

# editorial

## crime and disorder

During the 1997 election campaign, in a change of direction from the previous Conservative administration's thinking about crime, its reduction and prevention, New Labour forwarded proposals for 'community safety' which mirrored many of those detailed in the *Morgan Report* (Home Office, 1991), published some six years before. Indeed, whereas the Conservatives dismissed this Report's recommendations for a disseminated system of community safety led by local authorities, such proposals were to form, under New Labour, not only part of a consultation document on community safety circulated during the September of 1997, but also a central plank of the newly introduced *Crime and Disorder Bill* (1997) expected to receive royal assent this summer.

One of the most succinct attempts to evaluate these developments generally, and the nature of community safety strategies in England and Wales at the end of the twentieth century specifically, can be found in the recently edited collection of articles by Marlow and Pitts (1998) - *Planning Safer Communities*. Contributors grapple with the dynamics and complexities surrounding the development of community safety strategies; the place within such strategies for young people; and the limitations and possibilities of this new way of working for the future of crime prevention. For these writers 'it seems that after nearly twenty years of unrealised promises, disappointments and fitful accomplishments, the time of 'community safety' and the 'community safety professional' has finally arrived'.

As Section 6 of the *Crime and Disorder Bill* details, local responsible agencies are to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder in their area, based upon local audits of crime and other crime-related indicators. Other sections of the Bill detail ways of tackling particular anti-social and offending behaviours, aspects of criminal justice such as the youth justice system and some anomalies of the criminal law such as racial harassment.

It is within this context that this current issue of CJM has arisen. Its aim is threefold. First, we provide information about the changes generally and those specifically proposed within the Bill. Secondly, we gather together a number of social commentators, practitioners and academics willing to provide a critical review of the main characteristics and strategies detailed in the Bill. Thirdly, we offer a broader contextual analysis of developments in community crime prevention and safety at the end of the twentieth century.

To take our last aim first, the issue begins with an article by **David Faulkner** in which he explores some of the contemporary debates surrounding crime and justice. He calls for a systematic response 'set in a wider context of principles and values, including those of citizenship and civil society'. Whilst much of the content of the *Crime and Disorder Bill* should be enthusiastically welcomed, Faulkner expresses concern over the failure to tackle the rising level of imprisonment and the rush to criminalise further behaviours in the pursuit of respectability with the electorate.

This broader contextual discussion continues in an interview by **Penny Fraser** with the author **Nick Davies**, whose recent book, *Dark Heart*, provides a chilling account of hidden Britain today, as the review located at the back of the issue highlights. The picture presented is that of the underside of new Britain, of the underbelly New Labour's manifesto pledges aim to reach, although as Davies' thoughts suggest, this may not be as

straightforward as some think.

The second aim of this issue is to provide a critical review of the Bill's themes, alongside a discussion of the success or otherwise of those aspects which have already been developed. For example, **Mike Ashley** considers models of successful partnership work at local and regional levels and **Frank Warburton** looks at the implications of the proposed measures for dealing with 'anti-social behaviour' and warns against further exclusion of young people from local decision-making and provision. **Jason Ditton** and colleagues, along with **Jeanette Garwood** and colleagues, direct their discussions specifically at the problems and some possible solutions surrounding the Bill's requirement that local authorities undertake area crime audits; **Francis McGlone** looks at proposals affecting children and parents; and **Caroline Keenan** reports on a recent conference looking at ways of dealing with sex offenders in the community, organised by the ISTD, with Sussex Police. Finally, **John Pitts** looks critically at the provisions for youth justice in an open letter to Jack Straw.

In Part II of the *Crime and Disorder Bill*, as **Peter Francis** and **Penny Fraser** detail in their review of it towards the middle of the issue, proposals outline the abolition of the presumption of *doli incapax*, alongside new offences for racially aggravated assault, racially aggravated public order offences and racially aggravated harassment. **Rae Sibbitt**, in her contribution, considers the likely efficacy of the latter proposals in dealing with racial violence and victimisation.

The final set of contributions attempt to make sense of particular aspects of the proposed legislation. **Elaine Arnall**, **Dick Whitfield** and **Charles Pollard** focus primarily on developments within parts III and IV of the Bill. **Elaine Arnall** examines the consequences of the Bill for youth justice in general and drug misuse in particular, while **Dick Whitfield** raises some uncomfortable questions about the dangers associated with electronic monitoring, and stresses caution in seeing it as a panacea. **David Kidd-Hewitt** engages **Charles Pollard**, the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, in discussion about restorative justice, an explicit aim of the Bill as detailed in its Reparation Order.

Much has already been written about the content of the Bill and its implications for community safety and crime reduction, often from a perspective of cautious optimism. Certainly its endorsement of some if not all of the recommendations of the *Morgan Report* is, as Marlow and Pitts (1998) indicate, something to be applauded. Nevertheless, it is perhaps too early to offer judgement about the operation of particular proposals and developments. In some areas, the spirit of the Bill is somewhat more controversial and problematic, as the contribution by **John Gardiner** and colleagues highlights.

What is not in dispute is that the emergence, development and introduction of the *Crime and Disorder Bill* provides the first opportunity to evaluate the extent to which New Labour has followed its pre-election mantra of being 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime', as well as of determining the success or otherwise of the specific strategies detailed in the run up to the election, and of the community safety discourse more generally. We hope that in some small way this issue contributes to that evaluation.

*Peter Francis, Penny Fraser and Julia Braggins*

### References

- Home Office (1991) *Safer Communities: The Local Delivery of Crime Prevention Through the Partnership Approach* (The Morgan Report) (London: Home Office)
- HMSO Stationery Office (1997) *Crime and Disorder Bill* (London: HMSO)
- Marlow, A and Pitts, J (Eds) (1998) *Planning Safer Communities* (Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing).