

[Might we have gone a little too far?](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Sunday 7 December 2008



As has been endlessly pointed out before WWI the average Englishman could live out his life having no more interaction with the State than that afforded by the postman and the local policeman. Some of the additions since then have indeed been worthwhile but I'm not sure that we can say that of all of them. Yes, I know this is from the Daily Mail [but still](#) [3]:

The Solankis were found guilty of failing to comply with the bylaw and now have a criminal record. They were given a six-month conditional discharge.

What dark crime could they have committed for a conditional discharge to have made the national newspaper?

A Cambridgeshire bylaw states that all paperboys must have a work permit issued by the council and signed by the child's employer, headteacher and parents. Working children must also be over 13 and cannot start work until after 7am.

Had they been employing those underage? Or perhaps forcing them to work long before dawn?

All the boys concerned were between 13 and 16. Other than not having the correct paperwork, they were working legally.

So no, nothing terrible going on.

Prosecutor Simon Reeve told the court that the couple ignored letters and visits from a child employment officer. He said that although eight applications for work permits had been sent to the children's school, only three were signed.

They had even tried to comply with the paperwork.

Cambridgeshire County Council used the controversial Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) to spy on eight paperboys thought to be working without permits. It sent undercover council officers to lurk outside a Spar in the village of Melbourn and take notes on the movements of the boys.

To uncover this terrible breach of all that makes a society holy and worth preserving council officers used anti-terrorism laws and (one assumes that if they were undercover they had to wear disguises, which is amusing and at 7 am they were on overtime which is less so) staked out the local newsagent. All to

discover that voluntary exchange was going on without their permission.

Yes, I know that pre-WWI world isn't coming back and I'm entirely happy with many of the innovations since then, unemployment pay, State old age pensions and the rest. But might I just float the suggestion, that while the law is the law the law can also be an ass, that we've gone too far and ought to be retreating, not advancing, the State's control over our lives?

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[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/miscellaneous/might-we-have-gone-a-little-too-far>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5778>

[3] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1092264/New-target-anti-terror-spies-Village-paperboys--having-correct-paperwork.html>

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

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