

INTRODUCTION

Recessionary conditions, as currently being experienced in Australia, serve to focus public attention on the interaction between circumstances of economic hardship and crime. While the lack of any uniform statistical data confirming the link between economic factors and crime makes the association less certain, an important indicator of the likely impact of the current recession on crime trends is the fact that one of the most striking characteristics of offending is unemployment. The first of the papers in this issue examines the relationship of unemployment and crime and the consequences of the failure to address this correlation, particularly in the case of young people; a subject taken up by a number of contributors to the Contemporary Comment section.

Paul Wilson and Robin Lincoln in their paper "Young People, Economic Crisis, Social Control and Crime" focus on the role of youth unemployment in generating crime and on the question of why young people become more criminogenic as a result of unemployment. The authors point to the high correlation between juvenile offending, youth unemployment and non participation in education and advocate a radical shift in economic focus to a strategy which, coupled with educational initiatives, aims to forge stronger links between education and industry to open up youth employment opportunities. The consequences of ignoring youth unemployment are forecast as likely to contribute to the deepening degree of social inequality in Australian society, with a lost generation of Australian youth disenfranchised from the workplace, alienated from society, and channelling the frustration and anger of their marginal status into criminal activity.

Given the current reform agenda of the juvenile justice process in New South Wales, Jenny Barga's paper evaluating the role and function of the police/magistrate initiative of Community Aid Panels (CAP) is an excellent source from which to assess the utility and desirability of such a scheme as part of future juvenile justice strategies. Drawing on a research project carried out at one Sydney metropolitan CAP, the paper provides constructive details on the relationship between appearance before CAP and levels of cautioning and as to voluntariness of participation on the part of young offenders both in terms of appearance before CAP and assent to community work suggested.

In light of the decision of the Federal government to abandon further investigation of suspected Nazi war criminals, it is fitting that Irene Nemes' paper reflects on the legal and moral considerations underlying the prosecution and punishment of Nazi war criminals. The paper traces the history of the *War Crimes Amendment Act 1988*, highlighting various difficulties encountered both with the passage of the legislation and subsequent prosecutorial proceedings. The paper goes on to assess the likely impact of developments in Europe, in particular the collapse of the Soviet Union, on Australian war trials. The legislation is ultimately analysed within the frameworks of positive and natural law, with

consideration also given to the appropriate rationale of punishment in relation to war criminals.

Finally, Chris Richards and Rob White examine both the proactive and reactive campaigns of police unions and the impact of their activities on the shaping of the public debate on the nature of policing in our society. The paper questions whether the media is the appropriate forum for the venting of industrial demands pursuant to which greater police powers and resources are sought which in turn have an intrusive impact on the lives of members of the public. The response of police unions to criticism of their members is also scrutinised and seen as undermining attempts at administrative reform of police services and the establishment of accountability to the members of the public over whom they have significant power.

On an international note, the development in Japan of the practice of suspension of prosecution as a formal disposition available to the public prosecution service is the subject of an interesting contemporary comment by Mark Findlay. The exercise of prosecutorial discretion in favour of suspension of prosecution is depicted as a form of conditional waiver premised on the potential benefit to an individual offender, rather than the more familiar practice of a decision not to prosecute due to insufficiency of evidence.

Returning to the issue of the connection between unemployment and other circumstances of economic hardship and increased involvement in criminal activity, Tony Vinson's contemporary comment postulates a further explanation of the socio-economic disadvantage-crime link. Reflecting on his own experience in researching the general coincidence of crime and social disadvantage in particular localities, Tony Vinson suggests this may be explicable on the basis of the social conditioning of those whose job it is to track down crime; that state agencies turn to the economically disadvantaged to find those who commit crime. The wider implications of current trends of socio-economic inequality is an issue taken up by Eva Cox in her contemporary comment in which she outlines the insidious effect of the creation of a marginal underclass on the social fabric of the community and assesses the ramifications of the loss of a communal focus. Finally, the contemporary comment of Ann Symonds highlights the necessity of a comprehensive approach to juvenile offending, addressing the totality of issues affecting young people, including education, policing, housing, community service and job creation.

The pervasive range of subject matters dealt with in this issue of the journal is indicative of the span of criminal justice issues currently the subject of debate, to which the above papers and comments will no doubt contribute.

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