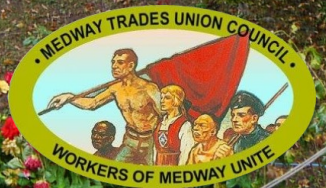


# KNIFE CRIME

## A WORKERS COMMUNITY CHARTER



Medway Trades Union Council is playing a leading role in a community based campaign around knife crime. Joining forces with Napo, the probation workers union on 21<sup>st</sup> September at Mid Kent College in Gillingham, we brought together trade unionists who share a common interest on this issue, and local community campaigners concerned about the government's punitive agenda around criminal justice



Welcoming visitors to the 'Knife Crime Summit' MTUC Treasurer and Napo member Chas Berry said, "this meeting is unique. There is heightened interest in the number of knife related deaths in our communities, but the emphasis so far is overwhelmingly on a 'top down' approach. As workers and community activists, we understand the solutions must come from within our own communities."

Introducing the first session, Napo National Chair Katie Lomas set out the issues framing the national debate. While extra resources are being made available for police and prison places, little is being done to support community alternatives to custody. Custodial sentences for young people caught carrying a knife, that do not take account of the social context in which these offences occur, are in danger of criminalizing a whole generation. She slammed Home Secretary Priti Patel's statement that offenders 'need to feel terror', stating "there is already enough fear causing young people to carry knives without creating any more".



The conference was then addressed by Lennox Rodgers; ex-offender, author and founder of the Dartford based charity Refocus. Lennox gave visitors an insight into what drew him in to a life of organised violent crime, and what helped him escape. Childhood bullying, abuse and discrimination, leading to the adoption of a criminal persona, created a lifestyle and identity that he found difficult to shift. "I became an enforcer", he said, "and I began to climb the ladder until I reached the top where I found myself working

for the kinds of people who never get caught".

His decision to change came as an epiphany, but could only be sustained through the non-judgmental support he received from some key,



relationships, both personal and professional. Lennox and his wife, Bali, now offer mentoring support to young people at risk of criminalisation like he was.

Primary Teacher and NEU member in the London Borough of Newham, Chris Grandison, related how the murder of two



of his past pupils motivated him to research some of the causes of violent street crime among males both in the UK and around the world. Chris's presentation gave a graphic illustration of the links between income inequality and homicide rates. He set this in the context 'austerity' in Britain with statistics showing that in London the 'least' wealthy 10% have lost 32% of their wealth over the last two years. He also highlighted how policing policies such as 'stop and search' have an overall negative effect upon community relations. The Met police's own research, for example, shows that a 10% increase in 'stop and search' only yields a 0.1% decrease in violent crime. At the same time, use of Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act to stop and search anyone within a geographical area, whether or not they suspect them of carrying a weapon, leads to the withdrawal of public trust in the police in those areas.

The speakers sparked a wide-ranging discussion and debate, which carried over into the afternoon sessions. Several spoke of their own experiences as victims and witnesses and made appeals for unity against the government's austerity agenda. One visitor was inspired to get up and give his own account of how he became a violent offender, and how he now wants to work with Napo and MTUC to promote our work.

Feedback from all participants was positive, with a commitment by many to build support for community based initiatives like Refocus.

'The conference approved a draft Knife Crime Charter which can be used by Trade Unions and others in workplaces and communities. It reflects our opposition to discriminatory practice. As part of this charter there is a list of demands to address contributing factors. If you have any comments on them or would like to be involved in taking the campaign forward, please contact MTUC ...

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# DRAFT WORKERS KNIFE CRIME CHARTER

- ◆ Everyone should respect and value all young people and the positive contributions that they make.
- ◆ No extension of stop and search with regard proposal to expand section 60.
- ◆ Stop criminalisation for minor offences e.g carrying a small amount of cannabis
- ◆ Ban the box. No tick-box to declare a criminal record unless a DBS check is required.
- ◆ Protect our data. No selling of public personal and medical data to commercial organisations.
- ◆ Reverse austerity with regard to social services and education. Targeted intervention for hard to reach children including home schooled children.
- ◆ Restore properly funded public education services
- ◆ Support cross community campaigns such as Medway Victims. Promoting education and information.
- ◆ Support for community interventions into schools, including mentoring.
- ◆ Properly funded health services, particularly mental health
- ◆ Prisons should be places of genuine rehabilitation and education, not just incarceration

**To feed back your thoughts and suggestions on this charter**

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