

## PSAP NEWS ISSUE 27 2018

Welcome to **PSAP News**. The Penal and Social Affairs Panel of the Unitarians brings news of some current issues in criminal justice, Human Rights, prisons and now social problems. Follow the links for fuller information.

If you are a regular reader, you will have spotted that the Panel has expanded its name. Why?

The outstanding change during the life of the Penal Affairs Panel since 1991 has been the doubling of the prison population. Since 1991 all Governments have engaged in populist penal politics. The number of criminal offences in statutes has doubled and the length of prison sentences and the use in sentencing of community sentences grown inexorably.

To be clear, the Penal Affairs Panel does not wish to give up the work and objectives given to it by the General Assembly in 1991. It wishes to expand them. The situation in 2017 in UK prisons is arguably much worse. The more Panel members look at modern penal problems, the more social issues emerge. More than 60% of UK prisoners have drug misuse problems yet the present Government persists in the "war on drugs" and refuses to reform. Since 1991, and with the start of "care in the community", UK prisons have filled with people with treatable mental illnesses. The UK persists in the criminalisation of children at the earliest possible age. Homelessness, poverty, inequality and the lack of education are at the heart of the causes of crime.

The PSAP wishes to give Unitarians a focus for collecting and sharing information about social problems as well as penal affairs and give a voice to express reasoned concerns.

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**1 Norway to Decriminalise Drugs** Norway has announced it will decriminalise all drugs, the first Scandinavian country to do so. It will go on to look at legalising the regulated sale of some drugs which aim to cut street trading, control the quality and even raise tax income, as does the sale of alcohol and tobacco in the UK. Norway's move will clearly put pressure on the UK's drug policies. See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/18/norway-decriminalised-drugs-uk-chose-legalisation-policy>

**2 Female Prisoners 'subject to excessive strip-searching'** Prison inspections have found much greater than normal use of force and humiliating procedures such as strip-searching of female prisoners at HMP Peterborough. The Chief Inspector of Prisons has said the findings were disappointing. Interviews of female prisoners as they enter prison have shown 57% have been victims of domestic violence. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/female-prison-inmates-strip-searching-sexual-abuse-victims-physical-rape-uk-prisoners-inspectorate-a8172761.html>

**3 Torture 'Systematic' in Youth Detention Centres in 70s and 80s** One firm of solicitors has 400 cases of physical and psychological injury to young people detained following the over-enthusiastic adoption of Home Secretary William Whitelaw's 'Short, Sharp Shock' treatment in Youth Detention Centres. The solicitors have made a formal complaint against the UK for breach of the UN Convention Against Torture prohibiting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. See <https://www.aol.co.uk/news/2018/01/04/torture-systematic-in-youth-detention-centres-in-1970s-and-198/>

**4 Government Privatisation of Probation Failing** The radical reform of the Probation Services to split the internationally-acclaimed service into two parts has come under severe criticism by the HM Chief Inspector of Probation, Dame Glenys Stacey. The largest group of 'low-risk' offenders became the responsibility of 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies for supervision but are not able to make the profits promised and made major cuts accordingly. The Howard League has said the "emerging public safety disaster" had been foreseen in 2014. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/probation-services-failing-privatisation-model-two-tier-system-risks-murderer-sexual-offences-a8108591.html>

**5 European Court of Justice Finds against Snoopers Charter** After an adverse finding by the Court of Appeal, the ECJ has ruled unlawful the mass collection of data by the UK under the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. The Court found similarly against Sweden. The ECJ finding against the UK concerned the statutes allowed "general and indiscriminate retention" of many sorts of data without independent oversight. The Home Office has immediately begun a consultation on how to keep the information under control of police officers and with access by many other civil servants. See <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/dec/21/eus-highest-court-delivers-blow-to-uk-snoopers-charter>

**6 Proportion of Elderly Prisoners Increased by 150% since 2002** Public Health England has reported on the rapidly increasing numbers of aged prisoners in a prison system designed for the "young and fit". The reasons are the increases in sentencing for the same offences and the growth in prosecutions of historical offences. In June 2017 three times as many people were sentenced to 10 or more years, compared to June 2007. The Prison Service is now the carer for the largest number of elderly in the UK. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/elderly-prisoners-jailed-over-50-age-numbers-increase-2002-figures-a8082921.html>

**7 Octagon Unitarians Norwich win City of Sanctuary Award** The Norwich Unitarians, Framlingham School, New Routes charity for the homeless and the University of East Anglia have all won awards under the City of Sanctuary scheme. The Octagon won for introducing its 'Welcome Rucksack' scheme for amnesty-seekers and refugees and drew the other award winners into a concert at the Octagon Chapel which raised £2400 for New Routes work with the homeless. See <http://cityofsanctuary.org/donate/>

**11 Please Send Your News for PSAP News** Do you have social responsibility news? Send it to [bruce\\_chilton@hotmail.com](mailto:bruce_chilton@hotmail.com) with a link to fuller information.

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