

Acid Attacks Spread Terror in London

News:

London suffered a wave of terror last night, and the world's media are following the story with great interest; *CNN*: "London acid attacks: 5 men assaulted in 1 night; 2 arrested", *TIME Magazine*: "Acid Attacks Have Become a Gruesome Criminal Trend in the U.K.", the *Washington Post*: "The London acid attack is part of a depressing, 'barbaric' trend." These attacks occurred within 70 minutes of each other, and are thought to be linked.

Comment:

Fear has been growing in recent years as attacks on innocent people with burning acid have been increasing in London. There were 166 attacks in 2014, rising to 261 in 2015, and 454 in 2016. One person has died and 37 have been gravely injured this year as a result of acid attacks. Stephen Timms, Member of Parliament, raised the issue for urgent parliamentary debate next week. He said, "Too many people are frightened of becoming a victim. Ministers need to act." Whatever action these ministers decide upon, however, will not treat the cause of this problem.

The media are addressing the problem of acid attacks as a legislative problem, which they are viewing from three angles. The first is the ability of those under the age of full legal accountability to gain access to acid, which now is very easy as many common household types of bleach contain highly corrosive sulphuric acid. The second is the disparity in the law related to carrying offensive weapons. Carrying knives is illegal, while carrying acid is not. The third is that the penalties for committing an acid attack are much lower than for a knife attack. Addressing these issues may reduce the number of acid attacks, but as the level of criminal violence remains unchecked in Western societies, the forthcoming parliamentary debate is not going to bring much needed peace to London's streets.

From the legislative perspective, crimes are not treated seriously enough in the West to deter would-be attackers, and unlike under the Islamic legal system, there are no requirements for criminals to compensate their victims for their crimes. Legislation, however, is not the whole story.

Crime has always been present in human societies, but excessive crime is a social indicator of systemic problems, and when people are living in fear of their neighbours, something is terribly wrong. As most victims of crime are the poor, it is unlikely that anything will change for the better. The poor are growing in number, and the capitalist ideology is the cause of this, and it lacks the intellectual basis to overcome the alienation of those who suffer from the growing disparity between the rich and the poor.

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