



## Left Realism and Social Democratic Renewal

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### Abstract

At its inception Left Realism argued the need to develop a radical social democratic approach to crime. I argue that its contribution and continuing relevance primarily lies in this political project, the need for which has not dissipated. But this can only be advanced as an integral component of a more general renewal of social democratic ideas and politics that challenges the hegemony of neo-liberalism. This is far from guaranteed. The possibilities and challenges after the global financial crisis are considered. I argue for a rethinking of some core themes from early Left Realism to (as I see it) better complement the task of social democratic renewal in the present.

### Keywords

Critical criminology; Left Realism; neo-liberalism; social democracy.

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## **Introduction**

The Left realist project in criminology was initiated in the 1980s with the central aim of developing a social democratic approach to crime (see Taylor 1981 for an early Left realist argument although he did not invoke the label; Currie 1985; Hogg 1988; Jones, Maclean and Young 1986; Kinsey, Lea and Young 1986; Lea and Young 1984; Lowman and MacLean 1992; Matthews and Young 1986). Its heyday was the decade from the early 1980s to the early 1990s. Work in the field continued, although more sporadically and with more of a focus on theory or specific issues and less on the original idea of developing a wide-ranging, social democratic crime agenda (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2010, 2012; Lea 2002; Walklate 2015). The publication of Roger Matthews' *Realist Criminology* (2014) provides a welcome occasion for reflection and debate on the contemporary relevance and role of Left Realism.

I argue that the principal contribution of Left Realism was and remains political in nature. Left realists made the case for a distinctive social democratic politics of crime. It reflected the sense that crime had become newly politicised, a vital electoral battleground and an important ingredient in hegemonic political strategy. Nothing has changed in this regard, but adopting this perspective suggests – as I will argue in the first half of the paper – that the past history and present role of the Left realist project must be considered in the context of shifts across the broader political landscape over the last 30 years, the rise of neo-liberalism, the impact of populism (in penal politics and politics at large), the decline of the Left and the prospects of social democratic renewal in the wake of the global financial crisis (GFC) and the contemporary outpouring of popular protest around the world. I take the view that Left Realism must work in concert with the wider politics of social democratic renewal. In the second half of the paper I revisit some of the key themes in the original Left realist project and consider how they might be recast in the light of present conditions.

## **Hope and fear: The paradox of neo-liberalism and the failures of social democratic politics**

In the years immediately following Margaret Thatcher's victory in the 1979 general election in Britain (and Ronald Reagan's in the US presidential election in 1980), the Left across the Anglophone world continued to display a general optimism about the political future. The birth of Left Realism reflected this optimism and shared in it. It was not dimmed (and may even have been buoyed) by an awareness of the radicalism of the New Right. Many foresaw resistance that might open the way to a radical Left alternative. It was not to be. The hegemonic political project of the Right prevailed, eclipsing the post-war social democratic consensus and the pivotal roles of the welfare state and Keynesian economic management. Neo-liberalism became entrenched as the new political orthodoxy in many parts of the world. The public issues that animated politics in the 1960s and 1970s – poverty, inequality, re-distribution, social rights, combatting corporate power – were buried behind the promise of personal freedom, enlarged choice and widespread prosperity, courtesy of 'the market'. Criminologists with progressive political leanings continued to engage with the theoretical, research and policy issues of the day, but Left Realism not surprisingly lost some of its political bearings. Its prospects of revival as a political project are entwined with the more general revival of social democratic politics – a wider ranging renewal of progressive political ideas, energy, organisation, strategy and confidence. This is far from guaranteed.

Under the reign of neo-liberalism many have prospered economically but, for many others, the era is one of 'vertiginous' anxieties (Young 2007) and a growing precariousness in personal, family, work and community life. Pervasive anxiety has been a major source of the conservative appeal to harsh policies on crime, welfare, immigration and other social issues. The Right took the advantage on two fronts: the pursuit of free market policies that overwhelmingly favoured the wealthy few over the poor and middle classes and the promise to contain and repress the social fall-out from these same policies.

The social democratic Left has singularly failed to lay bare the responsibility of the Right for the insecurities and instability the latter so deftly exploits. If street crime in the 70s could be successfully pinned by the Right on the supposed moral flabbiness and permissive social policies associated with the welfare state, then the great waves of financial crime and near collapse of the global economy in the GFC should, one would think, have been able to be sheeted home to the greed, licence and amoral personal and corporate behaviour unleashed by the Right's deregulatory policies and free market ideology. It was Thatcher and Reagan that lit the fuse that blew up the global economy in 2008, with dire social consequences for millions of people who lost their homes, their jobs and their savings. Pervasive criminality in the financial sector was an undeniable fact contributing to the crisis. Yet not only were there no significant criminal prosecutions, neo-liberal dominance has remained largely unshaken in the aftermath (Ferguson 2012; Hogg 2013b). The many lessons of the GFC are yet to be fully digested. The most important might be that this was not just an economic crisis but, as David Marquand (2015: 2) has suggested, 'also a crisis of the *moral* economy [emphasis added]'.

Parties of the Left and centre Left are inhibited from effectively making this argument because they accepted Thatcher's argument that there was no alternative to her neo-liberal agenda. This also reduced them to practising a mostly managerial or technocratic politics from which the confident, inspiring vision of a more equal, socially just world largely disappeared. Social democratic politics has thus struggled for purpose and relevance.

Much the same story can be told with respect specifically to law and order. Centre Left leaders like Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and many (state) Labor Party leaders in Australia were convinced of the need to take law and order seriously (just as the Left realists had counselled), but in their haste to avoid being outflanked on the Right, they simply borrowed right-wing rhetoric and policies, sometimes even amplifying them to boost their *bona fides* (on Clinton see Walker 1997: 318, 324-326; on Blair see Blair 2010: 55-57).

### **The current political malaise**

The upshot is that the Right still owns the terms of the political conversation even as, issue by issue, many of their policies remain unpopular and are a source of widespread disaffection. Governments of both the Right and the Centre Left have often imposed policies (on, for example, privatisation, corporatisation of education and health services, and stripping support for the poor) that are not popular, but political convergence has left voters with little real choice. Nonetheless, strong public feeling still imposed limits on neo-liberal ambitions. Many of the social democratic reforms of the 60s and 70s – those of Labor/Labour governments in Australia and Britain and Johnson's 'Great Society' programmes – survived the neo-liberal assault: environmental regulation, consumer protection laws, work and product safety laws, anti-discrimination laws, and the repeal of overtly racist immigration laws, to name a few. They are now too entrenched to be wound back or even to be recognised and celebrated as significant social democratic reforms.

The neo-liberal marketisation of so many other areas of everyday life, including politics itself, and the corruption, insecurities and cynicism it has brought in its wake has fed a growing disaffection with conventional politics and declining trust in public institutions (Coggan 2013; Hay 2007; Marquand 2015). This is where neo-liberalism in economic and social policy connects to the growing political salience of law and order, for the crisis of trust and confidence fuels the turn to punitive rhetoric and policies as a key political tactic to engage the disaffected, tap public anxieties and shore up flagging legitimacy. Political disenchantment has also increased the attraction of third parties and independents, and deepened involvement in social movement politics to the exclusion of traditional mass party politics (feminism, environmentalism, identity politics, on-line activism, and so on). These movements can claim huge successes on many issues, but the 'big' questions of social inequality, wealth redistribution

and tackling power and privilege cannot be addressed without an over-arching social vision and hegemonic political strategy.

Large-scale, enduring political reform requires broad social coalitions and a shared vision of a just social order. It also depends on deepening democratic institutions and practices both to advance a progressive hegemonic politics and to defend gains against inevitable backlash. Unfortunately, the major democratic advances made across large parts of the globe since the 1990s (in Latin America, Eastern Europe, South Africa and some parts of South East Asia) appear to be giving way to a growing 'crisis of democracy' that is affecting both new and old democratic states (Coggan 2013). Democratic disaffection can tempt people to reach for or accept (often incrementally) authoritarian solutions, a wide variety of which is also on offer in today's world (Kampfner 2010).

### **The challenge of populism**

The rise of populism is a further symptom of the current democratic malaise. Left Realism in the 1980s was a political response to the role of crime in an emerging 'authoritarian populism' (Hall et al. 1978), but it was eclipsed by the populism it sought to challenge (Pratt 2006). Right wing populist parties and movements have recently grown in size and influence in the US (the Tea Party), UK (UKIP), Australia (a variety have come and gone since One Nation) and across large parts of Europe, often with street crime as one symbolic focus linked to other core obsessions with immigration, xenophobia and welfare. Left wing populist movements and parties (like Occupy, the Arab Spring, Syriza in Greece and the *Indignados* and Podemos in Spain) are also proliferating as part of a more general upsurge in popular protest across the globe (*The Economist Intelligence Unit* 2013; Mason 2013). The drivers of protest movements are diffuse, overlapping and constantly shifting and evolving: economic distress, inequality, unemployment, political repression, government austerity, deficient public services, environmental degradation, public safety, corruption, cronyism and corporate abuses. In several cases (the uprisings of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt; protests in Brazil and Turkey) a local incident or demonstration was the trigger that set off a larger, prolonged protest movement directed at the heart of political power. Popular disaffection is in many places widespread and deeply felt and there is a roiling volatility just below the surface of daily life.

Although there is diversity there are also some common features. There is firstly the deeply ingrained distrust of the political and corporate establishment. Secondly, there is the return to political and popular visibility of questions of inequality and fairness that are registered in other developments such as the unlikely popularity of French economist Thomas Picketty's (2014) socialist tome, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Thirdly, there is a self-conscious refusal and rejection of conventional forms of political organisation and expression (parties, manifestoes, political programmes, ideology). The movements often lack any clearly defined political purpose, ideology or strategy, being more in the nature of collective expressions of indignation and angry disavowal at the conduct of political and economic elites and the performance of established institutions.

'Populist' is freely used by commentators as a pejorative that captures what they regard as the emotional, non-rational, politically directionless (or simply anti-political) and aberrant character of this new politics. (Criminologists have done much the same thing in their critical accounts of penal populism: Hogg 2013a). This cries out for reassessment, especially in light of the alienating effects of the managerialism that dogs contemporary mainstream politics. A growing literature, from diverse disciplines and standpoints, has sought to balance the traditional rationalist bias of political theory and discourse with a proper recognition of the role of emotions in politics (Haidt 2013; Laclau 2007; Moisi 2009). Caricatures of populism are challenged. Far from being a perversion of healthy democratic politics, it is a dimension of the

normal democratic practice of politics and needs to be taken much more seriously at large and in penal politics more specifically (Hogg 2013a; Quilter 2014).

### **Reviving social democracy**

The resurgence of global protest and return of inequality as a political issue suggest the times may favour a rethinking and reinvention of Left social democratic politics. Thinkers from across a broad Left spectrum have laid down markers for such a revivalist project (Hall, Massey and Rustin 2013; Judt 2010; Marquand 2015). But there are major challenges in the way of such a task. Foremost is the challenge of connecting politically (which is to also say emotionally) with a wide constituency, or variety of constituencies. How can the Left once again inspire hope and confidence, what were once its hallmarks? If it is to do so, if a renewal of social democracy is at all possible, it will have to take populism much more seriously (Laclau 2007).

Populist politics is accused of offering simplistic solutions to complex problems. However, it also increases access to politics for those who feel themselves excluded or alienated from power and the political process. At its core it contests the increasingly dominant idea of politics as mere administration, a disenchanted realm in which problems are managed and interests coordinated according to technical criteria and pragmatic calculation. It challenges what Margaret Canovan describes as politics stripped of its secular 'redemptive' face and the moral and emotional appeal of the democratic 'promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people' (Canovan 1999: 11). It engages people outside the political class and the older institutionalised channels of communication and influence. It cuts through the increasingly predictable, scripted and alienating verbiage and rituals of contemporary managerial politics. If it is guilty of offering simple solutions, of promising more than it can deliver and raising expectations that are bound to fall short of realisation, this merely confirms that populism is a (usually unacknowledged) dimension of democratic politics in general. It certainly does not justify the condescending dismissals so familiar amongst the commentariat. The populist promise that political power might be made transparent to the popular will:

... is not entirely illusory: it really is the case that people who can manage to believe in the possibility of collective action and to unite behind it can exercise more power than if they give up and concentrate on their private affairs ... Unrealistic visions may be a condition of real achievements as well as being a recipe for disappointment. (Canovan 1999: 13)

The lessons for social democratic politics are many. The importance of a presence in daily life and popular culture (including of course social media nowadays) is underscored. So too is the importance of reviving the idea that politics is educative rather than merely reactive to polls, focus groups and rancorous media campaigns. Reviving radical social democracy presents major political, cultural and social challenges. It may not even prove possible in today's world, but if such a rethinking and reimagining is not attempted, Left politics seems destined to continue down its current path of progressive ossification and irrelevance.

### **Left Realism and social democratic renewal**

I have laboured the general argument concerning the larger question of social democratic political renewal for a reason. If Left Realism is conceived as a political project that aims to exert an enduring influence on the direction of policy and change, this only makes sense if it woven into a viable social democratic politics and narrative (Brown 2011). A Left realist criminology offering itself primarily as a theoretical critique of other criminologies – 'liberal', 'administrative', 'Left idealist', and so on – may contribute something to critical intellectual debates in criminology (see Matthews 2014), but it also risks contributing to less healthy trends towards fragmentation (Bosworth and Hoyle 2011) and evangelism (Brown 2002; Carlen 2011). This works against the sort of non-sectarian collaboration and dialogue within broadly



progressive research, policy and practitioner communities that may best serve Left Realism as a political project. Left Realism, like social democratic renewal at large, should eschew sectarianism in favour of a broad-based, open, ecumenical ethos, a political composite that draws (as contemporary progressive political essayists like Marquand in Britain and Dionne in America argue) on 'the most resonant traditions within our political culture' (Marquand 2015: 17; Dionne 2012). It needs to be concerned with the nitty-gritty of policy and with evidence, but also with political values and popular narratives in which law and order concerns are articulated with a larger social democratic political vision and project. Fundamentally, it has to challenge head-on the assumptions of neo-liberalism in economics, politics and popular culture.

It is here that, in rethinking Left Realism for the twenty-first century, useful bearings can be taken from that seminal contribution to critical criminology, *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978). Written before the election of Margaret Thatcher and the rise to dominance of neo-liberalism, its account of the growing political salience of crime and of the 'drift' toward a 'law and order society' was deeply prescient (also see Hall 1979). It showed that far from being a marginal political issue, crime and law and order concerns were central to the public experience of the British crisis in the 1970s and to the efforts of the political Right to fashion a hegemonic strategy that would secure popular consent for its 'solutions', blending neo-liberalism and authoritarianism, a 'free economy' enforced by a 'strong state' (Gamble 1988). Essential to the Right's success (and to Hall et al.'s 1978 analysis, one heavily influenced by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1971)) was the struggle at the level of everyday experience and common sense. Crime – and certain crimes in particular (like 'mugging') – symbolised, or were made to symbolise, so much more than mere violations of the law: the impact of non-white immigration on the transformation of urban neighbourhoods; threats to national identity; declining economic fortunes; and the failings of the welfare state. Crisis was thereby experienced as, and in some degree reduced to, a crisis of social order whose solution would be found in the recourse to tough law and order measures. Some key Left realist themes might be reconsidered in this light.

### **Taking crime seriously: Local/global**

The foremost task Left Realism set itself was to get the Left to take crime seriously, to abandon the habit of downplaying its gravity, dismissing evidence of popular fears as exaggerated and disproportionate, as mere moral panic instigated by the media or cynical political forces. A social democratic approach to crime, they argued, must take seriously the concerns of ordinary citizens, especially those without power and influence or the means to look after themselves. This was underscored by the fact that everyday personal and household crime (assaults, theft, and so on) was heavily concentrated in poor and socially marginal communities. The unequal distribution of crime compounded all the other forms of distress battled by those at the bottom of the social heap in an unequal society. Crime most gravely affected those who could least afford to protect themselves or withstand its impacts. Moreover, tough political rhetoric on law and order designed to assuage middle-class fears did not translate into effective local responses to crime for those most affected. One problem was that the unequal impacts of crime were masked in official statistics and victim surveys that presented a general, usually national, picture of crime and crime trends. A scaling down of methods was needed to capture the realities of crime at a local level in the most affected communities. This was linked to demands for greater responsiveness and accountability of police and other institutions responsible for managing local crime.

Patterns of inequality, concentration and compounding have, if anything, increased in the last 30 years in many places. The increasing commercialisation of security has allowed those who can afford it to further insulate themselves from the effects of crime by purchasing ever greater and more technologically sophisticated forms of security. This protection does not stop at crime but often involves erecting borders against conditions and categories of people regarded as

troubling or suspect in some way – rowdy youth, minorities, the poor – with attitudes towards such groups increasingly framed by discourses of crime and disreputability. A growing emphasis on crime prevention and managing risk has thus fed into more generalised modes of social exclusion based on categorical suspicion. Those who cannot afford to purchase entry to the secured, increasingly privatised spaces of modern life are left to fend for themselves in the badlands beyond, where they are exposed to ever greater crime risks and cycles of victimised/victimising behaviour (Davis 1990; Genn 1988).

The need to address the deeply unequal distribution and impacts of crime at the local level remains undiminished. But the earlier focus of the realists on responsive and accountable local policing needs to be pushed further to embrace other criminal justice institutions (notably courts and corrections) and other domains of public policy. Justice reinvestment is one strategy that has this potential: to simultaneously make the link and redress the imbalance between shrinking local social provision in the neediest communities and the churning of people from these communities through an expanding criminal justice system and back to the same communities, usually with the net effect that local social, economic and crime problems are exacerbated rather than ameliorated (Allen and Stern 2007; Bales and Nagin 2011; Brown, Schwartz and Boseley 2012). Justice reinvestment (like most reform ideas) can be steered in a variety of directions. The struggle to frame it within a social democratic politics is therefore imperative (Brown 2011). At the same time, the fact that it can appeal to others – fiscal conservatives and liberals – should be seen as a political advantage.

The example of justice reinvestment illustrates a larger point: that it is also important to scale up the analysis from the local to regional, national and global levels. Crime increasingly ramifies across borders. This is obviously true of organised crime, terrorism and other crimes that are transnational in nature, but it is also true in the sense that some crimes (the phenomenon of ‘mugging’ in the 1970s or even a single local crime like the 1992 abduction and murder of two-year old Merseysider James Bulger) resonate well beyond any particular locality, inflecting public fears and conditioning political responses. More fundamentally, the forces that shape local crime problems are never just local in provenance. Consider impacts of deindustrialisation, collapsing local employment, the hollowing out of inner cities, and systematic home foreclosures that socially eviscerated whole streets and neighbourhoods in many US cities in the GFC: it is necessary to make the connection between larger structural forces driving growing social inequality and polarisation and local crime and safety problems. Complementary policies are required to tackle both.

A particular challenge confronts social democratic politics in the global era, both generally and in relation to crime. Although there is nothing new about geo-political divides and gross inequalities between societies of the global North and global South, new media and communications technologies and cross-border travel and mobility permits as it motivates increasing numbers of people to both think *and act* globally. Inequalities are driving behaviour in novel ways. A *sense* of relative deprivation and feelings of humiliation, injustice or indeed hope for a better future translate into asylum seekers fleeing armed conflict and persecution, economic migrants, terrorists, people traffickers, drug cartels, and many others, acting to a degree and in ways unknown before. Poor and rich worlds, zones of chaos and zones of prosperity, are linked in manifold new ways.

Crime is consequently also politicised in novel ways. It is, for example, increasingly linked to questions of national security. Fear of crime in local communities is, then, not just a function of local crime but is conditioned by faraway events and global anxieties. Local and global are newly intertwined. It is necessary, therefore, to set the unequal and concentrated effects of crime at the local level and *within* nations in the context of the gross inequalities in crime and violence *between* nations and regions (Currie 2009) and recognise the growing interconnections between the two. US demand for illicit drugs and supply of guns fuels organised violence (and

corruption) on a massive scale in parts of Latin America where drug cartels, private militias and police and armed forces are locked in conflict. This is in turn linked to extreme levels of violence played out on the streets of some of America's inner cities, where armed gangs confront increasingly militarised police. It is not enough, therefore, to focus on local crime problems without also addressing the structural conditions, illegal markets and chains of activity in which they are embedded.

A common response to the insecurities (job losses, novel criminal and other threats) produced by globalisation in the rich world is defensive in character. People are increasingly drawn to xenophobic parties and movements that promise to slash foreign aid and shut national borders to immigrants, asylum seekers and other unwanted intrusions from the outside world. The social democratic Left is confronted with the very difficult issue of how to reconcile the traditional commitment to the idea that the first responsibility of a nation state is the security (economic and social as well as physical) of its own citizens with the imperative of addressing global problems of inequality, poverty and environmental crisis, a dilemma made all the harder by the fact that its own constituencies are the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of change and thus to the appeal of right-wing populists.

There is no simple way through this issue. Crimes like terrorism, Internet pornography and on-line fraud, and problems like people movements, climate change and financial interdependence are unavoidably global in nature. It is illusory to believe that nations can any longer shield themselves from the troubles of the outside world (or that there is any longer a simple 'inside' and 'outside', that the local is not also global).

### **Taking the penumbra of crime seriously: Incivilities and anti-social behaviour**

In stressing the importance of an effective response to street crime left realists were careful to distinguish their position from the 'broken windows' approach of US Right realists. The latter promoted a 'zero tolerance' approach not only against street crime but also minor disorders and incivilities. Their argument was that, left unchecked, such disorder fuelled public fears and community deterioration, which ultimately led to more serious crime (Wilson and Kelling 1982). Left realist criticisms reflected their genuine concern for the civil liberties implications of such an approach as well as their sense that it would compound local alienation from the police, inhibit cooperation and reduce effectiveness in addressing 'real' crime problems (Kinsey, Lea and Young 1986; also see Matthews 1992). The British Labour Government under Tony Blair was (once again) more influenced by the Right realists, launching a controversial legal crusade against anti-social behaviour. The critical responses to this and other such measures where legally prohibited conduct is ill-defined and police enjoy enormous discretion raises real concerns, but it may be time to reconsider the efficacy of a reflex legalist, civil liberties posture on these issues.

The realities are that street disorder has always been, and remains, a central concern of the police and when considered in context (rather than in terms of abstract legal categories) crime and disorder are not always so easily disentangled. As well, in other contexts (like racial abuse and vilification or sexual harassment) the Left generally supports more not less efforts at controlling borderline illegal behaviours that offend and humiliate and which they often see as belonging on a continuum with, or symptomatic of, much more serious problems of victimisation and discrimination. The crucial issue is not whether, but how, various forms of anti-social behaviour should be policed. The problem, at least in the Australian context (and I suspect elsewhere), is that policing public order has so often involved excessive and discriminatory responses, like arresting individuals for pissing in laneways or swearing at police, with the disproportionate burden falling on young people, the poor, the homeless and minorities. (In the Australian context, Indigenous people are massively disproportionately affected by such laws.)



Whilst recognising these problems it is possible to affirm the importance of civility in everyday life, seek to recast meanings and priorities in sanctioning it and expose the grosser, genuinely threatening (and often racialised and gendered) forms of incivility that are currently unpoliced or under-policed. There have been some recent examples in Australia of private citizens using their cell phones to capture the racial intimidation of travellers or workers on public transport and passing them on to police or mainstream media outlets. Irrespective of whether or not such citizen 'policing' should lead to prosecutions or formal intervention of some kind, it might feed into a progressive redrawing of the normative contours of discussion and sanctioning practices around anti-social behaviour. Realists should also highlight the utter hypocrisy of those on the Right who attack racial vilification laws as violations of free speech whilst showing utter indifference to the vast numbers of poor, young and minority individuals who are tossed into police cells on a daily basis for much more trivial violations of offensive language and behaviour laws.

There is another level on which this debate should also be engaged. In other circumstances, like for example tax avoidance by corporations or the rich, the legalist argument of strict compliance is habitually trotted out as a sufficient answer to every claim of improper conduct. Sticklers for the rule of law when it comes to their own conduct insist that it is enough that there has been no clearly established violation of the law. Questions of fairness and equity and (dis)respect for widely shared moral and social norms are simply not permitted to arise in these discussions. This is another discursive battleground on which Left realists might mount campaigns: to endeavour to invest concepts like anti-social behaviour with new and different meanings that capture what is often the genuinely (and seriously) anti-social character of behaviour engaged in by the big end of town, including tax avoidance, polluting local environments, and business practices that variously involve fraud, deception, intimidation, harassment, cheating workers of their entitlements, and so on (Croall 2009). As Croall points out, many of these activities have deeply corrosive impacts on community safety, public trust and the fabric of civic life, but they are missing entirely from debates around anti-social behaviour and the apparatus of knowledge and control directed at managing it.

The struggle here is to link such practices to larger political questions of fairness and justice and to lower the threshold for judging them in moral and social terms rather than solely by reference to formal legal criteria: in short, to define the deviancy of the powerful *up*. It is possible. In Britain in 2012, a social media campaign, carrying the tacit threat of boycotts, embarrassed Starbucks into voluntarily paying additional tax to the Inland Revenue (Ferguson 2012). The difficulty lies in moving beyond one-off campaigns such as this to generalise moral awareness and engender a more permanent shift in the common sense framing and public control and accountability of corporate (mis)conduct. The challenge is to forge a new moral economy that supports a re-ordering of state and society and a re-thinking of what, who and how we criminalise and dispense justice (Marquand 2015; Thompson 1993).

### **Re-thinking realist critiques of administrative criminology**

Left realists have been harsh critics of 'administrative criminology' (see Matthews 2014: 12-15). These critiques go together with others directed at the growing role of risk, actuarialism, prevention and security in criminological discourse and policy agendas. All could be seen as symptoms of an increasingly dominant managerialist politics, which has also infected social democracy. While it is important to avoid fetishising numbers (Young 2011: 44), it is also necessary to recognise the essential role numbers play in political and criminological debates and in the practice of modern government (Rose 1991). Statistics and other forms of quantification are political artefacts, but they are no less significant or necessary for that. In some areas, the problem is a critical shortage of the forms of numericisation that play an important role in problematising particular issues. For many years, the governments in the US-led Coalition that invaded Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11 engaged in a calculated process of

denial in relation to civilian casualties by simply choosing not to know ('We don't do body counts' said US General Tommy Franks, a line echoed by government officials in Britain and Australia). The task was left to NGOs (like Iraq Body Count in the UK: <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/>) to collect and disseminate information on war casualties and lift the fog of political denial.

Recent police killings of Afro-American men in the US, beginning with the shooting death of Michael Brown, a young Black man, in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014 have led to riots and prompted widespread public soul-searching. Those seeking statistics on the incidence of such killings each year in the US quickly discovered that no accurate count was available. The FBI keeps some figures but local police forces are not mandated to provide the data. It is impossible, therefore, to readily assemble a national picture, a reliable knowledge of how many there are, which police forces are involved, the race and other characteristics of victims, and trends over time. Police killings are a symptom of problems that run deeper and a potential trigger to inquiry and reform. The Department of Justice investigation prompted by Brown's killing and the subsequent riots confirmed the existence of a general pattern of oppressive, discriminatory treatment of the poor and minorities at the hands of the local criminal justice system in Ferguson, and by implication in other inner city areas of America with large Black populations and grave levels of poverty. Numbers can be a vital tool in making the hidden visible, in commanding public attention and in building political pressure for change.

In 2014 US Democratic congressman John Conyers introduced a corporate crime bill, the *Corporate Crime Database Act*, which would, if enacted, require the US Department of Justice to establish a central, publicly accessible database recording all criminal, civil and administrative proceedings against corporations in the US. A small step if it were to succeed, but a not insignificant one, given the substantial silence on corporate crime in public and political discourse. Crime statistics are socially produced but this does not detract from their powerful role in the construction of crime as a social problem, in delineating its meanings and conferring a certain coherent shape on disparate phenomena, making it possible for journalists, politicians and criminologists to talk in common sense terms about *the* crime problem, to map its locations, produce tables and graphs of crime trends and convey implicit ideas about the social profiles of offenders. Public discourse is organised and coheres around these common sense understandings and concerns.

There is something that might be usefully called a 'crime complex', an apparatus of power/knowledge in Foucault's sense. It comprises the core enforcement and knowledge-producing agencies (police, courts, corrections); government statistical and research bureaux that collate and publish crime data, undertake victim surveys and other policy-relevant research; opinion-shaping institutions and practices (like media, polling organisations, and so on); and a growing array of commercial industries with interests in managing crime problems (insurance, private security). Administrative criminology and the many tools of crime measurement and visualisation are integral parts of the 'crime complex'. The complex is not monolithic in nature. Agencies and actors within it do not consciously collude to produce a uniform picture. Rather, relationships are symbiotic. Institutionalised interdependencies tend to ensure, for example, that statistics of recorded crime (such as the FBI Index) are widely reported by media, consumed by the public and utilised by government. They make it possible to speak credibly about the general state of crime, whether it is increasing or not, and which types of crime in particular are contributing to these trends. It is a sort of moral barometer of the state of the nation that shapes public attitudes and guides policy. Such is the ritualistic character of such processes that few are led to ask how such forms of knowledge are constituted and what they include and exclude. The effect is to reproduce a dominant, common sense knowledge and understanding of the crime problem which circulates in self-perpetuating, self-reinforcing fashion within the crime complex itself and the wider society and in turn shapes other opinion-forming processes (like questions in polls and focus groups that predetermine the

crime problem about which members of the public are prompted to express their fears and concerns).

The striking feature of the crime complex is that so much crime, and certainly most of the crimes and harms perpetrated by the powerful (corporations and the wealthy), is systematically excluded from it. Although not necessarily exempt from regulation in some form (usually of a sparing, non-stigmatising nature), anyone wishing to produce a coherent picture (of incidence, trends, and so on) would need to trawl through the annual reports and other archives of multiple bureaucracies with widely varying regulatory responsibilities, operating philosophies and rules for counting and reporting illegal behaviour. Substantial labour would be required to even begin to construct what would still be at best a radically incomplete, patchwork knowledge of the universe of white collar and corporate criminal activity and the modes of justice to which it is subject. Such a diffuse institutional pattern and opaque body of knowledge is antithetical to simple representation according to the 'rules' and routines governing the organisation of the public discourse on crime in the crime complex. Great swathes of serious criminal wrongdoing consequently elude popular everyday representation and understandings of *the* crime problem.

Despite Edwin Sutherland's (1949) efforts to expose the criminological blindness to white collar crime and the long and fruitful tradition of research and theory he initiated, the crime complex remains almost completely impervious to it. White collar and corporate crime may be a thriving research area but as a special topic or sectional interest only that largely remains outside the criminological mainstream and its routine habits of thought, characteristic ways of talking and institutionalised knowledge-producing processes.

Conyers' bill was a modest attempt to make a small dent in this power/knowledge edifice. Left realist energies might be better expended on supporting and further developing such initiatives – initiatives that aim to reconstruct the crime complex along progressive lines – than on rehearsing critiques of 'administrative' criminology, which is a soft theoretical target but a much harder political nut to crack. This is a struggle over common sense attitudes and beliefs and the often mundane bureaucratic practices and processes that shape and maintain them. It is of more than trivial political significance because common sense concerning crime and control is insinuated in the circuits of ideological and cultural power through which social relations of dominance and subordination are maintained and the structures of authority supporting them legitimised. It is, in other words, an important element in hegemonic power relations.

### **Conclusion: Searching for a good social democratic law and order story**

I am mindful that most of what I have argued relates to challenges for the future although I hope some practical pathways for developing a fresh social democratic approach to crime have been suggested. But is it mostly just wishful thinking? In these times it is easy to share Gramsci's 'pessimism of the intellect' and not so easy to summon his 'optimism of the will'. Yet political renewal does depend upon just such a recovery of hope, confidence and vision. Some heart at least should be taken from work on comparative political economy and penal policy (Lacey 2008; Pratt et al. 2005) which reveals that not all countries and regions have been on the same political (and punitive) trajectory. In particular, it tells a quite hopeful, 'big picture' story about crime, justice and social democracy in the Nordic world (Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland).

The Nordic experience shows that taxing heavily to invest generously in the education, health and social well-being of citizens, far from being a drag on economic vitality, may support highly productive, prosperous, creative, inclusive and safe societies. On all of these criteria, the Nordic countries not only compete with but also significantly outperform their market liberal counterparts in the Anglo world. This is not to idealise these societies or suggest they are without their own problems, challenges and shortcomings, let alone hold them up as a model

that can be imitated elsewhere. Rather, the fundamental point is they give the lie to neo-liberal orthodoxy that there is no alternative but to embrace free markets and small government and accept inevitable trade-offs between social inclusivity and economic success (with the corollary that those for whom the market has no use will be subject to an ever-expanding apparatus of punitive controls).

They show there are proven alternative paths to a 'sustaining society' (Currie 2012): a society that is (more) egalitarian, prosperous, innovative, tolerant and safe, and at the same time sparing in its reliance on criminalisation and penal repression (Pratt and Eriksson 2013). They should encourage us not to imitate them but to imagine alternative futures and draw on our own political traditions to build them.

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