willingness of those very same partnerships to uncover and embrace initiatives around crimes *against* business in community safety agendas. 43 per cent of local crime and disorder audits published in 2002 identify crimes against business as a priority for intervention compared with 16 per cent in 1999, the first year that

the local audits were published (Coleman *et al.*, 2005). Locally – and nationally – business organisations and trade associations are involved in a concerted effort to reframe how local publics think about the process of criminal victimisation. Crimes against business surveys have proliferated and paint a similar picture of the toll of business victimisation as more ubiquitous and economically damaging than offences committed against individuals.

Crimes *against* business are used to create a sense of collective risk to us all, an extension of the imagery of what Hudson (1996: 154) calls "communities of victims." So, we *all* suffer price rises as a result of shoplifting, breaking and entering businesses, the general hiking up of insurance premiums and so on. Thus, according to Liverpool's Crime and Disorder Strategy for 2001, crime against business "should be taken seriously" because it has "knock on effects, the consequential loss of jobs, the effect on the economy and the regeneration of the city" and in deterring "new businesses operating in certain parts of the city" (Liverpool Crime and Disorder Partnership, 2001: 18).

The (further) insulation of business from crime agendas

This is the context of entrepreneurial urbanism: the creation of new sites of power where businesses enter into partnerships to control crime; where the naked pursuit of profit is elevated to the status of moral exigency; and where business is constructed as *victim*. How much more difficult does it then become to conceive of businesses as offenders, and to act upon that?

This process of hegemony construction bears heavily upon any campaigns for the regulation, indeed criminalization, of business. Counter-offensives against environmental, public and occupational health, occupational safety and food standards regulation, not to mention increased taxation, are often connected to hegemonic claims that businesses are unduly victimised by states. The material consequences are that local authorities transfer a growing proportion of public resources to urban street crime control, whilst the regulation of business crimes drifts from funding crisis to funding crisis. The total number of local authority funded health and safety enforcement officers (environmental health officers, or EHOs) fell from a full time equivalent of 1590 in 1996/97 to 1070 in 2000/01. Each officer equivalent is now responsible for enforcing health and safety in 1118 premises, an increase of 40 per cent since 1996/97. The number of visits to premises fell by a quarter in the same period (Coleman *et al.* 2005). In local authority food regulation there is also a growing awareness of a crisis in both the recruitment and the funding of EHOs. The result is that very few food safety crimes are prosecuted. Thus, half of all local authorities failed to lay *one single prosecution* for breaches of food law in 2000/01 (*ibid*). Although it is not possible to use such data to conclusively point to a causal link between the retreat from enforcement at a local level and intensification of control efforts in relation to crimes against businesses, there can be little doubt that the decriminalization of business offending is a key effect of the process of hegemony construction that is unfolding here.

Conclusion

A key – but unexplored – aspect of new crime prevention strategies, then, is its impact on the production, visibility and control of corporate crimes and harms. However, as is the case for any form of hegemonic domination, this process is never complete, never entirely secure. This is partly because any hegemony relies on the construction of a 'common-sense' which at times of course is both internally contradictory and, more importantly perhaps, contradicts with people's everyday experiences – and this is certainly the case with respect to community safety, harm, crime and corporations.

For us, pursuing a strategy of corporate crime prevention – not least under the rubric of community safety – is both a desirable and feasible direction for criminal justice professionals to begin to develop. Crime prevention partnerships could be realistically reoriented to include regulatory agencies, workers' organisations, consumer groups, and environmental pressure groups. In discursive terms, this is a relatively straightforward task. At the same time – not least since the processes of entrepreneurial urbanism that we point to tend to make business offending less visible to the public – it is crucial that all available data on corporate crime should be disseminated and publicised as widely as possible by local crime prevention partnerships and agencies. This could provide a means of raising awareness of the risks of victimisation, and as a means of encouraging the general public to be more vigilant and responsible. Such a strategy might allow a relative reordering of the priorities of crime prevention agendas and would build upon one of the few accepted wisdoms of the criminology of corporate crime – namely that when drawn to peoples' attention, popular support for the control of such offences is enthusiastic. But making corporate crimes visible requires those of us whose work involves analyzing crime to do so in an imaginative and holistic fashion and expand our images of crime and criminals beyond the usual suspects.

■

Roy Coleman is Lecturer is Sociology, University of Liverpool. Steve Tombs is Professor of Sociology, Liverpool John Moores University. Dave Whyte is Lecturer in Criminology, University of Stirling.

References

Coleman, R. (2004) *Reclaiming the Streets: Surveillance, Social Order and the City*, Cullompton: Willan.

Coleman, R., Tombs, S. and Whyte, D. (2006) 'Capital, Crime Control and Statecraft in the Entrepreneurial City', *Urban Studies*, 43, (1).

Garland, D. (2000) 'The Culture of High Crime Societies: Some Preconditions of Recent Law and Order Policies', *British Journal of Criminology*, 40, 347-375.

Hudson, B. (1996) *Understanding Justice: An Introduction to Ideas, Perspectives and Controversies in Modern Penal Theory.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Liverpool Crime and Disorder Partnership (2001), *Crime and Disorder Strategy*, Liverpool: CitySafe.

Whyte, D. (2004) 'All that Glitters Isn't Gold: Environmental Crimes and the Production of Local Criminological Knowledge', *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 6, (1).