

**Some thoughts following the Public Policy Exchange Webinar on Combating Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in the UK, February 29, 2024:**

**Developing a Stronger Multi-Agency Response for Identifying and Supporting Victims and Convicting Perpetrators.**

Public Policy Exchange produces and delivers high quality conferences and interactive seminars which provide an invaluable interface for policy discussion, debate and networking. These special events offer local practitioners, civil servants and other stakeholders not only an insight into current policy thinking, but also the opportunity to feed into future development across all areas of public policy.

## Programme Overview

*There were 7,936 Referrals for modern slavery and human trafficking taking place solely in the UK in the year December 2022 in the UK, a 10.3% increase on the previous year. Many of these victims have been trafficked from overseas and work in the construction industry, in agriculture, in the sex industry, and in places like nail bars, car washes, and cannabis farms, with children found working in all of these situations, as well as in sexual slavery. In the year ending March 2021, police recorded modern slavery offences involving a child increased by 27% to 3,239, compared to the previous year.*

*The 2020 UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery outlined the UK government approach, alongside the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive, to tackle modern slavery and human trafficking. The support is based on four strands: pursue, prevent, protect, and victim identification and support. This person-centric approach to human trafficking, tackling perpetrators and supporting victims, is also found in the new changes to the immigration system that aims to criminalise anyone supporting those attempting to illegally enter the UK, and improve criminal justice responses to human traffickers. The National Referral Mechanism is the UK's framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive appropriate support. In January 2021, the government launched a new £281 million five-year Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract for the provision of support services in England and Wales, delivering a needs-based service for victims. In March 2021, the government also launched its modern slavery statement registry, to improve transparency in supply chains, with over 21,000 organisations covered by the statements submitted. In 2022, the Home Office also funded the Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit with £1.4 million to support the police in combating trafficking and organised immigration crime, providing a wide variety of anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officers and prosecutors. The government trained hundreds of investigators, officers, and front-line practitioners on various human trafficking topics including victim identification and investigative techniques.*

*Many charities argue that little progress has been made in supporting and protecting victims, that they do not receive adequate care and that they continue to face the risk of violence and re-enslaving. Critics of the new immigration system, such as the NGO, Focus on Labour Exploitation, have argued that closing legal routes into the UK, pushes many into the hands of traffickers. Resulting labour shortages in sectors such as hospitality and agriculture, might, according to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "spark an increase in the number of migrants working in the country illegally, both of their own free will and under duress". The impact of Brexit will also have implications beyond the end of freedom of movement. Trafficking victims identified in the UK face a greater risk of being deported or repatriated, while loss of access to EUROPOL databases has undermined UK efforts to tackle criminal organisations. Furthermore, according to the anti-child trafficking charity ECPAT UK, the Nationality and Borders Act "will significantly impact children's rights to protection and leave them at risk of dangerous journeys, trafficking and criminalisation."*

*This symposium will therefore provide local authorities, police forces, health professionals, criminal justice agencies, academics and charities, with a timely opportunity to examine methods of improving the identification and disruption of modern slavery and human trafficking, and to assess government policy and legislation in this area. It will also enable delegates to share best practice in strengthening local partnership arrangements and coordination activities to increase reporting and deliver sustained support for victims.*

## Coverage of the webinar

- Evaluate current government policy on tackling human trafficking and modern slavery
- Develop ideas for delivering an effective coordinated response across national, regional and local law enforcement agencies
- Determine how local authorities and law enforcement agencies can work in partnership to target, identify and disrupt human trafficking and modern slavery
- Explore opportunities to raise awareness amongst businesses and ensure compliance in preventing human trafficking and modern slavery in their supply chains
- Assess how victims can be better provided with sustained multi-agency and monitored support after receiving a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decision, minimising the risk of re-trafficking
- Analyse how relevant agencies can improve staff training and engage with local communities to improve awareness and understanding of human trafficking and modern slavery
- Identify how victims can be better supported to give evidence against their enslavers, thereby increasing levels of successful prosecutions
- Formulate methods of increasing the quality and quantity of NRM referrals from NGOs
- Explore new means of cooperation with EUROPOL and other European enforcement agencies after Brexit

## The speakers and their presentations. .

**Dr Peter Olayiwola**, Lecturer in Sociology & Criminology at School of Social Science at the University of Aberdeen: *Multi-agency Response to Human Trafficking in the UK: Problems, Politics and Prospects*

**Dr Alister Bull**, Training Manager at Hope for Justice: *Analyse how relevant agencies can improve staff training and engage with local communities to improve awareness and understanding of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. What does Hope for Justice training offer through learning pathways for identification and trauma-informed response?*

**Dr Maayan Niezna**, Lecturer in Law at the University of Liverpool: *The non-punishment principle Forced criminality and victims' consent*

**Professor John Coxhead**, Director of the International PIEL Centre, Royal Docks School of Business and Law at the University of East London: *Combating Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in the UK: Developing a Stronger Multi-Agency Response for Identifying and Supporting Victims and Convicting Perpetrators*

**Lauren Saunders**, Head of Policy and Research at Unseen: *Combating Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in the UK: Developing a Stronger Multi-Agency Response for Identifying and Supporting Victims and Convicting Perpetrators*

**Dr Matthew Young**, Research, Participation and Policy Manager at Causeway: *Benefits of Meaningful Survivor Engagement*

**Chief Inspector Alan Rhees-Cooper**, Staff Officer to the National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Missing People at West Yorkshire Police: *Missing Migrants and Exploitation*

## Thoughts arising from the presentations

There was a high degree of helpful overlap in the presentations of the seven speakers, which collectively highlighted the problems and offered solutions. Top down solutions are problematic in a culture of self-interest perpetuated by a self-interested Government, whilst increasingly well-developed bottom up solutions can only go so far in turning the tide of a money orientated competitive world.

I'm not going to summarise each speaker's input but lay down some thoughts after mulling over what I heard. The problems were stated graphically, the solutions confounded by a seeming reality that everybody knows what they want but nobody does anything about it. The Tragedy of the Commons first conceptualized in 1833 is often used to encapsulate what is happening today on a much more worrying scale. I will quote selectively from the speakers. The PDFs of the PowerPoints are available to browse and consult for detail.

### **The current Government's culture of controlling immigration and being hostile to migrants.**

Changes in the law, the way the law is enacted, plus international issues have increased the number of victims of trafficking and decreased the number of prosecutions.

Peter Olayiwola related the problem to structural/political challenges - cuts/austerity, BREXIT, migration policies, etc. and gave examples of Government action, as reported in the press, by Rishi Sunak, Priti Patel and Suella, Braverman. The focus has shifted from protection to prosecution.

Peter quoted from a number of earlier damning reports 'The government 'does not have a measure of success for its objectives nor a definition of what success looks like' (NAO 2017: 18). "The UK's immediate and longer-term response to victims is not up to standard..." (CSJ, 2020). Also, 'obsession with immigration controls and its weak regulatory structures enabling exploitation to flourish and grow- (ATMG, 2010&2014) The Modern Slavery Act itself is in need of amendment – a 2018 Review made 80 recommendations for improvement.

A recent report by the Centre for Social Justice, ["MPs say modern slavery 'no longer a priority' for the UK Government"](#) follows a November, 2023 report by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, [Human trafficking](#).

Alan Coxtead referred to Rwanda as a good example of negative and unhelpful aspiration:

- Rwanda is deterring who?
- When did penalising desperate victims, rather than taking down the criminals exploiting them, become the thing to do?
- If we spent the amount of money on attacking the crime that we've spent on victim blaming we would have won part of the war by now
- How difficult would it be to infiltrate these criminal franchises?
- Forget deter: seize the initiative and attack – now."
- Cutting NCA budgets and cutting UK off from continental law enforcement cooperation are bad ideas and false economies Stop politicking and deal with the crime businesses.

**Legislation** is unclear with difficulties of definition and application. Much of Peter Olayiwola's presentation was about definitions and inconsistencies and differences between the England and Wales Modern Slavery Act and the Scotland and Northern Ireland Acts, in particular the fuzzy line between exploitation and slavery. How do you interpret the definition of consent and how do you distinguish victim/criminal and even victim/perpetrator? The former applies particularly in County Lines and Cannabis Cultivation, the latter sometimes even in Sexual Exploitation where victim becomes Madam.

Maayan Niezna's focus was the "non-punishment principle" which reflects the understanding that victims of trafficking and slavery might be compelled to commit unlawful activities. It prioritises the protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking and modern slavery over their prosecution. The principle is recognised in international law, and the UK developed a statutory defence under Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to comply with it. On the other hand, we have, "consent is not a defence", so it's not as straightforward as it sounds.

The law is different for adults and children a point covered by Chief Inspector Alan Rhees-Cooper, in his lengthy coverage of the problems is deciding whether a missing person was smuggled to escape, trafficked for exploitation, or came voluntarily as an economic migrant. There is a huge amount for the Police to consider in defining and acting on "missing people". The complex and detailed legislation on this, and the responsibility for pursuing cases of "missing person" (a significant number of people in small boat crossings go missing in the first 48 hours), leads to much unhelpful inaction and delay.

**Culture within organisations** engenders a drive for efficiency and profit, putting this above employee welfare, employee learning and development. A good learning climate would foster the learning organisation principle. Alistar Bull presented a model of Vision, Knowledge and Community focusing on Hope for Justice's aim of a world free of slavery. It's a good start but we have a long way to go before people want to learn through life and before organisations fully recognise the benefit of the learning organisation concept. For communities and Government to recognise the benefits seems to be an impossible aspiration.

**Culture of people in the modern world** Alan Rhees-Cooper might be viewed as controversial and he certainly points the finger at all of us in highlighting that it isn't just the Government that is complicit in inaction, "Just like abolishing slavery, everyone needs some honesty. Money is a big corrupter - snouts in the trough of crime? Organised crime is not OK: we need to sort out ethical capitalism Sharing banks with villains is not OK. International corruption needs tackling: we need political will (why isn't it there already?)

This triggers thoughts of Pope Francis on structural sin and the globalization of indifference. It is difficult to counter engrained beliefs and short term thinking. Most everybody wants money and they also want solutions to climate change, wars and conflicts, and poverty but few people recognise their own complicity, or feel empowered to do anything, so inaction perpetuates and increases the problems.

**Cost versus resources** – Organised Crime assets hugely outstrip Government resources to combat it. Organisations compete with one another for whatever pots of money there are. Funding bodies are largely controlled directly or indirectly by Government or other bodies to further their own agenda rather than a much bigger, longer term agenda that gets at the root of the problem. Top Down and Bottom Up approaches need to work together and meet in the middle. Top Down has the vision but not the resources. Bottom Up is largely dependent on volunteers, inspired individuals, and a lot of work by a few, which is never enough to start the difficult climb up against the slippery road down.

In **supporting victims** there needs to be much more of an emphasis on after-care and empowering. This is a huge job, absolutely necessary and widely recognised but needs inspired individuals and organisations prepared to put in effort within and beyond their resources. Empowering people is intensive and long term, a feature of some interventions but never enough. What is needed is full involvement by victims/migrants in the management not only of self but of the organization helping them, to the point of engagement in research on need and response to need. In a sense this is close to the discipline of ethnology where study is through direct contact with the culture (in this case the world of victims/migrants) and seeks to understand their perspective rather than our flawed assessment of their perspective. Matthew Young's presentation of Causeway research, combined with victim empowerment, is probably unique. Mathew spoke about their aims: survivors to lead the sector within a decade; survivors to shape knowledge production; top down to bottom up approach; recognising and investing in survivor expertise to dispel power imbalances. The benefits are to victims and organisations alike: improve organisations abilities to understand and represent the needs of its service users; improve services, reputation and influence; foster dynamic and authentic understanding of issues related to modern slavery; improve survivor wellbeing through a better sense of self-actualisation, upskilling and employability skills.

**Training and Learning** Alistar Bull's presentation was particularly interesting coming over more as part of Hope for Justice's mission to create a world free of slavery than as a training provider for profit. His model of Vision (What world do we want to live in?); Knowledge (what do we understand about how we look and respond to the world?); and community (How do we make it work in our community?) reminded me of Bishop Patrick Lynch's presentation at the 2014 Vatican assembly of bishops and law enforcement officers and its pledge to eliminate slavery by 2020. I've always reflected that his journey of: "being aware, being convinced, being compassionate, being collaborative" is reflected in some of the people I've come across working in the fight against modern slavery, most notably, police officers who were profoundly affected by their first-hand experience of the Morecambe Bay cockle pickers disaster.

The Hope for Justice training – aimed largely at first responders and Newly Graduated Practitioners (NGPs) – is good and recognises that training is often not put into action in the work place. Not only is evaluation needed but organisations need to support learning and development. He goes further than that in recognising the importance of being part of a learning community beyond one's own organisation. This is very different to standard training provider interventions which end with a training event. Without evaluation little will change and training providers will continue to offer the same material for perpetuity. Concepts of learning climate and learning organisation go back to the 1990s but have rarely been more than theoretical concepts. Hope for Justice is at least going part way there.

**Partnership, and its junior partner, networking,** are vital. Lauren Saunders presentation on improving multi-agency approaches to survivor support was about Unseen's mission to: empower and reintegrate victims, equip victim support and other organisation with knowledge and influence government.

Lauren gave an overview of the entire lengthy process from identification to exit but I thought the most useful slide to emphasise the need for collaborative working was the list of after care needs, many of which apply widely to people not going through the NRM process and including of course asylum seekers and refugees. This has struck me forcibly in personal experience working with asylum seekers modern slavery victims. Few organisation have the time to cover all needs themselves, or indeed to engage with others who can fill the gaps Lauren's list was: Housing (safe and appropriate); Finances; Health; Mental Health; Legal Needs; Education; Employment; Volunteering & Training; Community support; Translation & Interpreting; Personal Safety; Wellbeing; Knowledge of rights and entitlements Being; believed; Evidence collection

Reflecting on this, the needs of trafficking victims and refugee are manifold, recognised but not fully met, in statements of well-meaning aspiration. An organisation needs to be clear about what it can do itself and what it can't. It needs to know what, and where are, the organisation that can offer the much needed input beyond their own remit. More than this, partnerships need to be non-competitive, collaborative, supporting each other, sharing resources, focusing on their value added rather than replication, and aiming for a collective integrated response to need. Even more than this they need to make the link between top down and bottom up, identifying gaps and creating a wide response that extends to a national or even an international one.

#### **Advocacy and victim involvement in support, advocacy and research.**

Whilst reflecting on the presentations, the problems of victims, and the difficulties created by politicians and big business, I was surprised that advocacy got virtually no mention in practice or solutions. Mathew Young's was the only PowerPoint where the word appeared – Causeway are, "committed to raising awareness of modern slavery as we advocate for a fairer and more understanding society: investing in research; national campaigning; strategic partnerships; training; collaboration with local authorities, government officials, media and influencers.". Much of Alan Coxhead's presentation screamed out for advocacy. What Mathew Young is talking about is something much more than the role of independent modern slavery advocates working with individual victims – advocacy for victims as a whole. Many organisations seek to influence Government bills as they go through Parliament but it is secondary to their raison d'etre. Advocacy could come into play via the APPG on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery but as a neutral honest broker with no teeth it has had little positive impact on recent legislation affecting refugees.

Advocacy in key, not only for individuals but for the entirety of suffering humanity, in the context of Government gone wrong and world gone wrong. Via the concept of proxy voting, encapsulated in UK Citizens, we need to change the trajectory of Government and electorate thinking. What people want is not what people need. People acknowledge the need for intervention in climate, poverty, injustice, conflict but, they see that as a responsibility for others and not them... and they vote for what they want in the short term which is meeting individual personal needs. And our Government, of course, in responding to the "wish of the people" responds too to what people want and not what they need. Governments are motivated for self-survival for which, without a charismatic leader who can change hearts and minds, survival will always focus on the immediate short term.

**The role of Christian and other Faith communities.** Although there was no Faith input to the webinar it's worth considering how Faith communities might respond to the problem of modern slavery and learn from the problems and solutions raised in this webinar.

In the Catholic Church, top down and bottom up do not meet in the middle. Catholic charities do an extraordinary amount of work, locally, nationally, internationally, but whilst acknowledging that work, the Church relies on voluntary donations rather than funding from its own prodigious purse. We saw it with the 2014 pledges of Faith and Law Enforcement Agencies to work together to end modern slavery by 2020. The Law Enforcement Agencies responded massively in the UK but SMG did virtually nothing to harness the three quarters of a million regular Catholic Mass attenders who see all the slaves, hidden in plain sight, in the work place, in the service outlets, in the hospitals, in the open and, now, in the care homes.

The Anglican Clewer initiative goes much further with its much greater financial backing and has been producing practical resources as well as Christian prayer and reflective materials since 2016, whereas the Santa Marta Group (SMG), is only now starting to produce resources after a false start in 2015. SMG has a three year strategic plan 2023-2026 but its website still contains very little of what it will be putting out. However, even the Clewer Initiative with plentiful finance behind it has had little influence at grass roots level. Anglican parishioners seem to know little more about modern slavery than Catholics. Talking to an Anglican priest – the Clewer representative on the Pan Lancashire Anti-Slavery Partnership – some time ago, he commented that like the Catholic Church, Anglican Church goers were more interested in prayer and liturgy than faith in action. This is the problem we face in trying to harness the huge number of people of Faith as the much needed Intelligence for the Police, and as advocates for social justice. How can we counter that problem?

Far from reaching the United Nations Sustainable Goal of ending modern slavery by 2030 we are actually going backwards. Part of the answer can be recognising the problems and building on, and extending, the limited solutions outlined in the presentations above but we have a lot to do

Anthony Brown

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