

None of them say crime is FALLING

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News

"We are falling into an abyss of murder and mayhem," the Sun newspaper screamed last week. The news is full of lurid stories about gun-toting teens and old people imprisoned in their homes by their fear of thugs. The right wing tabloids are demanding more police powers and more prisons.

'We are falling into an abyss of murder and mayhem,' the Sun newspaper screamed last week. The news is full of lurid stories about gun-toting teens and old people imprisoned in their homes by their fear of thugs. The right wing tabloids are demanding more police powers and more prisons.

Politicians are using the hysteria to step up their attacks on civil liberties and jury trials. All this comes at a time when crime is actually falling. The British Crime Survey reports that crime has fallen by 33 percent in the last five years.

Violent crime fell by one fifth between 1999 and 2000, the last year for which full figures are available. There was a rise in street crime last year. It rose because of an increase in the number of mobile phone thefts, mostly among young people. The rise in phone theft is in proportion to the massive increase in the ownership and use of mobiles.

There are inner city areas where children steal phones from other children. This is nasty, but it is not the crime wave of drug-induced violence the media feature every day.

Most mobile phones are not stolen in violent street robberies. The majority of people report that their phones are stolen when left unattended in public places, such as offices, leisure facilities and on public transport. Robberies and thefts not involving phones have fallen in the last two years.

Paul Cavadino is the chief executive of prisoners' welfare organisation NACRO. He told the press last week, 'Crime is falling overall and has been for some years. Despite this, prison numbers are rocketing and the courts are tougher than ever on petty offenders.

'Yet the public could be forgiven for thinking that we are submerged under a wave of crime, with the police and the courts powerless to do anything about it.'

Why kids steal

PEOPLE ARE understandably worried about violent crime, especially when it involves children. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that as many as one in four teenage boys in deprived areas carry weapons. A senior Department of Health

adviser described teenage boys as 'a major public health risk'. Why are teenagers apparently caught up in a crime wave?

It has a lot to do with mobiles, the most expensive personal item that can easily be taken and sold on. But it is not just about phone theft. The Rowntree Foundation itself pointed to the answer last month. It produced a report on how many children in inner cities dropped out of school or were excluded. They got no more help from any social services.

Astonishingly, education minister Estelle Morris is encouraging head teachers to exclude more children from school. 'Crime is largely generated by social forces, not by what goes on in courts,' argues Open University Law Professor, Gary Slapper. Dealing with social issues like racism, poverty and exclusion from school are the key to tackling crime.

Prisons are already at breaking point

METROPOLITAN POLICE commissioner John Stevens has blamed leftie lawyers for getting dangerous criminals off the hook. The media claim that the justice system has broken down and criminals are getting away with murder. They are lying.

More people than ever are being banged up in prison. The proportion of people convicted who are sent to prison has risen from 49 percent ten years ago to 63 percent today. The number of people in prison has risen by 10,000 since Labour got into office, and by 5,000 in the last year alone. Britain imprisons more than any other European country.

The prisons are at breaking point because of chronic overcrowding. Juries do convict less people than they used to.

Some columnists have argued that this shows the prosecution service is chaotic and underfunded. Experts believe it is mainly because people simply do not trust the police any more.

More police powers equal more racism

THE SO called crime wave is being used to justify stop and search laws. Even the editor of the Voice, a newspaper aimed at black Britons, approved of an increase in police powers. But this will lead to more racist harassment on our streets.

Black people are already a staggering seven times more likely to be stopped and searched than whites. This discrimination is getting worse. A year ago blacks were five times more likely than whites to be stopped by police.

The police claim they are scared to stop blacks because they will be accused of racism. This is rubbish. The number of whites stopped and searched fell last year by 14 percent. The number of blacks searched by the police rose by 4 percent, and by over 6 percent in London.

The number of Asians stopped and searched rose by 3 percent. Any further crackdown on Britain's black population will only make this racism worse.