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Editorial: Reflections on an English Summer of Rioting and Looting

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August 2011 will be remembered in England as the month when rioting and looting occurred on an astonishing scale on city streets in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and elsewhere. The internet, television and newspapers were full of images of burning cars and shops; but also of young people smashing shop windows in order to loot, and then brazenly walking out with flat screen televisions and other consumables. In one BBC TV report an on-the-spot witness complained that even charity shops were being looted. In a video posted on the internet, a local resident from London berated the rioters: "I'm ashamed to be a Hackney person, 'cause we're not all gathering together and fighting for a cause, we're running down Footlocker and thieving shoes" (YouTube Video posted 8 August 2011). Zygmunt Bauman (2011a) took a similar view, that: "These are not hunger or bread riots. These are riots of defective and disqualified consumers". Elsewhere he elaborated:

This particular social minefield has been created by the combination of consumerism with rising inequality. This was not a rebellion or an uprising of famished and impoverished people or an oppressed ethnic or religious minority - but a mutiny of defective and disqualified consumers, people offended and humiliated by the display of riches to which they had been denied access (Bauman, 2011b).

For politicians the rioting and looting were straightforward criminality. Elsewhere they were described as "shopping with violence" (Littlejohn, 2011). For Slavoj Žižek (2011) they were:

... a manifestation of a consumerist desire violently enacted when unable to realise itself in the 'proper' way - by shopping. As such, they also contain a moment of genuine protest, in the form of an ironic response to consumerist ideology ... The riots are a demonstration of the material force of ideology - so much, perhaps, for the 'post-ideological society'.

British criminology clearly needed to respond to the rioting and looting. Tim Newburn of the London School of Economics has taken a lead in an important research project where those involved in the rioting and looting have been questioned. Phase 1 of the study has just been published and Tim reports on the findings in this Newsletter. Other criminologists have also contributed to the debate. For instance, in October the Campaign for Social Science held a one-day conference on the riots exploring "causes, calamities and consequences". Speakers included Ben Bowling, David Canter and Mike Hough. Also speaking was former BBC Home Affairs correspondent Jon Silverman from the University of Bedfordshire. Jon contributes to this Newsletter his reflections on the riots. A further thought provoking contribution is provided by John Lea of the University of Brighton (See also Lea, 2011).

The rioting and looting came to an end following a massive influx of policing into London - and a change in the weather (see e.g. Ellen Cohen, 1990). While the rioting and looting displayed some of the worst in society, the public responses showed some of the good. For instance, social media were used to aid the rioters and looters; yet were also used to galvanize support and action in clearing up the mess. Membership of the *Facebook* group "Post-riot clean up: Let's help London" quickly reached over 19,000 and on the streets 'armies' of residents with brooms and rubbish bags were seen trying to reclaim their neighbourhoods. There are clearly some grounds for optimism.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter we have news from the society's sub-committees and details of what is going on in the BSC regional groups. We are also delighted to include Robert Reiner's acceptance speech for the BSC Outstanding Achievement Award. Rob was a popular winner at the society's summer conference at Northumbria University. He was introduced at the conference by his colleague at the London School of Economics, Jill Peay, whose address is also included here.

It has clearly been a busy year for British criminology and for the society where Loraine Gelsthorpe has now taken over the reins from Mike Hough. Next year looks set to be similarly busy with, for example, the promise of elected Police and Crime Commissioners following the successful passage of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. There will be the security at the London Olympics to consider. And following consultation on anti-social behaviour (Home Office, 2011), maybe the replacement for the Anti-social Behaviour Order?

Perhaps the holiday season is a good opportunity to catch breath. In the meantime I want to wish all a very happy Christmas and a peaceful new year.

Andrew Millie, December 2011

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