


Offending behaviour

David Green, one of the authors of the book *Crime and Civil Society*, looks at crime trends and argues that the Government should be building more prisons, not letting persistent offenders out early under home detention curfew.

 Public confidence in the crime figures has deteriorated in recent years because of changes in the recording of crime which make it difficult to make comparisons and gain an accurate picture of whether crime has increased or decreased. As a result, the Government has established a Crime Statistics Review Group to recommend a new method of calculating crime figures. Until its reports, existing figures are based on those derived from police records and those based on the British Crime Survey (BCS) which examines people's experiences of crime. In brief, crime is down from its British Crime Survey peak in 1995, but it is only back to where it was in the early 1980s, by which time, according to police records, it was ten times the rate in the 1950s.

Police records of crime throughout Europe reveal that England and Wales had the fourth highest crime rate out of the 39 countries in the *2003 European Sourcebook of Crime*, compiled by an international team under the guidance of the Council of Europe. According to the book, Britain had a crime rate of 9,817 crimes per 100,000 population; it was more than double the average of 4,333 across other European countries.

Police records suggest that crime peaked in 1992 and that, after deducting increases due to changes in the counting rules, it is back to where it was in about 1990. However, the peak in the 1990s was the result of a surge in criminal activity because of some exceptionally counter-productive measures taken in the 1980s. The 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence



Persistent offenders should go to prison

Act (PACE) weakened police powers, and the introduction of the Crown Prosecution Service in 1986 increased the tendency for cases to be dropped. The police also increased the use of cautions and unrecorded warnings. The deterrent effect of sentencing was reduced for some of the most common crimes, notably car theft in 1988. The 1991 Criminal Justice Act prevented judges from taking full account of previous convictions. Many academics claimed that crime was not really rising, as the figures suggested, but rather that there was a 'moral panic'. The prison population was deliberately reduced from 50,000 in 1988 to about 44,500 in 1993, diminishing both the incapacitation and deterrent effects of jail.

A major cause of the fall in crime has been the increased use of prison since 1993. By 1997 the Conservative Party had increased the prison population to 61,100. The current Government has added another 15,000, taking the total to

over 76,000 in 2006. A Home Office survey found that the average prisoner admitted they had committed 140 crimes in the year before capture. If so, the incarceration of 15,000 offenders would have saved over 2.1m crimes, and the jailing of over 31,000 since 1993 would have prevented 4.3m crimes. Figure 1 shows how the fall in crime, measured by the BCS, followed the increase in the prison population.

Other factors have also been at work. The biggest falls have been in burglary and car theft, in part because improved security devices have made it harder to steal cars and to break into houses. Moreover, the economics of burglary have altered. In the 1990s a burglar typically stole the TV, the video and hi-fi equipment, but their second-hand value has fallen significantly.

Alternatives to prison

Increased use of prison has helped to reduce crime but the Government has been enthusiastic about

alternatives to prison, which it claims reduce offending. How effective have three of its leading programmes been?

Offending behaviour programmes, such as anger management courses, costing at least £2,000 each or £25m a year, have not been found to reduce crime. Recent Home Office studies (No 206 and 161) found that reconviction rates did not fall.

The Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) has cost at least £45m since 2001. In October 2005 the ISSP final report was published and found that 91 per cent of offenders who had taken part in programme were reconvicted within the two-year follow up. In other words, ISSP was more costly than other community sentences and was less effective.

Drug treatment in the community looked promising at one stage and millions have also been put into Drug Treatment and Testing Orders. However, according to Home Office Research Findings (184), around 70 per cent of offenders did not even complete their order and 80 per cent were reconvicted of a crime within two years.

Is there an alternative to the Government's policies? Based on the recommendations of *Crime and Civil Society*, a new strategy should be conducted on four main fronts:

- social investment, both public and private, in institutions that encourage a law-abiding lifestyle, especially the family;
- reducing the net benefits of crime by increasing the risk of detection and punishment;



Would locking more people up prevent crime?

- personalised programmes to reduce reoffending by convicted criminals;
- reducing the net advantages of crime through situational change, such as CCTV.

Here I will focus on the second and third fronts, but this is not intended to diminish the importance of increasing social investment in early socialisation and combating disorder in schools. No crime policy will be able to alter beliefs and attitudes if the institutions for encouraging social cohesion especially the family, schools and churches are in a weakened state.

Cutting crime

Three main measures would help. First, we should recruit more police. In England and Wales in 2000 we had 237 police officers for every 100,000 population. In France, they had 396 police officers for every 100,000 population, 67 per cent more. But they had a much lower crime rate, 6,405 crimes for every 100,000 population, 35 per cent lower than ours.

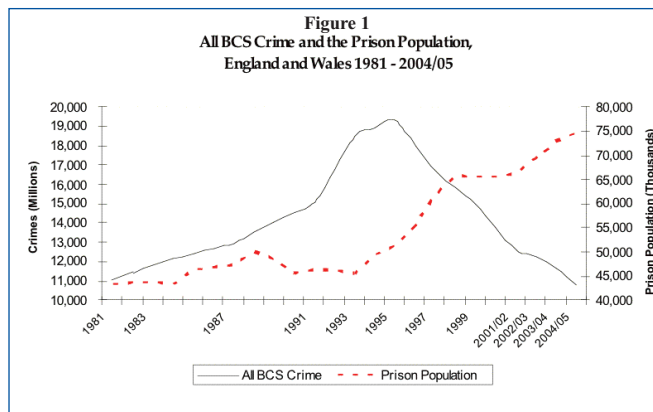
Secondly, we should increase prison capacity. On the Government's own admission, there are about 100,000 offenders who

commit half of all crime. They also believe that only 15 to 20,000 are in jail at any one time. Instead of a crash programme to lock up the other 80,000, the Government is focusing on only 5,000 ultra-serious offenders.

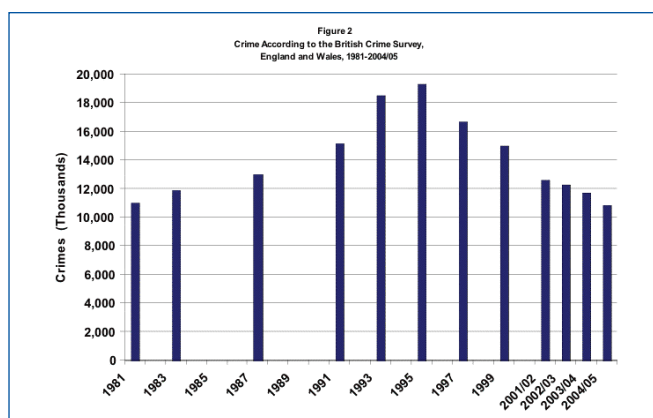
Thirdly, we should reform parole so that the release date depends on demonstrated good behaviour. At present, release at the half-way stage is automatic for prisoners serving under four years and can be even earlier under home detention curfew. The normal rule should be that the whole sentence is served unless offenders earn up to one-third off for good behaviour.

Many commentators make a sharp contrast between punishment and rehabilitation, but an effective policy should deploy both approaches. First, we should scrap Offending Behaviour Programmes based on cognitive-behavioural therapy and transfer the money to basic and vocational education. There is good evidence that vocational and work-related skills are beneficial.

Secondly, more serious efforts should be made to get prisoners off alcohol and drugs by imposing mandatory drug testing for all



Source: British Crime Survey. Prison population 1981-2004, based on annual averages published in Social Trends 35, Figure 9.21.



Source: Crime in England and Wales 2004/05.

prisoners on admission to jail. One Home Office Study found that 75 per cent of prisoners interviewed had taken drugs whilst in prison, most commonly heroin, at 53 per cent, and cannabis at 55 per cent. Random mandatory drug tests of prisoners are carried out daily across the prison estate, but the Prison Service annual report concluded in 2002/03 that testing had not led to a significant overall reduction in drug use. During the course of visits by the Home Affairs Committee in 2004, prisoners complained about the widespread availability of drugs and the consequent impact on morale for those trying to get off drugs.

Thirdly, we should introduce a graduated approach to juvenile offending. A welfare approach should be attempted initially. However, if offences continue to be committed, the level of intervention by the authorities should escalate. The more recalcitrant the offender, the more determined the response should be. Once individuals have been convicted three times for an indictable

offence, there is such overwhelming evidence that they are likely to spend the next several years committing crimes that they should be sent to secure institutions for a significant period which could be varied. Custodial sentences should be for a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of four years, followed by intensive supervision for 12 months or more after release. Release after 12 months should depend on a prolonged period of demonstrated good behaviour.

I believe that incorporating these measures into a new crime strategy would help to reduce crime across Britain.

Dr David G. Green is Director of the right wing think tank Civitas and a member of the Crime Statistics Review Group set up by the Home Secretary. For more information click on: www.civitas.org.uk Dr Green will be speaking at the Federation's conference next month