

Ref. A07852

PRIME MINISTER

Tackling Crime and Public Disorder: A New Initiative

I attach a paper by Mr. Wasserman of the CPRS setting out a proposal for a new initiative aimed at tackling crime and public disorder.

2. Briefly, it argues that a new initiative might be focused not on the police and the rest of the criminal justice system - those in the front line in the day-to-day fight against crime - but on changing the social attitudes which lie at the root of the problem. These it identifies as the failure of teachers, parents and other adults to set clear, consistent limits to the behaviour of children and adolescents. Children need such limits to provide a framework of certainty within which to grow up successfully and learn the self-control necessary to cope with boredom, frustration and even failure. *etc*

3. The paper goes on to propose a programme of action aimed at changing these attitudes, so that adults are readier and better equipped to use their authority as and when appropriate. This would involve trying in some measure to restore the confidence and authority which adults appear to have lost, and teaching them how to deal effectively with the confrontation and conflict which often accompany the use of authority.

4. In practical terms, this would mean the Government taking a much closer interest in the training of teachers and other professionals, both initially and in-service. The teachers would be critical to the success of this strategy, both because of their classroom role and because of their ability to influence parents. But it would be essential not to overlook the influence of other adults who come into direct and regular contact with children and young people; particularly those responsible for dealing with "children in trouble". The voluntary sector and the churches too would have important parts to play; as, of course, would the media.

5. I think that this is an attractive idea. It is based on what I believe is a sound proposition - that children need, respond to, and now too often lack clear limits as a framework for growing up. It would complement, not compete or



← | clash with, what the police and the other law and order services try to do, and they should welcome it. But it is a strategy on a grand scale and for the long term: it would be unlikely to have much "payoff" in the short term. That is no reason for not starting, if the idea is a good one: it is a reason for taking care in deciding how best to introduce and pursue it.

6. If the main initial thrust is to be directed via teachers, and above all through teacher training, it would be desirable before going public to work out in more detail what changes would need to be made in teacher training, and what would be involved in putting those changes into effect.

7. Once the time had come to go public, one way of launching a new initiative of this kind might be by means of a seminar or conference to which leading figures in the teaching, social work and other professions would be invited, as well as representatives of the ethnic communities, the voluntary sector, and the churches. The object of the seminar would be for the Government and others concerned to review the latest evidence on how best to deal with adolescent anti-social behaviour. It would, of course, require careful handling, but it should be possible to mount a seminar which would set the scene for a programme of action aimed at achieving the sorts of long-term changes in attitudes which are required. The seminar would also give the Government an opportunity to demonstrate clearly the sense of priority which it attaches to this matter. As you will see from his paper, Mr. Wasserman has already identified a number of individuals who might be invited to participate in such a seminar.

eg Professor
Rutter and
Dr Perry-Jones.

8. A decision to mount an initiative along these lines would invite strong reactions from many teachers and members of the so-called "caring or helping professions" who would resent any implied criticism of their present approach and, more vigorously, from those who see political advantage in arguing that crime and disorder are inherent in a capitalist society, particularly one experiencing high levels of unemployment or containing a substantial racial minority community. But it might appeal strongly to the good sense of a great many ordinary people.

9. Such a programme would involve the interests of a number of Government Departments and outside agencies. Even more to the point, its very ambitiousness would call for political leadership at the highest level. Only you

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could provide the leadership required to bring about the kind of change in the general climate of opinion which this strategy would demand and to overcome the resistance of the professional interest groups and others. It would need to be identified with you, and you would have at least to open and perhaps to preside over the seminar which launched it.

10. To support you in carrying out this task, a small unit could be established in the Cabinet Office. It could co-ordinate the preparatory work and, in consultation with the Departments concerned, organise the initial seminar and develop a credible programme of action for following it up.

11. I dare say you will want to discuss this general approach. If you like it, you will wish to minute the Home Secretary and other colleagues directly concerned, telling them what you have in mind and inviting them to discuss it. We can provide a draft minute for the purpose, in the light of your reactions to Mr. Wasserman's proposal.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

19th March, 1982

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TACKLING CRIME AND PUBLIC DISORDER: A NEW INITIATIVE

1. The apparently inexorable rise in recorded crime and public disorder threatens the social stability which has long characterised life in this country. It leads to widespread fear and insecurity. It engenders a loss of respect for, and confidence in, the police and the other arms of the criminal justice system. Ultimately, it undermines the authority of our democratic institutions. Because there is now also a distinct racial dimension to the growth of crime and disorder, its potential effects are even more dangerous.

2. This Government has placed the maintenance of law and order at the top of its list of domestic priorities. But so far this has meant principally strengthening those who are in the front line in the battle against crime; namely, the police service. In this, the Government is generally acknowledged to have been successful.

3. The time is now ripe for a new initiative. But the target must be chosen with great care. Nothing should be done which could be interpreted as stemming from doubts about the competence of the police or as implying that they no longer enjoy the full confidence of the Government as a whole.

4. From the point of view of the police and others on the front line, the most important target for Government action is the "underlying causes" of crime or what is sometimes referred to as "the general breakdown of law and order" or "the deterioration of society's moral values". I believe that this is also the view of the vast majority of the public.

5. The sorts of thing which most people would point to as evidence of the breakdown of law and order are violence in schools and on the streets, football hooliganism, vandalism and minor crimes on council estates, etc. These are the commonest forms of anti-social behaviour. They are overwhelmingly the activities of adolescents (age 10 to 18) and appear to recognise neither class nor racial barriers. Children and young people of all races and classes engage in them; adults, children and young people of all races and classes are their victims. Because they are so common, they are

the object of much media attention, both locally and nationally. For this reason and because it is generally recognised that the police on their own can do very little about them, they contribute disproportionately to undermining the general level of confidence in the police and the rest of the criminal justice system.

6. On these grounds alone, they merit serious Government attention. They merit attention also because of their effects on those who engage in them. While most adolescents simply grow out of such anti-social behaviour, it is well established that (as one would expect) very few adult criminals do not have a record of having offended as juveniles.

Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour

7. Such behaviour has been of concern for some time. It is only in the last few years, however, that significant progress appears to have been made in understanding and controlling it. One of those who has had remarkable success in dealing with it is Dr W Parry-Jones, Director of the Highfield Family and Adolescent Unit at Oxford.

8. His approach is based on the belief that, in order to mature successfully, children and adolescents need to have clear, consistent limits set to their behaviour. Without such limits, control or discipline, adolescents are unable to develop the "self-control" skills which enable them to deal effectively with boredom, frustration and even failure. Thus he would argue that the main causes of adolescent anti-social behaviour or public disorder lie not in unemployment, deprivation or racial disadvantage - he finds similar problems and difficulties among the pupils of the best public schools as among those who attend the most deprived Oxford comprehensives - but in the failure of adults (especially teachers and parents) to set clear and consistent limits for the children with whom they come into contact; that is, the failure by adults to use their authority as appropriate (to both the situation and the age of the child). For Dr Parry-Jones, this abdication by adults of their responsibilities, usually in order to avoid unpleasantness, conflict or confrontation, stems from a lack of confidence or morale which in turn may be traced back to, among other things, the "laissez faire" approach to child rearing advocated with such success by the so-called "parenting experts" of the 1950s and 1960s. Having lost their confidence, most adults are unable (and unwilling) to deal with the conflict which often accompanies the use of authority.

9. While he does not advocate the return to so-called "old fashioned" authoritarian discipline (which was often arbitrary and inappropriate both to the age of the adolescent and to the circumstances in which it was applied), Dr Parry-Jones maintains that children perceive the lack of control or authority by most present-day adults as offensive. They therefore react against it. Hence, for example, the difficulties in schools. (Dr Parry-Jones has had spectacular success in treating anorexia nervosa and school refusal in "patients" from middle class Oxford homes. The basis of his treatment is to make it clear to the patient that "he means business" and that he is prepared (and has the permission of the parents) to force feed anorexics and to carry school refusers into school feet first. He believes that neither of these is a step which a parent would feel strong enough to take and that the children are well aware of it. As soon as they understand that there are clear limits to what they can get away with, they feel relieved and are on the road to recovery.)

Further Evidence

10. Dr Parry-Jones is not the only one who has been having success with this approach to adolescent public disorder. An article in a recent issue of The Guardian, for example, reported a teacher in a successful ILEA-sponsored disruptive pupils unit as explaining her success in similar terms. "I don't get over friendly with [the children]", she said, "I'm their boss, not their pal."

11. Recent experience of tackling vandalism on council estates lends further support to the view that adolescent anti-social behaviour can be effectively controlled by adults who are prepared to use their authority clearly and consistently. The NACRO Crime Prevention Unit, for example, which has undertaken a number of successful anti-vandalism projects on estates in London and elsewhere, believes that a large part of its success may be accounted for by the fact that it has managed to build up the confidence and morale of the residents of these estates to the point where they are prepared to take an active role in protecting their own immediate environment. (It is

hardly suprising that children vandalise their own estate when they hear their parents describing it and its management in terms which indicate that they have no respect for either and are impatient to be transferred elsewhere.)
According to NACRO,

"The theory underlying our work is that an act such as vandalism cannot be prevented simply by more policing by the statutory agencies - the community itself must take an active part in seeing that standards are maintained. Willingness to participate in "self-policing" depends in turn on the belief that the environment is worth protecting. It is caring for, and involvement in, the maintenance of the environment which seems to have been eroded on many publicly-owned housing estates. The primary purpose of the Crime Prevention Unit's project is to involve residents on demoralised estates with planning improvement of the environment in such a way that they will feel inclined to maintain and protect them."

12. For this reason, anything which contributes to raising the moral of residents helps to control vandalism and minor crime. Tenant management and the sale of council houses, for example, are thus clearly steps in the right direction.

The Rutter Report

13. Probably the most important endorsement of this approach to adolescent anti-social behaviour comes from the research commissioned by the Home Office and the DHSS from Professor Michael Rutter of the Institute of Psychiatry of London University. The aim of his study, which is to be published in the autumn, was to examine all the available research on juvenile delinquency and to provide an objective assessment of the nature of the problem in the social context in which it occurs, together with pointers as to what methods are most effective in controlling it. (A note by the DHSS summarising Professor Rutter's report is attached.) Among the principal conclusions of the Rutter study are the following -

- i. Delinquent activity is a normal part of adolescent development; it is critical to establishing an adult identity.
- ii. Delinquency is not associated with immigration, unemployment or working mothers. It is associated with parental criminality, family disorder, single parenting, large family size, ineffective supervision and discipline, and punitive or inconsistent responses to lenient behaviour. When one negative factor is present, there is little risk of delinquency but the risk increases exponentially when further negative factors are added.
- iii. Delinquency occurs in all social classes.
- iv. The most effective social work intervention is the support of parents and teachers in exercising control and the development of the youngsters' coping skills.
- v. A high police presence is not an effective deterrent; what does help is for the police to form personal relationships with youngsters.
- vi. Prosecution tends to cause a youngster to reoffend, probably because after an appearance in court the youngster labels himself as a criminal and behaves criminally.

Implications for Policy

14. It seems clear, therefore, that we are beginning to understand the causes of adolescent public disorder and how to tackle it. It seems clear also, however, that tackling it successfully would require nothing less than changing the way in which most adults think about their own roles and their relationships to children. In addition, it would also mean teaching adults new skills; namely, those involved in using authority and handling conflict effectively. (Dr Parry-Jones refers to it as "undoing the effects of Dr Spock".)

15. The first group of adults whose attitudes, morale and skills must be changed are the teachers, not only because of their class-room role but also because, given compulsory education, the schools are the most cost-effective way of influencing parents.

16. But the way in which teacher training is organised makes this very difficult. In England alone, about 14,000 teachers are turned out each year from 100 different institutions. What is taught on these teacher training courses is determined by the institutions themselves in collaboration with their validating bodies; namely, the 18 universities and the Council for National Academic Awards. Although it is the Secretary of State for Education who approves teacher training courses and recognises someone as a qualified teacher, the DES has tended to leave the content of teacher training courses to the validating bodies. For the Department to insist that before being recognised as qualified a student-teacher must have completed a course on "the management of the class-room" would represent a major change in the relationship between the DES and the teacher training establishments and between the Department and the teaching profession as a whole.

17. I understand, however, that the Secretary of State for Education and Science has already decided to alter those relationships and to take a more active role in teacher training in an effort to raise professional standards in particular subjects. In so far as he succeeds in doing so, the ground will have been prepared for training teachers also in how to use their authority effectively.

18. To ensure that the new approach extends throughout the school system, arrangements would have to be made for in-service training for those who are already in the teaching force and for special training for those who go on to become Heads and Chief Education Officers. At present, no formal training is necessary for appointment to these jobs. This is in marked contrast to the police service, for example, where no-one can advance to the senior ranks without having completed the appropriate officer training at the Police Staff College.

19. Having built up the confidence and classroom management skills of teachers, it is likely that one would have increased simultaneously the respect with which they are regarded by parents and therefore the likelihood that parents would be willing to take their advice about how to deal with their children. The stage would then be set for an effective partnership between

the two adult groups. It is worth noting that teachers and parents already work together successfully in this way in respect of handicapped children. I understand that parents of spina bifida children, for example, find the support of teachers critical in helping them to deal as firmly as is necessary with their children.

20. Another group of adults whose approach to adolescents should receive attention at an early stage are those involved in dealing with "children in trouble", including non-offenders. These include the educational welfare officers, the nurses, the social workers, other voluntary workers and the churches. Special efforts would also have to be made to reach the media and other "opinion formers".

21. Just as experience in tackling vandalism on council estates has led to changes in the way in which estates are managed as well as in their physical characteristics (eg entry 'phones, better lighting), so changing the way teachers and social workers approach their responsibilities and the children in their care might in time lead to changes in the way the education, child care and other services are organised. Indeed, the Government itself might introduce (or encourage local authorities to introduce) changes in these services as a way of facilitating changes in attitudes and culture. For example, it maybe helpful in this context to give the court-based probation service a bigger role in the treatment of young offenders (at the expense of social workers).

Race

22. None of the proposals set out in this paper is directed specifically at the racial dimension of law and order. But I am inclined to think that the approach described above might also be applied with advantage to this problem. By building up the confidence and morale of the adult members of the ethnic minority communities, who are as concerned as the rest of society at the present state of crime, it should be possible to encourage them to take a more active role in using their authority to control their own children and young people.

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23. The strategy outlined above is aimed at achieving fundamental changes in some of the most deeply held beliefs and attitudes of our society. As such, it is bound to take time to bear fruit. In the meantime, it is likely to encounter resistance, particularly from those with a vested interest in the present arrangements.

24. But I believe that a programme of action based on this strategy would command widespread support from all those who are genuinely concerned about the extent of crime and public disorder in Britain today and that, by tackling the underlying causes of this behaviour, would offer real hope of controlling it.

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"JUVENILE DELINQUENCY - TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES"
PROFESSOR MICHAEL RUTTER'S SURVEY OF
JUVENILE DELINQUENCY RESEARCH

(Note by DHSS)

1. Professor Michael Rutter of the London University Institute of Psychiatry was commissioned jointly by Home Office and DHSS (with Home Office in the lead) to review and assess available research on juvenile delinquency. His review was completed in May 1981 and is to be published in autumn 1982.

2. The review was commissioned as an aid to policy making. The purpose was, through a scrutiny of all available research on the subject, to provide an objective assessment of the nature of juvenile delinquency and the social context in which it occurs, together with pointers as to what methods are most effective in controlling it. This is notoriously an area where prejudice and subjectivity abound. Professor Rutter's achievement has exceeded expectations, and the book is likely to be viewed as a landmark in juvenile delinquency literature.

3. His significant conclusions may be summarised as follows:

The Nature of Offending

3.1 Delinquent activity is a normal part of adolescent development; it is intrinsic to establishing an adult identity. Most youngsters commit some criminal acts. However the great majority grow out of delinquency successfully without ever being brought to court

3.2 Only a tiny proportion of criminal acts by juveniles result in prosecution and the lack of scope under present arrangements for filtering out offenders makes prosecution for trivial offences arbitrary; the poor and the black are more likely to be prosecuted. Youngsters prosecuted for trivial offences have more in common with those who are never prosecuted than they do with serious offenders; in particular they will grow out of it.

3.3 There is a hard core of offenders (recidivists) who, instead of growing out of it, commit more and more frequent and serious offences. They can be clearly identified after the event, but prediction techniques are only 50% accurate. They become adult criminals. Very few adult criminals did not offend as juveniles; the vast bulk of juvenile offenders never offend as adults.

Patterns of Offending

3.4 Statistics reveal a dramatic rise in juvenile crime since 1945, but most of this apparent increase is due to more offences being reported and more youngsters being cautioned or prosecuted for trivial offences (and such technical factors as the effect of inflation in drawing into the statistics offences against property of less and less value). Nevertheless there has been a real increase in juvenile crime, particularly in stealing and crimes of violence, though in the main this is due more to recidivists committing more and worse offences than to more youngsters committing crimes. This pattern is apparent in every non-third-world country except Japan.

3.5 Most of this increase happened during the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1970s there was a levelling off or perhaps even a decline.

3.6 The increase was paralleled by an increase in juvenile suicide, anorexia, alcoholism and drug dependence, suggesting it was part of a generally worsening juvenile malaise.

Associations and Causes

3.7 Juvenile delinquency is associated with the male sex. Girls are more lawabiding even than the statistics suggest because when they offend they are more likely to be prosecuted. This sex differential is dropping, and is lower than average among West Indian but very high among Asians and Cypriots.

3.8 Delinquency is not associated with immigration, unemployment or working mothers. It is associated with parental criminality, family discord, single parenting, large family size, ineffective supervision and discipline, and punitive or inconsistent responses to deviant behaviour. Poor housing and low income feature as relative rather than as absolute factors. When one negative factor is present, there is little risk of delinquency but the risk increases exponentially when further negative factors are added.

3.9 Delinquency occurs in all social classes but is commoner in the lower. The association is with the problems that accompany low social class rather than with low social class *per se*. In all social groups some delinquent acts are considered "normal", but this "normality" does not extend to recidivism.

3.10 Recidivists tend to be unpopular and rejected by their peer group. Recidivism is associated anti-social personality disorders eg cognitive and educational retardation, hyperactivity and attentional defects, and stimulus seeking. Low self-image is a crucial factor.

3.11 Films and television may aggravate aggressive behaviour in children who are aggressive anyway, but this is not a major factor. Football hooliganism is ritual role play and not associated with delinquency.

3.12 Delinquency rates are highest in big cities but vary between comparable areas within cities. Community ethos and school ethos are significant factors.

Prevention and Intervention

3.13 Most offenders grow out of their delinquency. Delinquent patterns may be broken by changing or leaving school, moving or leaving home, marriage and employment, though early "escape" marriages are no help; delinquents find it harder to obtain and retain employment.

3.14 The most effective social work intervention is the support of parents and teachers in exercising control, and the development of the youngster's coping skills. Work to reduce familial disharmony can be effective if it is sustained.

3.15 Reducing the scope for crime, eg by improving the security of buildings, does reduce crime.

3.16 A high police presence is not an effective deterrent; what does help is for the police to form personal relationships with youngsters.

Prosecution and Sentencing

3.17 Labelling a youngster as "criminal" is a significant factor. Prosecution tends to cause a youngster to reoffend, probably because after an appearance in court a youngster labels himself as a criminal and behaves criminally. Diversionary policies are thus likely to be more effective than prosecution for trivial offenders, though there is a risk that this will draw more youngsters into the formal network.

3.18 The sentence that a convicted youngster receives has very little effect on his subsequent reoffending pattern; other factors are much more significant.

3.19 Disposals that involve removal from home are likely to be ineffective unless work is done to prepare the home the youngster's return and to help him to reintegrate himself into his community.

3.20 Deterrent sentences are effective only if their impact is immediate - a long delay before sentencing and long-drawn-out sentences are likely to be counter-effective.

4. Professor Rutter implies the following recommendations for policy:

a. There should be increased scope for filtering trivial offenders so that they do not appear in court, and official reaction to trivial offending should be minimised.

b. Where prosecution is inevitable, the emphasis should be on community-based disposals, with the involvement of parents and teachers wherever possible.

c. Where removal from home is inevitable, there should be greater emphasis on preparing the home environment for his return and on supporting him during reintegration.

5. He recommends that surveys, including self-report studies and data from victims, be undertaken at five year intervals to assess historic changes in trends, and that more research is done on such matters as personality variables in recidivists, environmental influence and the long-term effects of all forms of intervention including intermediate treatment.