

PAP NEWS ISSUE 23 2016

Hello again from **PAP News**. The Penal Affairs Panel of the Unitarians sends you some news of current issues in criminal justice, Human Rights and in prisons. Follow the links for fuller information.

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1 New Justice Secretary to Continue Prison Reforms The new Justice Secretary, Liz Truss, has stated that Michael Gove's plans for prison reform will continue in response to the first annual statement by the new HM Inspector of Prisons. Peter Clarke reports an increase of 27% in violent incidents in prisons in England and Wales in the last year largely fuelled by drugs known as "legal highs" which were made illegal in May. See www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/19/prisons-legal-highs-peter-clarke-new-psychoactive-substances

2 Replacement of Human Rights Act by Bill of Rights Returns Notwithstanding the statement by Theresa May when Home Secretary that the proposal did not have Parliamentary support, the new Justice Secretary has announced that replacement of the Human Rights Act 1998 by a Bill of Rights will be pursued. It appears to be a decision arising from the result of the Referendum in June and may be related to the Brexit negotiations. However, Mrs May has also stated she wishes to see the authority of the European Court of Human Rights removed from UK laws and courts. Plans for a Bill of Rights were said to have been prepared under the previous Justice Secretary, Michael Gove. See www.theguardian.com/law/2016/aug/22/uk-bill-of-rights-will-not-be-scraped-says-liz-truss

3 Prison Units for Islamic Extremists The Home Office requested a report on Islamic extremism in prisons from a former prison governor, Peter Acheson. The report accuses the prison service of "complacency". The Justice Secretary has responded by proposing special units for prisoners identified as extremists. The proposals have drawn immediate criticism. Immediate problems include the shortage of prison officers. The experience of the special units set up in Northern Ireland in the 1970s is not encouraging. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37151089

4 Does Brexit really mean Brexit? How binding is the marginal decision of the Referendum in a parliamentary democracy like the UK? Geoffrey Robertson QC, a leading Human Rights lawyer, argues that the decision to serve notice starting the two year negotiation period requires parliamentary authority and not simply service of the notice by order of the Prime Minister. It is clear that the majority of MPs do not support Brexit. Robertson points out that capital punishment was abolished in the UK by the decision of Parliament notwithstanding that the overwhelming view of the UK public in 1968 was and still is in its favour. The UK does not have government by referenda led by populists. The Government lawyers' present advice is that service of the Brexit notice by the Government does not require parliamentary approval. See www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/27/stop-brexit-mp-vote-referendum-members-parliament-act-europe

5 “Carlile Inquiry 10 Years On” Report In 2006 the Howard League asked Lord Carlile QC to lead an independent inquiry into the treatment of children in prison. The inquiry looked at and reported on the use of restraint, strip searching and solitary confinement. Following BBC Panorama's revelations of abuse of children at Secure Training Centre Medway operated by G4S, there is an update. The findings are not good for children. Today, unlawful restraint is routine, strip searching and the use of solitary confinement have barely changed. See <http://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Carlile-Inquiry-10-years-on.pdf>

6 Deaths, Suicide Attempts and Violence in Prisons All Surge Most of the figures have grown substantially since 2015 amid further staff cuts. See www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prison-system-in-total-meltdown-as-sexual-assaults-and-violent-crimes-soar-in-jails-a7004926.html for murders in prisons See www.theguardian.com/society/2016/apr/28/murders-and-suicides-in-prisons-in-england-and-wales-hit-17-year-high

7 Triple Increase in Anti-Immigrant Crime in Brexit Vote Areas Since June, sharp increases in hate crime have been reported by police across England and Wales and especially in those areas which voted in favour of Brexit. See www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crime-racism-immigration-eu-referendum-result-what-it-means-euro-spectic-areas-a7165056.html and in Scotland. See www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/police-scotland-report-increase-hate-8688744

8 Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme Reaches 2000 In 10 months since David Cameron agreed the UK would accept 20,000 Syrian refugees selected by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, some 2,000 have been received by 108 local authorities. Coventry, Gateshead and Edinburgh are the leading authorities. Norfolk County Council agreed to join the scheme in July. Sanctuary Norfolk, a group of representatives from Faiths including the Unitarians, started pressing Norfolk to accept Syrian refugees in December 2014 and has now disbanded. New groups are forming to receive the refugees. See www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/gateshead-taken-second-highest-number-11813692

9 “What Point Prison?” BBC Radio 4 has broadcast a most interesting debate between a panel of experts in crime, law and prison conditions. Contributors include Nick Hardwick, the former HM Inspector of Prisons and Vicky Pryce, the economist who wrote the book “Prisonomics” from her experiences. Others include families of victims who speak movingly of the value of Restorative Justice. Listen to the broadcast on **Wednesday, 24 August, 2016 at 2000** through **BBC Radio iplayer** on www.bbc.co.uk/radio4

10 Norwich Unitarians Start Welcome Rucksack Scheme for Asylum-Seekers The Unitarians in Norwich are leading the local ecumenical Justice and Peace Group in giving every new asylum-seeker to Norwich a rucksack of kitchen and bathroom essentials. What are your local Unitarians doing to help these desperate people?

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