STATE TALK, STATE SILENCE: WORK AND ‘VIOLENCE’ IN THE UK

JOE SIM AND STEVE TOMBS

If there is one principle that the modern state is organised around, it is its ability to resort to violence. As Walter Benjamin pointed out, not only are the boundaries of the legitimacy of violence established by law, but the power and authority of the state – indeed law itself – is necessarily and intimately bound to violence: ‘Lawmaking is powermaking and to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence’.1

That said, even in states of exception such as the contemporary ‘war on terror’, the process of hegemony-building shows clearly the existence of a complex dialectical relationship between consent and coercion. Thus, we would argue that to understand the violence of the modern state, we need first to reject any crude dichotomy between force and consent – for the articulation of state power always implies an intimate inter-relation in which both are inseparable. Thus, following Gramsci, Poulantzas, Hall et al., and others, a critical analysis of the state should move beyond narrowly focusing on the repressive apparatuses of state power, crucial though these are, to the ideological apparatuses of the state. This entails a series of analytical tasks, one of which is the extent to which the state talks, or remains silent on, apparently related social issues around violence. This is the focus of this essay.

In their cultural history of the British state, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer noted that ‘“the State” never stops talking’.2 In making this important point about ‘state talk’, Corrigan and Sayer recognised that the power of the state in capitalist societies extended beyond its material role in confronting internal problem populations and external enemies, to the cultural and symbolic position occupied, and the interventions made, by the different institutions in civil society. They further noted that the state is involved in:

…moral regulation: a project of normalizing, rendering natural, taken for granted, in a word ‘obvious’, what are in fact ontological


and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order. Moral regulation is coextensive with state formation, and state forms are always animated and legitimated by a particular moral ethos.  

These insights provide a frame for the two issues around which this essay is organised. Each is concerned with violence, but violence of two quite different kinds. First, there is violence used against those who maintain state power, such as police and prison officers, and how this violence is socially and ideologically constructed as an affront to the state itself, and by extension, to a civilised social order. Second, there is the violence committed against workers in the routine processes of production – albeit denied the label of ‘violence’, and virtually legitimated by the state bodies which formally exist to prevent it.

This essay, therefore, presents two quite different stories of violent crime in contemporary Britain. One is a critical analysis of the loudly proclaimed dangers facing state servants, through a focus on what has been termed ‘the victimised state’. A second, quite different, tale is the silence associated with the mundane violence associated with working for a living, a form of violence for which there is, virtually, state-institutionalised impunity. While each is significant for understanding the ways in which contemporary state power operates, it is in their dialectical relationship that we find their real import: the pincer-like effects of their differing definitions is an important key to understanding what counts as violence in a neo-liberal social order – and, conversely, what does not count as violence within this social order.

THE ‘VICTIMISED STATE’

The social construction of state servants as perennial victims of violence has become normalised to the point where it is now taken for granted by the majority of academics, politicians, media experts, policy makers and the public. This deeply-embedded, common-sense view of the everyday dangers faced by the police (and by other state servants such as prison officers) is immensely important for understanding the ideological role that violence plays in the reproduction of a deeply divided social order. This point becomes even more significant when considering the deaths of state servants. These events have a social and symbolic significance that extends far beyond the demise of the individual or individuals concerned. When police officers are killed on duty, as happened in England at Shepherds Bush in 1966, in Blackpool in 1971, in inner London in 1985 and in Manchester in 2003, these killings come to represent ‘a potent symbol of lawlessness’ in a society
that is alleged to be degraded and scarred by the hostility of the deviant to authority and order.

Thus, the undisputed claim to moral authority, and the symbolic position that police (and prison) officers command, has allowed their organisation-al representatives in the Police Federation to construct a clear and precise definition of the ‘truth’ about the normalised nature of violence and the risks and dangers faced by its members in their everyday working lives. The ideological power of this ‘truth’, which reproduces and reinforces a broader populist discourse concerning the difficult job that state servants do, is such that alternative definitions of social reality remain subjugated and muted. Indeed, those who attempt to articulate alternative definitions that challenge the nature and extent of violence experienced by state servants are, as has been noted elsewhere, ‘insidiously position[ed] as heartless (they don’t care about the officer who is victimised) and naïve (they don’t live in the ‘real’ world’).  

What are the theoretical and political implications of thinking about violence committed against state servants? There are five we wish to highlight here, which taken together can contribute to a fuller and, crucially, more critical understanding of the operationalisation of violence as a powerful ideological mechanism for reinforcing an inequitable and inevitably unjust social order.

First, the few state servants who die in violent circumstances become, for the many who follow their lives and deaths in the mass media, the embodiment of a set of mystical, eternal values to which the society should aspire. Thomas Mathiesen’s brilliant insight into the panoptic and synoptic nature of contemporary power relationships is useful here. As he notes, contemporary forms of social control are not only built on a deeply embedded system of surveillance where the few survey the lives of the many but, in addition, as Mathiesen puts it, ‘we have seen the development of a unique and enormously extensive system enabling the many to see and contemplate the few…’. Thus the lives and deaths of individual state servants – the few – become a focus for the grief and outrage of the many. At the same time, the distorting and dislocating social divisions which remain integral to contemporary capitalist social relationships, and which underpin and give meaning to the violent activities of other individuals, organisations, corporations and states, are shunted to the ideological and political periphery as society expiates its guilt through focusing on the lone deviant individual who carried out what is invariably portrayed as an act of wanton barbarity. This solitary individual is situated at the centre of the gaze of the many by mass media whose capac-
ity for engaging in the ‘dramatisation of “evil”’ has, if anything, intensified since Frank Tannenbaum coined the term over sixty years ago.

Second, the ‘ideological mystification’ surrounding violence against state servants operates through a dialectical process which is sustained by exaggerating the numbers who are assaulted and murdered, and overdramatising the seriousness of the violence against them. This process has allowed powerful moral entrepreneurs such as the Police Federation and the Prison Officers’ Association to all but monopolise the debate about the violence and dangers faced by their members. This view of the matter, consecrated and blessed by the vast majority of the mass media and political spokespersons, has also been integral to the construction of a common-sense, populist discourse concerning what state servants do, and what is done to them on a daily basis by the dangerous.

However, a critical deconstruction of official discourse reveals a very different picture. For example, between 1994 and 1998, 28 police officers died on duty. Twenty-one of these deaths, 75 per cent of the total, were due to the involvement of officers in road traffic accidents. Four officers were murdered. This represented 14 per cent of the total. The remaining three, 11 per cent of the total, died after, respectively, collapsing at work, having a heart attack while baton training, and being involved in a helicopter crash. Furthermore, the claim that being a police officer generates a degree of stress which in turn accounts for the force’s high rates of sickness is also more problematic than the advocates of the victimised state thesis recognise. As Mathew Norman has pointed out, the sick rate may be affected by a police culture which has had little to fear in terms of being held to account democratically, due to a ‘protection racket’ which has been ‘slavishly’ operated between the Police Federation and successive governments of both major parties.

Third, violence committed by state servants is also mystified ideologically through complex processes involving individualisation and circumspection. This inevitably leads to a focus on the few ‘bad apples’ who are supposedly responsible for illegitimate violence by state officials, while simultaneously generating and constructing a highly restricted definition of the number, nature and extent of the physical and psychological violations committed against prisoners, who are, theoretically, in the care of the state. This construction distracts attention away from the institutionalisation of physical violence within the state, and also from ‘something about which people seldom talk: namely, the mechanisms of fear’, both of which can be mobilised inside and outside places of detention such as police stations (and prisons), and on the streets, to discipline, regulate, oppress and even, in a number of
cases, destroy those at the centre of the state’s punitive gaze. In the four decades up to 2006, there were over 1,000 deaths in police custody. No officers have ever been convicted of causing any of these deaths. Furthermore, between 1992 and 2005, 30 people were shot dead by the police. Again, there have been no convictions. Thus, the systemic nature of the state’s capacity for violence, and its institutionalisation, as well as the tacit and overt support for its use at all levels by its servants, is rarely if ever considered. This, in turn, is reinforced by a process of state and media-led defamation of those at the sharp, and often degrading, end of the state’s interventions. As Simon Hat-tenstone notes, ““police sources” routinely vilify victims and excuse police officers.”

Fourth, thinking critically about violence against state servants also raises a number of important issues concerning the concept of risk and how it has been theorised in contemporary criminology. Risk, and its impact on criminal justice policy, has dominated many of the recent debates in crimi-nology, particularly with respect to the shift towards the ‘new penology’ and the social construction of the ‘responsible’ subject. It has also had a profound impact on the ideologies and practices of many criminal justice and mental health professionals. However, there are serious conceptual and methodo-
logical problems in uncritically applying risk to the field of mental health and crime, particularly with respect to the issue of predictability. Furthermore, a more comprehensive definition of what the concept means needs to be developed if it is to have any critical, analytical viability. In terms of academics, (and so-called ‘practitioners’), this would involve shifting their professional gaze away from an overwhelming concern with, and concentration on, the behaviour of the powerless and the risks they pose, to considering the risks posed by the state to its citizens, offenders or otherwise. For example, can the concept of ‘risk’, as it is currently theoretically constituted, help to explain data from the Independent Police Complaints Commission which indicated that in 2004/05, 106 people died ‘during or following police con-

Furthermore, developing a critical conceptualisation of ‘risk’ would also mean considering how the powerful have utilised and continue to utilise
their self-referential propensity for being ‘at risk’ to justify political and policy clamp-downs. One effect of this analysis would be to belatedly turn the gaze of academics and practitioners upwards towards the powerful, and to identify how the discourse of the risks of violence faced by state servants has always been central to the legitimisation of their power and the implementation of authoritarian policies by the state.

Finally, the on-going construction of state servants as perennial victims reflects a more general contemporary political development which is tied in with the role of the respectable victim in the intensification of reactionary criminal justice and social policies. In the UK, this has been reinforced by the interventions of groups such as the Victims of Crime Trust and Protecting the Protectors (the protectors in this case being the police). These organisations are not only unconditionally supported by the main political parties but also have become a ubiquitous presence in the mass media. As in the US, the ideological cement for this support is the ‘spectre of the predator criminal’, which is the ‘ever-present image’.22 It is an image that is refined, articulated and disseminated by these pressure groups via the mass media, and, in a classic spiral of amplification, is reflected back to them by an increasingly fearful public whose idealisation of the past, and trepidation about the future, legitimates a further clamp-down in the present.

We now turn to another equally important issue which also has serious theoretical and political implications for thinking about violence and how it has been conceptualised: the question of violence related to the workplace.

**VIOLENCE AT WORK**

Despite the fact that most deaths and injuries caused by working in the UK result from infractions of the criminal law – the Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAW Act, 1974) being the principal criminal statute that applies here – such illegal killings of, and injuries to, workers remain unacknowledged as ‘crimes’, and are thus subject to gross under-enforcement. Indeed, thanks to the social-scientific commitment to defining violence both in terms of intention and as inter-personal – neither of which is intrinsic to constituting violence – such deaths and injuries are rarely even considered through the lens of violence.23 Yet this type of organisational violence is much more widespread than is understood, and remains widely under-reported. Thus in the UK, for example, the most conservative estimates of occupational fatalities to workers typically stand at around 250 a year. Yet if we add to this ‘headline’ figure other official data on occupational deaths – notably, deaths of members of the public, and in particular road deaths to workers and members of the public resulting from incidents involving ‘at work’ vehicles – this increases
the total of occupational deaths in 2006/07 from 241 to around 1,500. In other words, to obtain a more accurate figure of officially recorded occupational fatalities, we need to apply a multiplier of six or seven to HSE (Health and Safety Executive’s) headline figure.

It is worth emphasising that the majority of these deaths result from crimes by employers – though they are rarely processed as such. Thus we know, through HSE’s own research, that in a clear majority of workplace fatalities – in at least two out of three – there is *prima facie* evidence of violations of duties placed upon employers by the HASAW Act, and thus at the very least a criminal case to answer.24 This general conclusion – based upon evidence indicating attribution of responsibility for the fatalities in question – also holds in the case of fatal injuries involving ‘at work’ vehicles, these being numerically the most significant omission from HSE’s headline figure, and the site of most work-related deaths to workers and members of the public.25 Here, the key factors in such fatalities include employers’ failure to consider safer, alternative means of transport or indeed routes, the setting of unsafe schedules, journey times and distances, failures to maintain vehicles adequately, failures to invest in vehicles with additional safety features, and the lack of specialised training on offer for drivers.26

Non-fatal injuries data is subject to even greater levels of non-reporting: HSE’s most recent study indicated that in only 32 per cent of cases involving employees, and only 13 per cent of cases involving the self-employed, who had suffered a reportable injury resulting in a hospital visit, had the injury, in fact, been reported.27 Typically, according to official records, 30,000 major injuries are sustained by workers and 15,000 by members of the public each year in the UK (but not including injuries from accidents involving commercial or industrial vehicles).28 Around 120,000 ‘over-three day’ injuries to workers are typically recorded in any given year. Thus, occupational injury is far from an uncommon experience.29 To gain an accurate estimate of the actual scale of injuries sustained would require multiplying the HSE’s official figures by six or seven times.

Despite the problems involved in working with the available death and injury data, they do at least allow us to draw comparisons, no matter how crude, between violent crime recorded by the Home Office on the one hand, and occupational deaths and injuries on the other.

First, in terms of deaths, it is possible to compare the numbers of people killed at work with those recorded by the Home Office as homicides. This allows us to make several useful, if only indicative, observations. Initially it appears that one is twice as likely to be a victim of homicide in England and Wales than to die as a result of an acute, work-related incident. However,
against this we need to bear in mind that the work-related fatality data here are for ‘workers’ only, and so capture only somewhere between one-sixth to one-seventh of occupational fatalities. On this basis, being a victim of a work-related fatality looks many times more likely than being a victim of homicide.

A similar, again simple but equally instructive, comparison, can be made in terms of occupational injuries. According to the 2006/07 British Crime Survey (BCS), there were a total of 2,471,000 violent offences in England and Wales, and 3.6 per cent of people experienced a violent incident. Of these, 49 per cent resulted in no injury to the victim, about one in ten (12 per cent) required medical attention, and one in 50 (2 per cent) resulted in a hospital stay. In absolute terms, this equates to some 49,420 BCS recorded incidents of violence resulting in a hospital stay. Now, we cannot disaggregate from HSE injury data those which similarly require a hospital stay. But we do know that the kinds of injuries defined under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) as ‘major’ are serious enough to warrant at least hospital treatment, while the definition of an injury to a member of the public is one that requires the injured person going straight to hospital. Thus, we can reasonably set against BCS data on violence resulting in a hospital stay HSE data for major injuries to workers and injuries to the public which, for 2006/07, stand at 29,450 and 17,483 such injuries respectively. Combining these two figures produces a total – 46,933 – which is virtually the same as the figure for BCS recorded violence requiring a hospital stay. And this is not even to begin to estimate the numbers of over-three-day injuries – 114,222 in 2006/07 – which resulted in hospitalisation (nor, of course, to account for the high levels of under-reporting).

This comparison can also be expressed in percentage terms: again using data for 2006-2007, we find the percentage of workers experiencing a major injury stands at just under 0.1 per cent (0.097 per cent, or 97.1 in 100,000); this can be compared with the 0.072 per cent of BCS respondents (the 2 per cent of the 3.6 per cent who experienced violence) resulting in a hospital stay. Although such comparisons can only be broadly indicative, they do lead us to an inescapable conclusion, namely that work is more likely to be a source of violence in Britain than the conventional crimes recorded by the Home Office.

Yet ‘safety crimes’ are constructed as something to be acted on and counted, not by police forces, nor by the Home Office, but by regulatory agencies, and this crucially reinforces the idea that this category of crime, which involve violence towards, and the deaths of, many workers (and des-
perate impacts on their families) are not ‘real’ crimes. This institutional segregation of safety crimes by the state has profound implications for how we think about them and how we think about violence, so that we also need to examine what those agencies charged with responding to such offences actually do.

As we have already seen, processes of reporting and recording filter out the majority of deaths and injuries from the official figures. A second filter is apparent when there is a decision whether or not to investigate; almost 9 out of 10 major injuries that are reported to HSE are never investigated. A third filter is apparent when decisions are made whether or not to institute a particular type of enforcement action. When safety inspectors come across occurrences that breach the law and they decide to act on those breaches, prosecution is used much less readily than other types of enforcement action: the ratio of administrative (improvement and prohibition) notices to prosecutions is roughly 10:1. And of the injuries that do get investigated, only 11 per cent lead to prosecutions. In short, most safety crimes – including many of the most serious crimes – remain either undetected, or, if they are detected, are filtered out of the criminal justice system. And this also indicates that the separate treatment of safety crimes is rooted in the politics and practices of criminal justice rather than some intrinsic quality of such crimes. The ‘filtering’ processes can therefore only be fully understood within their political context. There are two tendencies within the current political context that are of particular importance in decriminalising safety crimes.

First, there has been the consistent erosion of HSE staffing resources which began under neo-liberal Conservative administrations and then, after a brief upturn in funding, became much more marked under the second Blair government from 2001 onwards. On 1 April 2002 there were 4,282 staff in post and on 1 April 2006 there were 3,991. Of those, 1,543 were deployed as frontline inspectors, compared with 1,625 on 1 April 2002. The steady erosion of HSE resources, from a low base, has certainly had an impact on the morale of the organisation and its confidence to lobby government for the resources it needs; HSE has, in recent years, refrained from making budgetary demands upon government. It is difficult to imagine any police officer in any police force area in the country failing to ask for more officers and a larger budget – despite the fact that numbers of police officers are at an all-time high.

The second tendency within the political context that has influenced the decriminalisation of safety crimes is the post-1997 consolidation of the government’s ‘burdens on business’/anti ‘red tape’ agenda. New Labour established the Better Regulation Task Force in 1997, one of the key tasks of which
has been to formalise a requirement that all proposed legislation affecting business must be accompanied by a ‘Regulatory Impact Assessment’ – the primary effect of which has been to pre-empt and minimise cost impacts upon business. This disciplinary process has formalised a pro-business/de-regulation frame of reference for policy making across government.

Also since 1997 there has been a series of ‘reviews’ of regulation – always couched in terms of the need to reduce it – which reached their apogee in a new Regulatory Code, published by the newly-formed Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. This sought to formalise existing, or set out new principles on how to handle what it calls ‘the few businesses’ that break the law – all reducing the possibility of formal enforcement action. The document actually formalised the diminished goal of public protection when it emphasised that ‘Regulators should recognize that a key element of their activity will be to allow, or even encourage, economic progress and only to intervene when there is a clear case for protection’.

HSE, then, is under pressure on two fronts: first, from a real cut in resources that is clearly indicated by the reduction of staff in post; and, second, in terms of the momentum given to the ‘burdens on business’ agenda, and the moral undermining of HSE’s remit. Unsurprisingly, then, the number of inspections has fallen, and recently very sharply: 41,496 HSE inspections in 2006/07 compared to 54,717 in 2005/06, a 24 per cent decrease. Thus in 2006/07 HSE-enforced workplaces could expect an inspection on average once every 14.5 years, compared to once every 7 years in 2001/02. Similarly, investigations are down: the proportion of major injuries investigated by HSE fell from 13 per cent in 2004/05 to 11 per cent in 2005/06. Finally, the reduction in resources has affected levels of prosecutions, given that these are extremely resource-intensive, and so have always been historically few in absolute terms. By 2005/06, 840 convictions were secured by HSE (in 1,056 cases taken) – about half the figure of 1,616 convictions secured in 1999/2000 (in 2,115 cases).

What is perhaps most remarkable about these processes is how they attract little or no popular, political, or academic attention; and just as remarkable here is the contrast between this deafening silence on the one hand and the ongoing moral panic that characterises social responses to most conventional violent crime on the other. The latter attract censure, controversy, political dispute and priority, and, of course, criminal justice energy and resources built on coercive authoritarian policies. The former remain on the political margins, a muted but grim reminder of the dangers faced by workers, and the often violent impact on their lives engendered by contemporary capitalist labour processes.
VIOLENCE, IDEOLOGY AND MORALITY

We have avoided any attempt at a direct contrast between levels of death and injury sustained by the police and other groups of workers. Suffice to say that, in terms of relative exposure to risk, the assertion that police work is a dangerous occupation is more difficult to sustain than the police and their defenders recognise. If we examine major and ‘over 3-day’ injuries for police officers from the rank of sergeant and below for 2006/07, we find that no police officer died in an HSE-recorded occupational fatality; there were 763 major injuries and under 3,000 over-3 day injuries; of these, 186 (major injuries) and 561 (‘over 3-day’) injuries were the result of physical assault; and the majority of injuries were as a result of ‘handling’ and ‘slipping or tripping’ at work. In the same year, there were 77 deaths of construction workers.42

That said, and strongly under-scoring the analysis presented in this chapter, such comparisons tend not to be made, since attacks on state servants, notably the police, are acts defined as violence, while those on workers are cast as accidents or, at best injuries. Thus while there is considerable under-reporting and attrition with respect to official injury data, the Home Office has in recent years put a great deal of effort into recording (through self-report surveys, as part of the British Crime Survey) ‘violence’ at work. Crucially, this exercise excludes corporate violence, since it defines violence in terms of a specific perpetrator: workplace violence incorporates ‘All assaults or threats which occurred while the victim was working and were perpetrated by members of the public’. Further, violence from this source – as far as both the HSE and the Home Office are concerned – refers to ‘any incident in which an individual suffers verbal abuse, physical abuse or threats in circumstances relating to their work’.43 Once deaths and injuries to workers as a result of the routine processes of production are ruled out, and violence to workers is seen as committed only by people external to their work organisations – members of ‘the public’ who indulge in violent acts or threats to them – then the problem of violence can be officially defined as limited to a subset of occupations among which, not surprisingly, policing is the most vulnerable.44

There is a sense, however, in which such empirical comparisons are not as relevant as thinking about the state’s response to, and representation of, violence against different groups of workers. This much is clear if we ask ourselves questions such as the following:
- Can we imagine the death of a police officer not being reported across a range of national media – while workers’ deaths rarely rate more than a passing mention, if any, in local media?

- Can we imagine a police officer dying and this being immediately represented as an ‘accident’, which is the social, political and legal default position vis-à-vis occupational worker deaths?

- Can we conceive of a police officer dying on duty, or losing a limb or sight, and this not being investigated – though we know that only a small subset of occupational fatalities, and only about one-tenth of major injuries, are investigated?

- Can we imagine that with evidence sufficient to mount a prosecution following the death of a police officer, a prosecution would not proceed on the grounds that the better enforcement response is not to punish past wrongdoing but to find an underlying remedy and prevent re-occurrence?

- Can we imagine that in the event of a successful prosecution being undertaken in such a case, the sanction applied to the perpetrator would be a fine (the most recent data on fines following successful prosecution show that the average fine for an occupational fatality in the UK is £29,867).

The murder of a state servant, particularly a police officer, represents a profound, symbolic moment in the culture and politics of a society, triggering an outpouring of popular sentiment and political rage. Such deaths signify that the social body is on the brink of moral collapse and is therefore in need of an increased injection of law and order to revive it and inoculate it from the further spread of those diseased degenerates who threaten its healthy equilibrium. The fabric of the society has been so torn and desecrated by these deaths that it can only be repaired (and the death revenged) by weaving the thread of social control ever tighter through the sharp needle of authoritarianism. ‘State talk’, and the moral populism generated by this ‘talk’, thus plays a crucial discursive role in this repressive process through the mobilisation of a highly restricted definition of ‘risk’ that restricts it to the dangers confronting the consecrated guardians of the social order. Worker deaths, by contrast, are more or less invisible. Unless they arise from some multi-fatality incident, they invariably attract no media or political attention, and are unlikely even to lead to criminal justice processes. They are the silent, routine costs – literally, mere occupational hazards – of a certain set of social relations in a society in which ‘risk’ and ‘entrepreneurialism’ are increasingly validated, with very different distributions, not least comprehensible in class terms, of the costs and benefits of those activities. This is state-sanctioned violence.
However, the argument of this essay also suggests that critical social scientists need to think differently in order to develop a more nuanced approach to the question of state power and social control, not least in terms of the representations and functions of dominant definitions of violence. In particular, they need to reflect on the moral underpinnings of state interventions and the role that regressive visions of morality play in defining and redefining the nature of these interventions. In other words, when a police or prison officer is murdered, the plaintive iconography that is mobilised – these sanctified, incorruptible guardians of social order – justifies a further intensification of the state’s clamp-down. This is a profoundly moral process as these deaths resonate with broader, hegemonic visions of terminal social breakdown which themselves are underpinned by a deep psychic anxiety about the nature and direction of the social order. In turn, they play a central discursive role in the reconfiguration of that order onto a more authoritarian terrain. Building a consensus around the essential benevolence of state institutions and their servants – particularly police and prison officers – while simultaneously socially constructing these same servants as living in perpetual danger from the degenerate and the desperate, has been central to this process.

This moral element of hegemony-building is also evident in the impunity with which businesses operate. For one of the key consequences of neo-liberalism has been that business has literally been granted a moral status, as intrinsic to the well-being and health of societies, and that it uses this as leverage, either explicitly or as an implicit resource, to address or pre-empt issues of stricter external control of its activities. Most crudely, then, the ‘moral capital’ attached to business activity has increased dramatically during the last three decades. Private enterprise, entrepreneurship, the pursuit of wealth, and the ‘market’ have all become valorised as ends in themselves. Just as the emergence of industrial capitalism was accompanied by a process in which paid work came to be invested with a moral meaning, somehow producing better people as a result of their engagement in it, now the institutions which organise and control work activity are increasingly represented as key moral agents. This elevation of private economic activity to the status of an intrinsically worthy end in itself coheres with a sustained attack on state, public and in particular regulatory activity, an attack cast in terms of the freeing of enterprise and the valorisation of risk, and helps make partial sense of the increasingly supine behaviour of governments in relation to capital.

Ultimately, for us, social science must be intimately related to social justice, and this means social scientists being aligned with social movements and recognising that we have some contribution to make to their struggles.47 Part
of this contribution is to engage in empirical and theoretical work which challenges orthodoxy, assumption or mystification – in order to contest the claim, for example, that workers are less innocent victims, undeserving of criminological attention, since they exchange their labour power (and thus exposure to risk) for a wage, or that the most dangerous occupations (exposed to ‘real’ violence) are those of state servants such as the police, prison officers and so on, as opposed to the most vulnerable sections of the labour force. Further, this work must be, as Carlen says, part of an ‘unfashionable crusade to bring “morals” back into public discourse’. This would involve talking about social justice and democratic accountability, terms which correspond with Gramsci’s notion of ‘good sense’ as opposed to state-defined discourses which engender a ‘common sense’ understanding of what violence means and how it should be responded to, in a society that remains scarred by grotesque levels of inequality and lacerated by social divisions which state institutions ultimately reinforce and reproduce.

NOTES

This chapter has benefited from the insights of Dave Whyte and Roy Coleman, to whom we record our thanks.


3 Ibid., p. 4.


10 There are methodological issues here with respect to comparing different time-spans but the general point remains valid.
11 Personal communication to Joe Sim from Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary, 27 July 2000.
16 Simon Hattenstone, ‘We cannot take them at their word’, The Guardian, 18 August 2005, p. 18.
19 Anthony Madden, ‘Risk Management in the Real World’ in Gray et al., eds., Criminal Justice, Mental Health and the Politics of Risk.
26 Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, Managing Occupational Road Risk, Birmingham: RoSPA, 1998; see also Denis Campbell, ‘Working Drivers “Responsible for 1,000 Road Deaths a Year”’, Observer, 13 November 2005.

28 Major injuries include fractures, other than to fingers, thumbs and toes; amputations; dislocations of the shoulder, hip, knee or spine; loss of sight (temporary or permanent); chemical or hot metal burn or any penetrating injury to the eye; injury resulting from an electric shock or electrical burn; injury leading to hypothermia or heat-induced illness requiring resuscitation or requiring admittance to hospital for more than 24 hours; and unconsciousness, via a series of specified causes. The vast majority of reported injuries to members of the public occur in the service sector, across education, shops, leisure and catering establishments, and healthcare; about half are injuries sustained as a result of ‘slips’ and ‘trips’, usually as a result of poor basic ‘housekeeping’.

29 An over-3-day injury is one which is not ‘major’, but results in the injured person being away from work or unable to do their full range of normal duties for more than three days.

30 A self-report survey conducted by the Home Office, and now recognised as the source of the most reliable crime data in the UK.


32 See note 28.


35 Tombs and Whyte, *A Crisis of Enforcement*.


37 Ibid., para. 8.

38 Ibid., para. 3.


41 But not all – witness, for example, sexual and spousal violence (see the essay in this volume by Lynne Segal).
42 Internal data supplied by HSE Statistics Branch, written communication, 01/04/08.
45 These points are discussed more fully in Steve Tombs and Dave Whyte, Safety Crimes, Cullompton: Willan, 2007.