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MORE COPS OR ARMED COPS IS NO SOLUTION – TACKLE THE ROOT CAUSES

James O'Toole writes about the recent knee-jerk reaction to antisocial behaviour.

There's been a huge moral panic about violence in inner city Dublin since a US tourist was beaten near Dublin's Talbot Street but as James O'Toole argues moral panic and the call for more armed Guards won't prevent crime in the city.

You wouldn't know it, but crime statistics haven't been on the rise in inner city Dublin. The Guards admitted this but said that the "perception" that the city is unsafe is as important as it actually being unsafe.

I grew up in Fatima Mansions flats in the 1980s and later moved up to Crumlin. I was a kid during the peak of crime and Dublin's drug epidemic. I saw firsthand the conditions that give birth to anti-social behaviour - it's the trauma of poverty that drives people to lash out.

Now that does not mean I'm justifying violent behaviour - not at all - sure my own grandmother Jane O'Toole of M Block Fatima was mugged one night on her way back from bingo. She was old school working-class and wouldn't hand over her bag and the mugger battered her.

When we saw her in James' Hospital she was black and blue. One of my uncles wanted to go out and get whoever did it to her but my dad said, "you might as well hang those two lads there!" and pointed at my brother and cousin standing there in their hoodies.

The mugger was desperate to feed a drug habit - what he did was disgusting and wrong, but more cops won't stop people turning to drugs. Not everybody in poverty turns to drugs and crime but the pool of those who do grows as poverty grows.

When the economic underpinning an entire community falls away then things are going to go wrong. People make life choices but not in circumstances they've chosen. And trauma makes an unstable life more unstable.

In the 1950s places like Fatima had full employment and people had a real sense of pride in the community. But in 1973 when the global economy collapsed things changed - unemployment began to skyrocket and so did crime. In fact, the peak of unemployment came in 1984 the same year as the peak in crime.

After a decade or more with no hope, filled with arguments over unpaid bills, people lost themselves and turned to drink and drugs to self-medicate away the pain. Then another generation comes along growing up in a house filled with anger and pain. Then another generation and another.

And from 1973 on the establishment, feeling pressure on their profits, adopted a new philosophy called "neoliberalism" - this was Thatcher's way - destroy public services, destroy public housing, destroy the public health service and drive everyone into the arms of private profiteers.

Decades of neoliberalism have made ghettos of the working-class estates and then when our young people lose hope and turn to drugs and crime, when they lash out in acts of violence, the rich call for more Guards, more Guards!

Even the government's own report on anti-social behaviour commissioned in 2022 after joyriding in Cherry Orchard admits that deprivation is the main driver of such crime - but isn't deprivation the byproduct of neoliberalism? They make you poor and then build a wall of Guards around you to keep you down.

How would I suggest dealing with anti-social behaviour? We need to make drugs a health issue like in Portugal, legalise, regulate and educate - that'd undermine a lot of the gangs. We need more community workers and mentors for our youth.

We need to end overcrowding in housing and neglect of the poorest communities. Above all else, we need to end the most vicious anti-social behaviour in society - neoliberalism itself. The violence of the rich is done while wearing a suit, but it has massive social costs and the violence of the poor is the byproduct of it.

The Guards will stand against any attempt to take down this rotten system and so more of them isn't going to help us escape the violence of the rich and the violence of the victims of the rich. Only a Socialist society where those who do the work get to vote on how the wealth they produce is spent can really solve this by providing stability in working-class lives.

James O'Toole has a new book on the Guards coming out in April 2024.

The RED Network (incorporating Rebel Telly) are a network of radical socialists within the political party People Before Profit, a 32-county people power movement on the island of Ireland.

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