

PAP NEWS ISSUE 24 2017

Greetings 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 Official Secrets Acts Unfit for Modern Use Just two months after the enactment of The investigative Powers Act, the final version of the “Snoopers’ Charter” promoted by Theresa May, the Law Commission considers all the Official Secrets Acts of 1911, 1929, 1939 and 1989 should be replaced by a new statute to deal with modern espionage. See www.lawgazette.co.uk/law/irrational-official-secrets-laws-unfit-for-digital-age/5059715.article

2 Review of Murder Laws Rejected The Ministry of Justice has rejected as unnecessary proposals by the Law Commission to replace the current homicide laws to provide offences with “degrees” of serious, as in the USA. See www.lawgazette.co.uk/law/moj-rules-out-homicide-law-review/5058589.article

3 Lord Ramsbotham Blames Grayling for Prison Crisis The former Chief Inspector of Prisons has accused Government ministers of “absolutely crazy” job cuts and mismanagement of prisons for two decades. His fiercest criticism is for Chris Grayling, the Justice Secretary 2012-2015. See <https://inews.co.uk/essentials/news/uk/prisons-crisis-absolutely-crazy-reforms-says-former-boss/>

4 British “Open Justice” Less than Poorest States in USA Television programmes from the USA about real crimes and courts are shown every day on British television but do not reflect the growing differences in the information about legal cases given to the public in each country. Over years, British courts have become less accessible to the public and the media and more evidence is being given in secret. As courts become “digitalised”, transparency reduces. A new “Charter for Open Justice” is proposed setting down principles to be observed by courts and lawyers. See www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/news-focus-uk-failing-open-justice-tests/5059694.article

5 The Guardian Criticises President Trump’s Attacks on Judges The newspaper’s editorial draws critical attention to the constitutional problems caused by populist attacks on the law. See www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/05/the-guardian-view-on-trump-v-the-judges-hastening-a-collapse-of-respect

6 Parole Board Chair Says Hope is the Missing Ingredient in Prison Reform Nick Hardwick, the former Chief Inspector of Prisons and now the Chair of the Parole Board, gave the annual Parmoor Lecture to the Howard League. The lecture explores major problems such as the murder rate in UK prisons (from nil in 2010 to 7 in 2015), the need for Nelson Mandela Rules on the treatment of prisoners and the continuing presence of indeterminate sentenced prisoners. When that sentence was abolished in 2012 there were about 7000 such prisoners waiting for “tariffs” to expire and hearings before the Parole Board. In 2017 there are still 3,500 prisoners but for 70% of them the tariff has expired. To read the lecture – See

www.gov.uk/government/news/parole-board-chairman-delivers-parmoor-lecture

For the UN's Nelson Mandela Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, see www.penalreform.org/priorities/prison-conditions/standard-minimum-rules/

7 Cuts in Legal Aid for Parole Board Hearings Challenged The Howard League and the Prisoners Advice Service are mounting a legal challenge to the cuts in Legal Aid for prisoners. The cuts were made in 2013 and have been criticised for keeping in prison prisoners serving indeterminate sentences whose tariffs have expired. This need for Legal Aid applies particularly to prisoners with mental health illnesses who are unable to present their cases for release to the Parole Board. See www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jan/27/legal-aid-cuts-delaying-prisoners-release-rehabilitation-courses

8 Police Complain about Explosion of Gun Crime in Merseyside There have been 79 shootings in Liverpool since last April and three recent murders. Police blame the illegal importing of firearms from eastern Europe, guns which go to gang members. Senior police officers have appealed to local people to give information. See www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/feb/03/liverpool-residents-break-silence-murders-police-gangs

9 Commons Report on “Appalling Conditions” for Asylum-Seekers in UK Accommodation for asylum-seekers entering the UK is usually provided by the Government which uses contractors such as G4S. The conditions of much of the accommodation provided are often very poor and have raised criticisms in many “dispersal centres” such as Norwich. The complaints to MPs have led to investigation. See www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/asylum-seekers-uk-refugees-rat-infested-accommodation-commons-report-living-conditions-home-affairs-a7553726.html

10 Prison Suicides Highest Ever There was a suicide every three days in UK prisons during 2016 and a total of 113. The Howard League and Centre for Mental Health in a joint report suggest the causes are the in prison officers and budgets and the continuing overcrowding. See www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/28/one-prison-suicide-every-three-days-england-and-wales-say-reformers

11 Red Cross Reports 1000s of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers are Destitute The British Red Cross has published a report on the destitution of many refugees and asylum-seekers, applicants for refugee status awaiting decisions from the Home Office. The charity is the biggest provider of services to refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK and helped in 2016 about 15,000 persons who were penniless, a rise of 10%. The Red Cross sees such people most frequently in Leicester, London and Cardiff. See www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/refugees-asylum-seekers-latest-red-cross-penniless-destitute-home-office-a7562291.html

12 Penal Affairs Panel to do Survey of Social Action by Unitarians The PAP wants to gather information about Unitarian SR activities – more to follow.

13 Please Send Your News for PAP News Do you have news for publication to Unitarians and our friends? Please send it to bruce_chilton@hotmail.com

Social responsibility is religion in action