How violent is Britain?

David Whyte introduces this issue of cjm

The articles in this themed issue of cjm focus on institutional violence. Many of the articles in this section were contributions to the conference organised by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies and the University of Liverpool on 15 May this year: 'How Violent is Britain?'. At the conference, a follow-up to 2013's 'How Corrupt is Britain?', campaigners, academics, key public figures and journalists were brought together to explore how we should tackle state and corporate violence in Britain.

'How Violent is Britain?' sought to ignite public debate about the politics of institutional violence. Many of the contributors to the conference, and some of the contributors here, show that the impact of state and corporate violence, particularly under current 'austerity' conditions, is intensifying. If radicalisation is described as the process through which an *individual* accepts and promotes a set of ideas that legitimise violence, then 'How Violent is Britain?' was concerned largely with a British state radicalisation, a process that has intrinsically violent consequences: in the asylum system; in foreign policy; amongst our police forces; and in the welfare system.

Amidst all of the constant chatter about the 'radicalisation' of individuals as Britain goes to war in Syria and Iraq (again) we ignore the 'radicalisation' of the state. Britain's hubris in the rush to war is an indication of the ease that extreme state violence can now be politically mobilised. It has been openly and officially recognised by all major political parties in the past year that the immediate roots of the current conflict can be found in the 2003 war. How can we reconcile this quickly forgotten consensus with a new consensus that disconnects the politics of the current war in the Middle East from the politics of the previous one? It is the hallmark of the radicalised state that its violence is made to appear decoupled from politics. And this indiscriminate aerial attack that will certainly kill countless civilians and combatants proceeds with virtually no public or political debate.

The poverty of media and public debate enables the disconnection of the violence of the state from its political causes. This political disconnection clouds our ability to understand the 'violence of austerity' as much as it clouds our ability to understand the causes of police violence, or military violence in the Middle East. But make no mistake, when workers are killed in industries that have been deemed by a business-friendly government to be 'low risk' (see **David Whyte**), when people die because a local authority evicts them from the homes they have lived in for years for not paying bedroom tax, and when people die because they are no longer allowed to visit a hospital, this is political violence. It is political violence, just as bombing people in another country from a distance, or arming another country to do so is political violence. This special issue of **cjm** exposes the intrinsically violent character of British politics and British state institutions. The McGurk's Bar bombing in Belfast is reconnected to the politics of the British state, thanks to the tenacity of the families of those killed (see **Ciarán MacAirt**).

The violence of housing evictions for profit is connected directly to the reforms that undeniably cause premature deaths and suicides (see **Vickie Cooper**); the harsh control and violent incarceration of immigrants and refugees is connected to a brutal politics of immigration (see **Victoria Canning**); the violence of the police during protests is connected to the intrinsically violent social inequalities that police ultimately preserve (see **Will Jackson** and **Helen Monk**); the violence of incarceration for young people is connected to a political war on youth crime (see **Barry Goldson**); the violence of self-harm and self-inflicted deaths is connected to a penal system of that is intrinsically violent (see **J M Moore**); and the violence of the NHS reforms is connected to a wider political struggle that not only places immigrants in danger, but endangers us all (see **David Stuckler** and **Sarah Steele**).

In the topical issues and comment section, and continuing with the theme of state violence, **Nina Vaswani** looks at vulnerable people within institutions. She has focused her research on young men in prison who describe their experiences of bereavement which highlight their backgrounds characterised by multiple and traumatic losses. **Marie-Helen Maras** introduces Darknet and the privacy enhancing technology used to get to Darknet sites: namely, Tor. She explores the investigation and subsequent shut down of Silk Road, emphasising the need for future research into cyberspace if lawbreaking activities on the Internet are to be obstructed. **Kevin Walby** and **Randy K Lippert** report on the global spread of corporate security and argue that mechanisms should be put in place to ensure future accountability in this fast growing sphere. **Rebecca Daddow** points to the transformational potential in using an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach in community building. Finally, **David Faulkner** reflects on his time as a civil servant in the Home Office, and offers an insight into the lessons that could be learnt to inform a future government's deliberations and decision making, regarding penal reform; he cautions against 'hastily conceived legislation'. ■

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