

# British Society of Criminology

**The British Criminology Conferences: Selected Proceedings. Volume 2.** Papers from the British Criminology Conference, Queens University, Belfast, 15-19 July 1997. This volume published March 1999. Editor: Mike Brogden. ISSN 1464-4088. See end of file for copyright and other information.

## COMMUNITY SAFETY: A CRITIQUE

### Daniel Gilling

The policy shift over the last decade or so from situational crime prevention to community safety is one which has been interpreted by many as a progressive change, rationally responding to the alleged weaknesses of the situational approach with a more liberal and holistic approach to crime prevention. However, this paper sets out an argument which casts doubt upon such an interpretation. It presents the shift towards community safety as a consequence of the harnessing of crime prevention to the interests of those who see within it a means of governance which risks undermining the best intentions of local practitioners.

### Introduction

In recent years a remarkable air of optimism has blown through parts of the criminal justice system. It is remarkable because it stands in such a stark contrast to the 'nothing works' pessimism of the 1970s and early 1980s, when officially recorded rates of crime appeared to be spiralling, and officially sponsored research undermined confidence in the competence of criminal justice institutions to reverse the trend. It is remarkable, too, because the optimism has followed on the heels of a period of considerable resource constraint across the public sector, including criminal justice, where internal managerial concerns of efficient and economical organisation have been paramount.

The optimism challenges the belief that little can be done about crime with case studies of success. It discerns a convergence of commitment and perspective between different agencies whose agendas once appeared to be so different. The convergence occurs around ideologies of preventionism (Gilling, 1997) and community, in that there is a new-found belief that something can be done about crime if it is done early, in the name of prevention, and if it is done in, by and with the support of the community. 'The community' is, amongst other things, a community of interest against crime which includes local authorities as well as the police - witness the enthusiasm with which urban local authorities in particular have taken up the mantle of community safety as set out by the Morgan Committee (Home Office, 1991), at such a rate that the new Labour Government's proposal to make it a statutory responsibility with the police almost might not be necessary.

The preventionist consensus occurs over crime, but especially over minor crimes and disorders: it is here that zero-tolerance policing (or its UK manifestation as 'confident' or 'quality of life' policing) converges with community safety and a local authority agenda which has become increasingly intolerant of disorder and its negative consequences for the local economy, housing management and, obviously, the community's sense of safety. The convergence manifests itself as another ideology, of partnership: a sense of togetherness and unity of purpose which fits neatly with the implied communitarianism of community safety. Where discourses of crime control were once discordant, there is now a sense of harmony, an implied seamlessness in Tony Blair's infamous couplet 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. William Bratton's zero-tolerance project in New York reflects this convergence, the success of the project being attributed equally to the parts played by the police and other local authority public services.

It is very easy to become seduced by notions of prevention, community, and partnership, which appear to coalesce against those things, such as crime and disorder, which cause anxiety. As Freeman (1992) points out, being for (the) prevention (of 'social problems') is tantamount to being against sin, and this provides a thick insulation against criticism - an insulation which has been exploited and furthered by the self-confident way in which advocates of community safety and zero-tolerance policing have handled the media. Indeed, the use of the media in such ways has been an integral part of initiatives against crime in the image-conscious 1990s, where the marketing often appears to be as important as the product. Who can argue with the apparently benign intentions of advocates of community safety and zero-tolerance policing?

This paper, however, seeks to cast a critical eye at these things, focusing mainly upon community safety, but not losing touch of the fact that it exists in a wider context of criminal justice and social policies, and socio-economic and cultural conditions, which help to frame its meaning and its effect. When I started studying crime prevention nearly a decade ago, I was initially critical of the partiality and unintended consequences of situational crime prevention, and something akin to community safety is what I would have argued for. Now it is here, notwithstanding the good intentions of most of its adherents and the undeniably positive impact it has had in some areas, I am not so sure. I begin the argument by contextualising the emergence of community safety within the UK.

## **The emergence of community safety**

Before its more recent widespread adoption, community safety was something initially practised through the estate-based work of NACRO, which first started in Widnes towards the end of the 1970s. This work continued in the 1980s, and at some point, because of a similar focus and a similar adoption of a problem-oriented methodology, merged with the sort of crime prevention being promoted by the Home Office. The departure of Ron Clarke from the Home Office, however, afforded more intellectual space to those who were more accommodating of social crime prevention, to complement the situational approach which Clarke had pioneered, and in the process, so it was thought, to eliminate the albatross of displacement which allegedly followed the latter.

The fusion of situational and social crime prevention provides the core of community safety, blocking opportunities (potential or actual) for crime while simultaneously tackling criminal motivations (potential or actual). Situational and social crime prevention are not, however, the only elements: in the course of the 1980s a vital further ingredient was added, namely fear of crime. In part, the inclusion of this within the community safety agenda followed the discovery of apparently disproportionate fear in the British Crime Surveys, and the left realist rejoinder which found the lived realities of fear of people in high crime areas to be most definitely proportionate. The sterility of the debate (Sparks, 1992) did not matter so much as the fact that fear had been identified as a problem, whatever its providence.

The Morgan Committee, which had been set up to explore the reasons lying behind the regrettably slothful take-up of crime prevention over the previous decade, pushed community safety into the mainstream by recommending it, as a concept and as an action plan, in preference to simple crime prevention. Although the Conservative governments of the 1990s were not keen to play up the local authority role in the way envisaged by Morgan, they did nevertheless accept the broad thrust of the report, and the main central government policy vehicle - the Safer Cities Programme - provided a means of advancing community safety at the local level, in most of the bigger towns and cities across the country. Local authority associations also welcomed the idea, and whilst lobbying for the statutory responsibility and the cash to go along with it, many of their membership began appointing community safety officers, and started to develop partnership bodies with the police and other agencies (including probation, health, and representatives of the voluntary and private sectors) which could pursue community safety (and the funding that went with it under urban policy initiatives) at a strategic level, often supplemented by sub-committees with a smaller geographic or problem-oriented focus. Across the country there now exists quite a complex community safety, although it is haphazard and locally variable, lacking the structural formalism characteristic of many other developed countries such as France.

It is tempting to see these developments in pragmatic and rational terms: situational crime prevention gives way to community safety because of the former's practical deficiencies and

the latter's practical strengths. However, at least two pieces of evidence urge caution before such a view may be accepted. First, displacement has not been the albatross of situational crime prevention that many had anticipated. Second, whilst community safety might sound like a good idea, its NACRO estate-based variant in the 1970s and 1980s was not a roaring success, as Poyner's (1986) evaluation for the Home Office, and Rock's (1988) well directed criticisms, persuasively show. Consequently, we must look elsewhere to account for the rise of community safety. This task is more than just academic: accounting for the rise of community safety gives us clues about the nature of its subsequent usage, as part of a package of measures which at times look uncomfortably like a strategy of governance for an imagined underclass, notwithstanding the good intentions of those who would see it as something very different.

## **Crime prevention, fear and crisis**

Situational crime prevention emerged in the 1980s at about the same time as many critics feared the emergence of a law and order society. The loss of a fragile welfare consensus, and apparent retrenchment in welfare spending, raised the spectre of more coercive state agencies being employed to manage the social casualties of economic restructuring and exclusion from the labour market. However, the law and order society never materialised, not least because agencies of the criminal justice system, and notably the police, had shown themselves to be remarkably ineffectual in stemming the rise in crime. Equally important, the political fallout from the urban riots of the early 1980s matched concerns about effectiveness in crime control with concerns about the police's capacity to maintain order. The end-product was a crisis in legitimacy.

Since the early 1980s, steps have been taken to elude this crisis. One entailed the abrogation of sole responsibility for the crime problem by state criminal justice agencies, by stressing the need for a partnership with other agencies and with the public at large. This was a distinct theme, for example, of Home Office Circular 8/84 on crime prevention, as well as Sir Kenneth Newman's model of 'multi-agency' policing for the Metropolitan Police. Another step entailed a softening of the hard edges of aspects of crime control: community policing comes into the reckoning here, as does the dilution of pure situational crime prevention with the more consensual social approach. In this context the dilution was necessary not so much because of the practical problem of displacement, but rather because of concerns about what might happen if situational crime prevention were taken too far. A policy which pushed the responsibility for crime prevention too far onto the shoulders of private citizens looked unwise, because it merely exposed the inadequacies of a criminal justice system which was demanding a greater and greater proportion of public expenditure. Perhaps more important, though, were the concerns about generating a fortress mentality, which would in turn generate more fear than the disproportionate amount which the British Crime Survey alleged already existed, and which was fast being recognised as a problem in its own right.

This concern about fear was vitally important, but it was not entirely clear then what fear meant. It has become very apparent in criminological work that the concept of fear is difficult to operationalise, and difficult to measure in anything other than a crude fashion, in much the same way that the level of crime itself is only ever crudely measured through reporting and recording behaviour. This is one reason why the debate about the proportionality or otherwise of fear to risk is ultimately a rather sterile one.

If we take Sparks' (1992) view, that fear is a product of uncertainty, which is itself a product of moral and political intuition, then we come closer to understanding the nature of the legitimacy crisis. In essence, the failure of the criminal justice system (evidenced in escalating crime rates), the increasing requirement for private citizens to take their own security measures, and environmental signs of disorder - Wilson and Kelling's (1982) 'broken windows', and Kenneth Newman's 'symbolic locations' - may all conspire to generate a fear which is not indexical to the risk of criminal victimisation so much as to a general feeling that the state is not doing its job, and may therefore not be trusted. Fear of crime thus covers a very broad spectrum of concerns. Certainly it might be highly specific in so far as it might relate to some people's concerns that they may themselves fall victim to crimes which are perceived to be prevalent in their residential area. But it is also a more general thing which is linked to the anxiety which some sociologists see as a core feature of the late-modern or post-modern condition. What matters is the symbolic importance of the anxiety, not so much its precise aetiology.

If there was a legitimacy crisis, then, and the government of the day saw one way out of it as the gradual adoption of a softer model of crime control (community safety rather than situational crime prevention alone), we have to ask what, or who, pushed its hand? It is certainly the case that many advocates of community safety, when they say they want to tackle fear of crime, mean the fear of crime which they suspect - and which left realist research often confirms - is endemic in inner city, high crime areas. In such areas, fear is seen as being destructive of community life: it undermines informal community controls as people are pushed back into their homes and behind their curtains, deeply mistrustful of their neighbours and their neighbours' neighbours. In such a context, fear is as much a welfare need as poverty. This stereotype of the fearful and consequently anomic inner city estate or neighbourhood - the disorganised community - bears a kernel of truth, but does not exist everywhere as the ethnographic work of Janet Foster (1995), the Sheffield studies, and the more recent work of Sandra Walklate and her colleagues in Salford clearly demonstrates. It is, however, common for professionals to exaggerate the extent of 'the problem' when bidding for resources and legitimate authority to address it. We should not expect those working in community safety to be different from those in other policy areas in this respect.

However, whilst this is the kind of fear of crime which many community safety workers seek to address, is it really credible to suggest that this is the fear or anxiety towards which the institutional warming to community safety is a response? Those suffering the worst of this kind of fear are often the same people who have been left on other occasions to the vagaries of the market and the beneficence of the 'trickle down effect', to exclusion from the labour market, and to cutbacks in welfare benefits and social services. These are the people who form part of contemporary understandings of the underclass. State agencies have not been especially accommodating of this group's interests in other policy areas, and there is no reason to suppose that community safety, or at least the state-sponsored version of it, is any different in this regard.

The contention here, then, is that the gradual accommodation of community safety as one part of the route out of the legitimacy crisis had very little to do with tackling the fears of these people, notwithstanding the fact that many people working on community safety initiatives have intentions to do exactly that. Rather, if the fear of these people and communities was to be tackled, it was going to have to come mainly from their own efforts: hence the first prong of the government's dual strategy around the mid-1980s was an active citizenship drive in crime prevention, especially through the vehicle of neighbourhood watch and the promotion, through publicity, of 'practical ways to cut crime'. This part of the strategy, however, was limited in its effects upon these groups: neighbourhood watch, it is well known, is most difficult to establish in the most disadvantaged, higher crime areas. There is also debate over the extent to which it contributes to rather than allays fear of crime.

## **The Safer Cities Programme - community safety and urban policy**

The second prong in the dual strategy, and a key moment for community safety, came after the 1987 General Election, and Mrs Thatcher's conviction that something needed to be done for those inner cities, which remained staunchly red in terms of their political hue. This heralded the beginnings of the *Action for Cities* initiative, of which the *Safer Cities Programme* was a key part. The Home Office publication *Crime Prevention News* announced the arrival of the *Programme* by announcing that 'each [of the 20 sites] has been selected from among the 57 *Urban Programme* areas. All have high crime rates and multi-ethnic populations, but (sic) all also have a strong track record in crime prevention activities'. The press release accompanying the *Programme's* launch was equally revealing:

In each [area] a *Safer Cities* team will act as a catalyst, establishing and drawing the maximum effect from this local partnership, developing initiatives to address local crime problems, and creating a safer environment in which enterprise, community activity and personal responsibility can flourish. In this way the *Safer Cities Programme* will make a powerful contribution to the economic and social regeneration of these areas.'

Effectively, what this does is to make safety an integral objective of urban regeneration and urban policy (Deakin and Edwards, 1993). In the context of the foregoing discussion, safety is the ideal alternative or solution to fear and anxiety. To understand why, suddenly, in the late

1980s, this was made an explicit objective of urban policy, we have to understand the trajectory that such policy has taken over the course of the 1980s and into the 1990s.

It is interesting to note the parallel between the different phases in the use of the idea of community in crime prevention identified by Hope (1995), and the different phases of urban policy's interaction with the community since the 1960s. Urban policy in Britain was sparked off in the 1960s as a result of a number of things, including the rediscovery of poverty, the emergence of a distinctive 'race problem' in some urban areas (not least as a result of the inflammatory discourse of the late Enoch Powell), and a concern that 'race riots' in the USA might also spread to the UK. Initially, urban policy was modelled upon Hope's first classification, namely disorganised communities: notions of pathology mixed with calls for assimilation, and a failure of policy makers to fine tune their services to the particularistic needs of their poorest urban inhabitants. The *Community Development Projects* of the early 1970s did a great deal to expose the fallacy of such a view, although their neo-marxist diagnoses were an official embarrassment which prompted their premature demise. Nevertheless, the Labour government of the late 1970s was forced to acknowledge the structural causes of urban problems in economic crisis and economic restructuring, and the policies they espoused from 1977 were modelled upon Hope's second classification, namely disadvantaged communities.

However, the Labour solution was cut short by the arrival of the Conservatives in 1979, and never given a chance to work in the face of an altogether different discourse. Whilst accepting that the problems of the inner city were primarily economic, the Conservative solution was a market one, rather than one led by public investment in local economic development - an activity which some of the large metropolitan authorities pursued in the 1980s and which undeniably hastened their demise. For the Conservatives, the problem was the flight of business from urban areas which had become unattractive as sites of investment, for a number of reasons, including an over-powerful labour movement, and incompetent and unhelpful local authorities. Importantly for our purposes, these reasons also included the physical fabric of these inner cities, which had turned many into urban wastelands, with crumbling and vandalised buildings, graffiti, poor transport and communications, and in terms of social fabric, high levels of crime and an emergent street culture of 1980s dangerous classes focused especially upon youth and a relatively conspicuous consumption of drugs and alcohol. In other words, in all sorts of ways, cities had become unsafe places, and in the context of a globalising economy, the fears and anxieties of private individuals reflected on to corporations who were relatively free to take their operations elsewhere.

The solution for the Conservatives - to make cities attractive places - was modelled upon Hope's final classification, namely what he calls frightened communities. In residential frightened communities, this may be addressed by the active citizenship measures referred to above, which enhance self-surveillance. In the urban business district, however, the solution requires not so much a change in the social fabric, which had been the objective of earlier urban policies, but rather the creation of a more attractive environment, which would tempt business and industry back in. The emphasis is therefore very strongly presentational, removing those things which appear to be blots on the urban landscape. This has been the thrust of urban regeneration, often using bodies such as *Urban Development Corporations* (UDCs) to bring about property-led private sector re-investment. Buildings are knocked down or given a face-lift, property prices rise, new building is encouraged and the constituents of an urban recovery are put in place, allegedly feeding through to the urban community via that trickle-down effect. An up-turn in business confidence translates ultimately as an up-turn in feelings of safety and security.

Of course, blots do not need to be restricted to features of the physical landscape: they may also be perceived as social things. Hence, for example, the broken windows approach is arguably actually a good deal less concerned about the broken windows than the gangs of youths on the streets, the addicts and drug dealers, the alcoholics and the homeless, not to mention the squeegee merchant, whose sense of enterprise in another context might beget an entrepreneurial award. In order to generate feelings of safety, these things - these people - need to be removed, or at the very least controlled and rendered harmless and unthreatening. That may mean excluding them from sterilised urban centres, with CCTV playing an important surveillance role, and containing them within residential areas.

So, to summarise to this point: the fear of crime that government policy sought primarily to address - at least by its move towards community safety - was not the fear experienced by poor inner city populations in high crime areas, but rather the fear expressed by business,

which had manifested itself in disinvestment from the inner city. Hence, to reiterate the above press release, the *Safer Cities Programme* was launched to create 'a safer environment in which enterprise, community activity and personal responsibility can flourish'. The community to be made safer by community safety was the frightened (business) community, not the disadvantaged community.

So far, this argument has been based mainly upon a reading of the pressures exerted upon the practice of community safety by structural, macro-level changes and forces within the urban political economy. These changes were notoriously represented through the body of the former Home Office minister of state, John Patten, who noted (1989) that 'the language of five years ago about crime prevention, of 'target hardening' or of 'the external enemy' now has an archaic ring to it'.

These pressures may be powerful and highly influential, but in the final analysis they are not determining. Thus, one objection to the argument relayed here may be that local practice has not been so constrained, and that local practice has been much more liberated and liberating than might be assumed from my reading of events. This may be true to some extent, and therefore the critique offered here must remain speculative until more extensive empirical research has been conducted - a programme that the author has started to undertake. The problem is that insufficient research has been conducted into the local practice of community safety - a problem of which the Home Office has been only too aware in relation to crime prevention in general. The Home Office's concerns, however, are that insufficient local practice has been evaluated: my concern here is that there is insufficient knowledge of what local practice is, or, very importantly, why it takes the shape it does. Tilley's (1993) work on the *Safer Cities Programme* suggests that the Home Office, despite its potential for 'interference' in approving larger bids for project funding, adopted a laissez faire approach which left local areas free to do their own thing, and attempts to collate information on initiatives undertaken show a broad range of social, situational, and fear-reducing projects. Yet it remains difficult to gain an overall impression of community safety, especially outside of *Safer Cities* areas, because practice is so multi-layered: different agencies are involved, they sometimes work in partnership, and sometimes in isolation, and they draw upon an array of different sources of funding. When one is looking to research community safety and its place within the local political economy it is difficult to know where to start. There is a strong case for comparative in-depth case study research. At present, precious few examples exist.

## **Local government and community safety**

The role of local authorities in community safety is especially important, because of their strategic position and outlook which has not been undermined by their new status as 'enabling' authorities. In the spring of 1996 the *Local Government Management Board*, together with the *Association of District Councils*, the *Association of Metropolitan Authorities*, and the *Association of County Councils*, commissioned research into community safety activities in local government (LGMB, 1996). The research showed that nine out of 10 authorities saw community safety as a legitimate local policy area, bearing testimony to the growth in interest in community safety since the publication of the Morgan Report (Home Office, 1991), although only just over half of these had translated such a recognition into policy statements, and just under a half had appointed specialist community safety officers.

Perhaps more relevant for present purposes is a consideration of what they do, in order to determine the extent to which they fit the tendency identified above. The survey shows there is a multiplicity of organisational structures for community safety, with the most common being the insertion of community safety into the strategic concerns of the policy and resources committee, with there additionally sometimes being an inter-agency element to this within local authority institutional arrangements, or in terms of local authority input into independent multi-agency partnerships. This is significant in so far as one might expect the strategic concerns of the policy and resources committee to include the economic well-being of the locality, and in so far as one might anticipate a business input into this where there is an inter-agency dimension to it, which there usually is in one form or another. The insertion of community safety into this kind of strategic thinking by the locality is further supported by the fact that where community safety officers are employed, they find, according to the survey, just under half of their time spent on policy development as opposed to service delivery.

In terms of crime preventive activities, it is instructive to learn that the most common activity amongst local authorities is town centre security - not something which necessarily immediately benefits local communities in the liberal spirit of social crime prevention or tackling fear of crime in disadvantaged communities. Unsurprisingly, it is CCTV which dominates the list, with 83 per cent of authorities having such schemes. The questionnaire provides a long list of activities for respondents to tick, some of which are too vague or general to determine exactly what it is that is done. However, beyond town centre CCTV the other main areas appear to be estate improvements (73 per cent), estate door-entry schemes (66 per cent), dealing with anti-social tenants (57 per cent), CCTV in parks or open spaces (58 per cent), peer education/drug prevention (53 per cent), holiday diversionary schemes (67 per cent), outreach youth work (51 per cent), car park security (64 per cent), street lighting improvements (57 per cent), support of neighbourhood watch (59 per cent), and fear of crime and the elderly (51 per cent). This is something of a mixed bag, but it is clear that a lot of the main areas fit into the general idea of making environmental changes which improve an overall sense of the city or town being a safe place. Initiatives which are more focused upon residential areas are considered below.

Finally, in terms of this discussion of the survey's findings, if we turn to the question of funding, we can identify another reason why the activities are often oriented towards a more general sense of safety. The most common source of funding may be mainstream funding from the rate support grant (66 per cent), but the two next most common are the *Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)* (44 per cent) and commercial sponsorship (43 per cent). CCTV challenge (37 per cent) and estate action/housing improvement (36 per cent) are also important sources. Clearly, the kinds of activities have to be tailored towards the kinds of funding sources: there are always strings attached. The survey only considers the source of funding, not its scale.

It is worth dwelling on the *SRB* for a moment, because it helps us to demonstrate the changes which have taken place in urban policy as it has moved into the 1990s. Whilst it is possible to characterise a general thrust to urban policy in the 1980s, it is complicated to an extent by the fact that it was very project-oriented, leading to confusion, duplication and many other associated difficulties. The introduction of the *SRB* in 1993 brought an end to this by bringing urban policy under a single budget, as the name suggests, administered from a series of regional offices. It did more than this, however. The introduction of the *SRB* also afforded the opportunity to sever the links between urban policy and deprivation which had been forged in the 1960s. Thus it was no longer necessary to be administratively defined as deprived in order to qualify for *SRB* funding. Rather, such funding was open to all, and, following the example of *City Challenge*, was to be awarded on the basis of competitive bids for regeneration funding. In this context, regeneration included the concept of community safety, and when the *SRB* was established the *Safer Cities Programme* was absorbed within in and transferred, in the process, from the Home Office to the Department of Environment - a meaningful move for those seeking to understand the contemporary status of community safety.

Furthermore, the competitive process was given certain set parameters. Thus, bids had to demonstrate that a partnership with the private sector had been forged and, more than this, that the successful acquisition of *SRB* funding would lead to the leverage of private funding too. Thus, if localities are to bid for *SRB* funding - and in the context of a very tightly controlled public purse and limited local finance the pressure is clearly on them to do so - and if that bid is to include plans for community safety, there is a good chance that the priorities are those of business and commerce, and of the reassurance of this frightened community that *locality X* is indeed the place to invest in.

Overall, to summarise this section, the main point to emerge is that local authorities are constrained with regard to how far they can resist the logic of community safety set at the wider national level. Their involvement is often on terms which limit the degree of local autonomy which may be shown. Thus, whilst many local authorities are now Labour-controlled, and many of these would take a more liberal interpretation of community safety which presented it as a means of addressing some of the problems of disadvantaged communities where crime and fear of crime are normally higher, they can not necessarily go that far down this path, although as the *LGTB* survey shows, this is not to say that they do not make attempts in this direction, or that such attempts are not, on occasion, successful. There is, however, strong pressure, some of which may be from the private sector and some of which may indeed be populist, which forces them in another direction. Eugene McLaughlin's

(1994) excellent account of the transformation of Manchester's police monitoring group into a community safety group is a fine example of this.

## Community safety and residential neighbourhoods

It is clear that a great deal of community safety activity takes place outside of the commercial centres of towns and cities, although the nebulous quality of community safety makes it slightly difficult to pin down. In practice, there is probably not much in the way of formally organised activity taking place in affluent neighbourhoods, or areas where crime rates are relatively low. Here, rather, community safety depends upon the active citizenship of initiatives such as neighbourhood watch, as well as the capacity of residents to buy into private security, be it the technology or the patrols, or both.

Most formal community safety is probably spatially organised in high crime areas, with a second tier of inter-agency input - practitioners rather than senior managers - beneath the authority-wide strategic approach which has been referred to above. It is this kind of community safety which lies at the heart of liberal visions of mending disorganised or disadvantaged communities through a combination of targeted and redistributed welfare services, and community development. But despite the best intentions of those working on such schemes in such areas, is this what we get? There may be a number of processes at work which militate against the realisation of such a vision.

To begin with, it is important to recognise that while there may be two main sites of community safety - the city/authority and the neighbourhood - they are not unrelated: impressions of safety or the lack of it are conveyed as much by the nature of urban residential neighbourhoods as by commercial centres or industrial estates. Here the recent work of a number of researchers into community safety and the city may be quite instructive.

Fraser (1996), for example, looks at the case of Moss Side, and how, as a 'problem area', it is no worse than many others in terms of social indices. However, Moss Side appears to have been talked up as a problem for a number of reasons. One is simply that with policy being increasingly centralised the only way to get anything done is to register the problem at the national level. More significant for our purposes, is that Moss Side can be used as a quasi-threat: it is a threat to the ambitions of those - the 'city fathers' - who want to turn the city into a thriving centre in the next millennium. It offends the eye of the urban commuter, and it generates a fear: here is a cancer which, if not removed, will spread into the healthy organs - the leafy suburbs and even the rural hinterland. Taylor (1996) writes of the coincidence of interests (indeed, they may be the same people) of those joining the new social movements in crime prevention (he refers to members of the community, but his comments may apply equally to public agencies) and those with a stake in 'urban boosterism'. For these people, community safety is not just a defence, it is a means of marketing the city. Both Fraser and Taylor note an important rider to a lot of what I have discussed thus far, namely that not all cities have the same interests, and therefore not necessarily the same motivation underpinning their involvement in community safety.

Moss Siders - or residents of any high crime disadvantaged urban neighbourhood - may be feared for exporting their roguish trade beyond the neighbourhood: Taylor's (1996) article shows how one set of suburbanites see local concerns - drug dealing, ram-raiding and the congregation of youths in theme pubs - very much in these terms, assisted by a similar perspective from the local media. What one ends up with, in effect, is one big ecological fallacy: dangerous areas, or symbolic locations, breed dangerous classes. Our anxiety about these dangerous classes is fanned by the media, and by changes in our routine activities which mean that we may less often be at home and thus our homes may be more vulnerable without capable guardians. Consumerism has increased the stock of available targets, and the rise in car ownership has made them more accessible to the dangerous classes, whilst also providing more criminal opportunities through the potential for ram-raiding or mobile drug dealing. It really does not matter if this is so or not, what matters is the perception of risk from urban predators, and the subsequent risk position which is taken up.

If we ask what this means for community safety, we see a conflict between the liberal ambitions of many who work in it, and the responses to anxiety of others, which they may themselves share. The liberal ambitions are about the re-incorporation of people from these symbolic locations, very much in the spirit of elements of Lord Scarman's proposed solution to the problems underpinning the Brixton riot of 1981. Others may be more interested in



identifying, isolating and managing these people, recognising, as Crowther (1997) points out in a paper on the underclass, that re-incorporation is no longer the goal. As a result, the solution is in line with Feeley and Simon's (1995) notion of 'actuarial justice' - whole groups are identified as risk categories which require generalised means of control through surveillance technologies and so forth.

There is a tendency for liberals to seek to strengthen their case by working with the logic of prevention and looking for the earliest point of intervention: get in early and do something before the problem manifests itself or gets out of hand. Now, however, under actuarial justice, this tendency may be exploited for more coercive ends. What was once considered pre-delinquent behaviour is starting to attract the label anti-social behaviour, or a 'quality of life' offence: these are, according to the broken windows thesis, the early manifestations of disorder which need to be stamped out quickly before they initiate the spiral of decline and disorder which allegedly leads to high crime communities. This is the domain of zero-tolerance.

## **Zero-tolerance and community safety: prospects for the future**

We can see signs of this conflict within the Labour Party's proposals against crime and disorder when in opposition. At one level, their supportive stance towards community safety is very much part of the liberal welfarist tradition - helping disadvantaged communities. On another level, however, it is possible to discern a subtle but highly important manipulation of community safety into a more coercive or intolerant form. Take, for example, the proposal for a new 'community safety order' made in the consultation paper 'A Quiet Life' in 1995, which also included proposals for a 'parental responsibility order', and a new criminal offence category for composite offences, whereby a harsher penalty could be applied to those committing a series of offences in a similar area over a relatively short period of time. The community safety order, the proposals say, might take the form of an injunction obtained under rules of civil evidence which could include conditions such as curfews, exclusions or restraints from certain activities. If the order is broken, it becomes a criminal offence and a custodial sentence of up to seven years may be passed.

One problem with this proposal is that it is not aimed just at criminal offences; it is also intended to cover other manifestations of 'chronic anti-social behaviour' - quality of life offences or civil wrongs. On the strength of rules of civil evidence, someone could find themselves imprisoned for up to seven years for being anti-social. Along with the other proposals in 'A Quiet Life', this seems a harsh way to pursue community safety. It could make 'three strikes and you're out' look reasonable.

Much the same may be said of elements of the joint proposals of the local authority associations in their manifesto, published in January 1997 and entitled 'Crime - the local solution'. Amongst a few more positive suggestions, this solution includes support for Labour's 'community safety order' proposal; a recommendation for local authorities to be enabled to pass by-laws under a new fast track category of 'social nuisance'; more powers for local authorities and housing associations to evict tenants and to ensure that they are thus 'intentionally homeless'; and the replacement of the police caution with a 'final warning' which might include reparation and a requirement for behavioural changes to be made within a set period of time.

Since assuming office, the Labour Party has looked to consolidate moves in this direction under the zero tolerance slogan. It has confirmed plans in a forthcoming Crime and Disorder Bill to bring in a final warning for youth offenders, and the community safety order. Indeed, where once local authorities pushed for the last government to endow them with a statutory responsibility for community safety, with a more enlightened vision of what that might entail, it now appears that the present government plans to give them the responsibility, but in a highly circumscribed form. As Home Office minister Alun Michael declares in a recent press release: 'What we will do is place a new joint responsibility on the police services and local authorities to develop statutory partnerships to prevent crime and enhance community safety by means of Community Safety Orders. We recognise how plagued many neighbourhoods are by continual anti-social behaviour by individuals or groups of individuals.'

This does not look like a very welfare-oriented approach to the problem. This is especially so when one considers what the other side of the partnership is likely to be doing. The police

have currently given a lot of attention to the idea of zero tolerance, inspired by the apparent success of the approach in New York, and a variation on it - confident policing - pursued by DCI Mallon in Hartlepool as well as others elsewhere. It is premised on the broken windows theory, and the associated conviction that the way to tackle serious crime is to tackle disorder (graphs show correlations between high levels of disorder and crime, but the relationship is not necessarily causal). Zero tolerance policing has a strong elective affinity with ideas such as the community safety order, parental responsibility order, composite offence and final warning, and together they provide a common basis upon which the police and local authorities may work together, obviating the need for the sorts of ideological clashes between the proponents of situational and social crime prevention which were witnessed in the 1980s. Again, what all this is doing is structuring community safety in a particular way. The proposed new institutional arrangements and methods of control will help to push community safety towards something very different from that envisaged by the original NACRO projects and its early proponents, towards social exclusion rather than inclusion. In so doing, it will benefit those planning healthy urban futures, but not necessarily all inhabitants. Crime, disorder, nuisance, anti-social behaviour, and quality of life offences may not be very pleasant, but I am not sure that such a strong emphasis upon criminalisation and enforcement is the right way to go about tackling the problems contributing to and created by these behaviours. It leaves very little space for more constructive actions, and even where these can take place they do so on terms which strengthen the criminalisation of the discourse of social policy, so that the measures end up being more about containment and control within the community (for a fuller discussion see Gilling and Barton 1997).

## Concluding discussion

The argument in this paper has been to set out my concerns about the current direction of community safety. The appearance of community safety as a softer, more inclusive approach to crime prevention enabled it to be used as a vehicle to escape from the legitimacy crisis which was looming in the early 1980s. However, while reformist, liberal-minded people might have seen this as an opportunity for the return of their welfarist values to the criminal justice domain, in practice this is not what has happened, or is likely to happen in the future.

Assisted by the nebulous quality of the concept and its practice, especially in regard to the fear of crime, the community safety vehicle has attracted passengers who have managed to influence the direction it has subsequently travelled in. This includes those with a particular stake in urban boosterism, the not so silent suburban majority, and those with a stake in populist politics. It is alarming how easily the commitment to community safety can sit with support for zero tolerance, but when one sees the positive public and media reaction to 'confident policing' in one's constituency (Peter Mandelson), or one's neighbouring constituency (Tony Blair), and one sees for oneself how the public supports the assault of New York's finest upon squeegee merchants (Jack Straw), one is quick to recognise the populist political value of such measures. The authoritarian populism of the first Thatcher government is revisited.

One great irony of this is that the solution to the legitimacy crisis, which was supposed to entail a degree of treading softly in law and order, in order not to cause riots and not to expose the public to greater fears, has ended up being just as harsh, if not more so, than an over-reliance on the situational approach was alleged to be. However, because it is clothed in the moral rhetoric of community safety, it appears not to be, because the coercion is justified for the benefit of the community, not the state. Perhaps the idea of a law and order society is not so far fetched now. What this means, in effect, is that there is still an element of the fortress mentality, but it has changed from a defensive 'home as castle' to a fortified citadel from which all the uncontrollable anti-social elements are to be ejected. Whether this amounts to the punitive city (Cohen, 1979), I am not sure. Time and research will tell.

## References

- Cohen, S. (1979) 'The Punitive City', *Contemporary Crises*, Vol. 3, 339-63.
- Crowther, C. (1997) *Policing the Underclass*. Scarman Centre Paper 12. Leicester: Scarman Centre.
- Deakin, N. and Edwards, J. (1993) *The Enterprise Culture and the Inner City*. London: Routledge.
- Feeley, M. and Simon, J. (1995) 'Actuarial Justice: The Emerging New Criminal Law', in D. Nelken (ed.), *The Futures of Criminology*. London: Sage.
- Foster, J. (1995) 'Informal Social Control and Community Crime Prevention', *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 35, 563-83.
- Fraser, P. (1996) 'Social and Spatial Relationships and the "Problem" Inner City', *Critical Social Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 43-65.
- Gilling, D. (1997) *Crime Prevention: Theory, Policy and Politics*. London: UCL Press.
- Gilling, D. and Barton, A. (1997) 'Crime Prevention and Community Safety: A New Home for Social Policy?' *Critical Social Policy*, Vol. 17, 63-83.
- Home Office (1991) *Safer Communities*. London: Home Office.
- Hope, T. (1995) 'Community Crime Prevention', in M. Tonry and D. Farrington (eds.), *Building a Safer Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Local Government Management Board (1996) *Survey of Community Safety Activities in England and Wales*. Luton: LGMB.
- McLaughlin, E. (1994) *Community, Policing and Accountability*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Patten, J. (1988) 'Crime Watch', *The Guardian*, 8 April.
- Poyner, B. (1986) *Crime Reduction on Housing Estates*. London: Tavistock Institute.
- Rock, P. (1988) 'Crime Reduction Initiatives on Problem Estates', in T. Hope and M. Shaw (eds.), *Communities and Crime Reduction*. London: Home Office.
- Sparks, R. (1992) 'Reason and Unreason In "Left Realism": Some Problems in the Constitution of the Fear of Crime', in R. Matthews and J. Young (eds.), *Issues In Realist Criminology*. London: Sage.
- Taylor, I. (1996) 'Fear of Crime, Urban Fortunes and Suburban Social Movements: Some Reflections from Manchester', *Sociology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 317-37.
- Tilley, N. (1993) 'Crime Prevention and the Safer Cities Story', *Howard Journal*, Vol. 32, 40-57.
- Wilson, J. and Kelling, G. (1982) 'Broken Windows', *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 29-38.
-

## About the author

[Daniel Gilling](#) lectures in criminal justice studies at the University of Plymouth. His main research interest lies in the areas of crime prevention and community safety, and particularly in the point of interface between these and broader social policies. Recently he has published a textbook, *Crime Prevention: Theory, Policy and Politics* (1997, UCL Press), and he is presently researching the community safety aspects of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act.

## Copyright information

Copyright this article © Daniel Gilling 1999.  
Copyright this volume © The British Society of Criminology 1999.  
Pages of the journal may be downloaded, read, and printed. No material should be altered, reposted, distributed or sold without permission. Further enquiries should be made to the British Society of Criminology.