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The Dangers Of Vigilante Justice



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By Alexander Baron



52
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The criminal justice system doesn't always get things right, and wouldn't even if all those running it were scrupulously honest and fair, which **few if any of them are**, but the alternative is far worse. That is vigilante justice, or lynching, a process in which the mob acts as judge, jury and executioner, not bothering to collect and evaluate evidence – which may be entirely spurious – and then proceeds to string up the accused from the nearest tree.

Reprehensible though this is, there was some rationale to it in the bad old days when the authorities had neither the resources nor the powers to deal with cases speedily and efficiently. That does not apply anymore, at least not in the *civilised* world.

Michael Pleasted was formerly known as Robin Moul. He was a convicted paedophile who had no fewer than 24 convictions. He was also 77 years old when last November, mother of five Sarah

Sands decided to stab him to death. In spite of this being a premeditated act fueled by drink, Sands received a sentence of only three and a half years for manslaughter.

Pleasted had been housed on an estate by Newham Council, who were unaware of his criminal history which predates the Violent And Sex Offender Register. He appears to have lived on the estate without causing anyone concern for well over a decade, but in July 2012 he was said to have come to the attention of the authorities due to his apparent closeness to a teenage boy. Whatever that means. It could be that he was just a lonely old man, certainly he had time on his hands, and volunteered as a steward. Whether or not he had any sort of ulterior motive, he was the victim of an unprovoked attack, and Sands was extremely lucky to receive such a lenient sentence.

Vigilante attacks – including occasional murders – happen in prisons too, usually by some plastic gangster out to make a name for himself. One such non-fatal but **extremely nasty attack** happened recently on the other side of the world to a big Australian star who **like Rolf Harris** has found himself incarcerated for offences against the young on extremely questionable testimony.

Robert Hughes, who is currently appealing his convictions, is said to be in protective custody. Convicted sex offenders are routinely targeted by other prisoners; in the UK they are sometimes segregated under what is known as Rule 43.

At a recent appeal hearing, the judge expressed dismay that such an attack could happen to Hughes under the circumstances.

While rapists, paedophiles and child killers are considered fair game by people of a certain mentality, people who are clearly innocent can also be targeted. In February this year, Lisa-Jayne Samuels was given a **20 month sentence** for making a false rape allegation against Terry Brown. Samuels was a serial rape liar, but initially the police took her claim seriously. They were not the only ones, and Mr Brown was attacked by a vigilante mob who stabbed him. Even worse, his pregnant fiancée tripped and fell during a confrontation; she suffered a miscarriage.

However heinous a crime may be, and however compelling the evidence against an accused, no one should be denied due process by mob justice.

52
SHARES