

Innovation of Justice

Saturday, 29 June 2019

9.00am Saturday in Londonâ€™s Bunhill Row and the streets are fairly empty but the University of Law building is throbbing. Hundreds are queuing up to register and collect their passes for the several rooms packed for dozens of seminars and speeches.

People have come from Scotland and Cornwall; some even flew in from abroad; one participant was from California. It is an Innovation Of Justice one day event. And the astonishing thing is that virtually all media have ignored it or, worse, simply donâ€™t know about it.

The young and the old are represented. All skin colours. All genders. Misery is etched on faces. Many are family members or friends of those falsely accused, wrongly convicted, killed by this explosion of injustice over the past many decades.

Horrible story follows tearful speech; a representative from the Ministry of Justice talks about the obvious miscarriage of justice for the Craigavon 2. Brilliant young solicitor Daniel Burke gives a passionate speech about his experiences representing wrongly accused Nigel Evans MP and hugely wronged Rolf Harris. Michael Oâ€™Brien, another victim of injustice who served 11 years; Eddie Gilfoyle, wrongly convicted; the Joint Enterprise fighters; Simon Warr, highly respected innocent teacher.

This massive explosion of injustices included Liam Allan, a young man falsely accused of rape who, thanks to brilliant work by dedicated lawyers including, amazingly, his prosecuting QC Jerry Hayes, had his trial collapse in a blaze of publicity regarding failures to disclose vital evidence.

To his credit, instead of shrugging his shoulders and getting on with his life, Liam and his friend Annie Brodie-Akers decided to start this campaign to raise awareness about the broken judicial system, incompetence or corruption in the police, CPS and legal structure.

That was one year ago. For many more years others have also tried to raise awareness - the Innocence projects; F.A.C.T and many global organisations.

But the other side gets most of the attention. Extreme media coverage is given to #MeToo and similar outfits - most of whom have the worthy and honourable intention of exposing genuine abuse. And of course there is abuse, just as there are rapes and murders.

Yet thousands of innocent men and women around the world are locked up for years for crimes they did not commit. In the case of celebrities, society rejoices in the falls from grace, be they real or imaginary. But for ordinary people, nobody seems to care. The story of Fireman David Bryant and his wife is enough to break your heart, if you care. As was the story of Sally Clark.

One of the speakers, Nick Hunton, spoke about his young son Mark who killed himself last year, aged 23, hounded to his death by false allegations. I watched Liam Allanâ€™s face as he heard the story. The quantity of rape claims has exploded just as the level of convictions has dropped - why? Because the rapes never happened. Misinterpreted, malicious, confused, some claims provoked by drugs or drink consumption, some genuinely imagined.

I had a conversation recently with a top barrister in the area of privacy, data protection, libel and online crime. He told me that not only was the system totally bogged down by those "chancers" as he called them, claiming compensation after convictions but even "trying it on" after acquittals - rightly guessing the innocent victims of false allegations will often just settle to make further aggravation go away. It is, he said, an exploding development, taking over from Blackmail. This, he claims, is a multi million pound growth industry of crime.

To meet these decent, honest, shattered people at crowded events such as the Innovation Of Justice one this past weekend, is depressing and upsetting. Battered down by trying so hard for so long to get justice and fairness, often having to cheer up broken, innocent men and women jamming our prisons, trying to get one or two media outlets to report on the miscarriages of justice, pain is written on their faces. They are so happy when someone listens. So relieved to find they are not only not alone but that thousands of others are hurting too.

Somebody does care, after all.