Are we all potential criminals?

by Simon Belt

Are we all potential criminals? The quick and banal answer being promoted by the mainstream media at the moment seems to be yes. The more balanced and sensible answer is clearly no. And as there's a lot at stake if the banalists triumph in determining policy in society, it's worth looking at some aspects of this worrying trend. The last couple of weeks have had a couple of high profile cases in the news that I'd Like to look at - firstly, the court case and conviction of **Mark Bridger**
for the murder of
April Jones
in North Wales, and secondly, the murder of British soldier,
Lee Rigby
in a main street in
Woolwich
, London.

The court case, and subsequent sentencing of Mark Bridger at **Mold Crown Court**, near Chester was covered in the media every day. The seeming familiarity of the estate where April lived and the timing in an afternoon, despite its rural setting, meant that the physical surroundings of April's abduction were something we could all imagine and situate ourselves in. The complete disregard for April's young life, and her family and friends by Mark Bridger ***not being able to remember*** what he did with April's body was truly enraging and shocking. It was shocking in many ways, despite being a society that reads about murder avidly - in fiction and biography, because of the near total unfamiliarity of the actual experience of murder because thankfully it is such a rare event in society.

The statistics on murder show a clear fall over the last few decades. In England and Wales, violent child deaths fell by 40% between the mid-1970s and 2010, from an annual toll of 136 to the thankfully lower figure of 84 deaths per year today. This figures masks the fact that most children killed by strangers is much lower, and again thankfully falling in recent years - currently around 6 per year. The reporting by the police that Mark Bridger had downloaded and viewed images of child pornography and violent videos on the day of April's disappearance led many commentators to flag up the association. Clearly people who kill children are not normal, yet stretching the association between a warped individual who viewed pornography available on the internet and the murder of a young girl to being a ***causal link*** really does seem a strange leap of faith. So why do some people make that leap and more importantly, why are they taken seriously?

On the day after the unusual whole life sentence was passed down to Bridger by Mr Justice Griffith, an adviser to the Government on child safety on the internet, **John Carr**, was quick off the blocks to promote his campaign round every media studio that would listen to him (and plenty did), to get search engine **Google** to enforce the most restrictive settings in their search engine by default. From Government advisor to media tart in one day, and what was alarming for me was the complete absense of questioning of why we should be taking him seriously, let alone why he rather than the public should be deciding policy. John's supposition is rather odd given that the era of internet is the very period when the murder of children and also children unknown to their murderers is in decline. To listen to John Carr, almost frothing at the mouth about the need to think the worst of

everyone, except himself of course, you would think we are in the grip of sad individuals having our heads turned by images on the internet that force us into becoming automatons of child murderers. Yet somehow, John and his self-selecting pals should be able to view whatever they chose with impunity, and then decide as good technocrats what is good for us, and what we can be trusted to see without becoming monsters in the
monkey see monkey do
way they think we do.

And what of the outcome of the unquestioned censorious climate created around these issues today? Well, Joe Public is not to be trusted to be able to decide for himself or herself, that society should be organised around the lowest common demoninator - and by a self appointed better than you character. Most exasperating in some senses is that it actually absolves the perverted characters that kill or molest children from the moral responsibility for their own actions, as after all they're not able to withstand the pressures of images like our self-appointed guardians like John Carr and all his proclamations of disaster if society is left to manage its own affairs.

So onto the second big issue this last week and that's the murder of **Lee Rigby** in Woolwich, London. This was clearly grotesque and from the start a peculiar spectacle live on daytime news, with events and the story unfolding in front of our eyes. Whilst the images from the

Skycopter may have been crystal clear the realisation of what had just happened wasn't. A bizarre car accident leading to stabbing on a main street in Woolwich of an off duty soldier in broad daylight by two 'muslim looking' people, that shortly became a sterile scene for the police to gather evidence from, and then the scheduling of police briefing to the Cobra cabinet committee to discuss terroist attacks whilst the Prime Minister was out of the country all seemed totally surreal. It was clear that someone, or quite a few people had lost the plot, so what was the plot and where was it lost?

As if the scenes on the news weren't bizarre enough, the notion that the murder of an off duty soldier by two weirdos parading for the crowd and deliberately waiting to then get shot by the police, was some sort of terrorist attack that the state machinery through Cobra should organise around was just gobsmacking. Both me and my wife just kept looking at each other as the story unfolded, speechless but asking with incredulous looks why these nutters were being taken seriously and dignified with some meaningful purpose. Worse than some politicians being unnerved into parading how seriously they were taking the threat to civilisation as we know it, was the response by commentators and those who should be a tad more dispassionate by having some distance from the immediacy of it all.

As Brendan O'Neill usefully summed up in the Huffington post:

More and more commentators and campaigners are describing the murder in Woolwich as an "inevitable" consequence of Western military ventures in Afghanistan and Iraq. Islamist terror attacks are apparently an "inevitable outcome" of British interference overseas.

Some go so far as to claim that British and American politicians bear "collective responsibility" for what happened in Woolwich. We're told that our leaders "created [this] bloodshed"
.

It seems like everywhere you turn, we are being depicted as less than able citizens, increasingly in need of our low capacity to engage in civilised behaviour like our betters more naturally can. This trend is a bad one for democracy, because however some may be drawn into it to distinguish from being like the dross in society, it emasculates us all and elevates the role of the know better than the plebs state officialdom. And when have we ever actually been impressed by the generosity of spirit or more material attributes of those who know better than us? Never,so the problem seems to be a problem of self loathing that needs to be tackled head on with some robust culture of our own, demanding **we take responsibility for our own actions**.