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The Social Organization of a Home Office Initiative

'[The] social world is by no means homogeneous but exhibits a multiform structure. Each of its spheres or regions is both a way of perceiving and a way of understanding the subjective experiences of others.'

1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, the Home Office could quite reasonably be portrayed as a rather cautious institution that sat at the still centre of the criminal justice system. In an earlier description, I certainly presented it as a relatively inert Department whose officials preferred to manage rather than to innovate, responding to problems and crises as they arose. The few officials with the greatest influence or the greatest expectation of influence, the men and women in the 'fast stream', moved from post to post with such frequency that they formed very few attachments to particular developments in train. The working ideal was to despatch business efficiently but without obvious personal engagement. All officials were hedged about with legal and quasi-legal precedents restricting new ventures; were apprehensive about displaying undue enthusiasm in an institution where evangelism was considered unseemly; were anxious to guard their ministers against embarrassment in a volatile world where embarrassments abounded; were enjoined not to encroach unnecessarily on the freedom of the individual; and, as agents of the major paymaster of the criminal justice system, were concerned not to become entangled in new and expensive projects.

All that was to change a little in the 1980s. Innovation and intervention began to be en-

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4. One of Andrew Rutherford's subjects, described as a senior Home Office official, reported of the 1960s that 'we still thought of ourselves as performing functions and carrying out procedures - we did not, as we do now, see ourselves as personally responsible for achieving results.' Quoted in A. Rutherford, Criminal Justice and the Pursuit of Decency (Oxford 1993) p. 57.
couraged because it was becoming increasingly apparent to officials and research officers that the conventional repertoire of the criminal justice system was less than effective. Recorded crime was rising inexorably (growing from some half a million offences a year in the 1950s to a million in the mid-1960s, two million in the mid-1970s and three million in the early 1980s) and the old answers seemed to be failing. I reported in *Helping Victims of Crime* how the Permanent Secretary had told a Department seminar in 1980 that, 'on a gloomy view, we seem to be locked into negative forces and negative results. The police and prison service require more and more men and more and more money. But crime increases steadily and becomes nastier, and the prison population rises.'

The decline of faith in stock recipes has been chronicled elsewhere. It was founded on a swelling pessimism about the obstinate growth of crime, a pessimism that was fed, *inter alia*, by Martinson's verdict that 'nothing works' in treatment; by Cohen's philippics about the paradoxes of 'net-widening'; and by the Home Office Research Unit's own published conclusions that variations in sentencing and police strategy achieved no apparent impact. What the Canadian criminologist Waller was wont to call the 'three C's of criminal justice, cops, courts and corrections' were found wanting, and officials began to turn elsewhere, to the 'community', to voluntary organizations, alternative sanctions and crime prevention strategies. There was what Hope and Shaw, then of the Home Office Research and Planning Unit, defined as a 'policy drift towards a 'community orientation'.

The case for greater innovation and intervention had to be constructed. Home Secretaries from Leon Brittan onwards were undoubtedly becoming more active and activist, questioning established practice and talking about the need for demonstrable efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. The Permanent Secretary of the 1980s, Sir Brian Cubbon, was disposed to change. But, above all, the case for experimentation was to be interpreted and enacted by an exceptional man, the Deputy Under-Secretary who assumed control of the Criminal Department in late 1982. That man, David Faulkner, was exceptional in part because he remained responsible for criminal policy for nine years, a long period in a single position for a senior person and one that allowed him to become knowledgeable and engaged. Over that period, he

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5. See, for example, the introduction and first chapter of D. Downes, ed., *Unravelling Criminal Justice* (London 1992), and E. Stockdale and S. Casale, eds., *Criminal Justice Under Stress* (London 1992).


10. One clear statement of that new formulation of policy was John Graham's review of crime prevention measures conducted under the aegis of the United Nations. Graham, a member of the Home Office Research and Planning Unit, wrote of 'how the formal processes of criminal justice - apprehending, prosecuting, sentencing, punishing and rehabilitating offenders - have been shown to have only a limited effect on controlling crime,... As a result, criminal policy in many countries has turned towards developing proactive measures to prevent and reduce crime, which are much cheaper than the costs of providing police forces, courts and prisons and would appear to hold out more promise of success in combating the problem of crime. Responsibility for crime prevention has consequently broadened to include agencies and individuals outside the criminal justice system.' J. Graham, *Crime Prevention Strategies in Europe and North America* (Helsinki 1990) pp. 6-7.


12. He was to say a year after his appointment as head of the Criminal Department, in 1983, that 'we may be seeing the beginning of a change. This may have been brought about as a reaction to the continuing increase in reported crime and through frustration over the apparent lack of success or lack of resources in meeting it.' 'Crime and the Criminal Justice System', unpublished Howard League Lecture, 19 April 1983.