

*The Abolition of Capital Punishment in
Britain: Political, Cultural and Penal
Change in the Mid-Twentieth Century*

Professor Tim Newburn

Institute of Criminology Public Seminar Series

Thursday 5th March 2009, 5.30pm
Seminar Room B3, Institute of Criminology,
Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA

The 1960s in Britain saw extensive legislative change affecting many areas of social life, including the legalisation of homosexuality, the liberalising of the divorce laws, the easing of restrictions on abortion, and the relaxation of controls over sexual representations in literature, film and on stage. Such changes led numerous commentators then, and subsequently, to refer to the period roughly coinciding with the 1960s as the 'permissive age'. It was also a period of important developments in the penal sphere, not least being the abolition of capital punishment. The Murder (Abolition of the Death Penalty) Act 1965 ended capital punishment for a trial period of five years, a move made permanent in 1969 (though total abolition did not occur until the UK signed the 6th protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1999). Focusing on this particular example of apparent penal amelioration, this paper examines the political campaigns for abolition in twentieth century Britain. More particularly, it considers the political and social conditions surrounding the ending of capital punishment in the 1960s and places the abolition of the death penalty in the broader context of the social and moral reforms of the period.

Tim Newburn is Professor of Criminology and Social Policy and Director of the Mannheim Centre for Criminology at the London School of Economics. He is the author of over 30 books on subjects ranging from policing and security, to young offenders, and comparative criminal justice policy.

This seminar is part of the IoC Public Seminar Series, and is open to all interested in attending.
If you wish to be added to the seminar mailing list, please contact: Joanne Garner, on:
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