

[We live in reactionary times](#) [1]

Written by [Anton Howes](#) [2] | Thursday 18 August 2011



We live in reactionary times. Curfews, national service, and the suppression of an entire medium of communication have all been seriously suggested over the past week in response to the riots. While the prospect of these measures being enacted are thankfully still slim, the fact that they were considered, let alone voiced should be alarming.

Curfews were among the stupider ideas. Creating yet another victimless crime, and lowering respect for the law with a silly and oppressive rule, it would have lent itself to corruption too. You also can't get much more nanny-state than a bedtime. Even setting the ideological case for civil liberty aside, curfews would have been impossibly impractical, requiring a myriad of special exemptions, damaging the economy, and causing huge inconvenience to millions of innocent people.

Wild calls for national service meet similar problems. For a start, it fails to address the problem: authority and enforced 'community engagement' are not the answer to a culture of unjustified entitlement and social atomisation encouraged by the impersonal entitlement state. You also don't encourage a culture of volunteering and socialising by enforcing it, a contradiction in terms.

Even for its own sake, the measure would display a worrying and growing tendency for the state to assume that it owns your time. This is before we even get into the huge impracticalities of any national service scheme, along with the opportunity cost of taking the time out to perform it. Lastly, it would be the culmination of a renewed tendency for demonising entire groups, in this case all young people, regardless of individual circumstance. As a policy that sees only groups, doesn't solve any problems, inconveniences millions, tries to artificially create communities by force, and allows the state to claim ownership of your time, I cannot think of a more stereotypically socialist measure.

Lastly, the blame laid at the feet of social media could not be more absurd. Shooting the messenger has never been the way to win any war, and the 'war against gangs' is no different. By David Cameron's logic, as [Charlie Brooker puts it](#) [3], "perhaps the government could issue us with gags we could slip over our mouths the moment the sirens start wailing".

Anton Howes is Director of the [Liberty League](#) [4].

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) [6]

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/justice-and-civil-liberties/we-live-in-reactionary-times>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/justice-and-civil-liberties/we-live-in-reactionary-times>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5795>

[3] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/14/charlie-brooker-prevent-more-riots>

[4] <http://uklibertyleague.com>

[5] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[6] <http://disqus.com>