**The Politics of Crime Prevention
by Brigitte C. M. Koch**

Aldershot: Gower (1998) ISBN 1 84014 181 6

Reviewed by Joshua Bamfield

This book on the politics of crime prevention under the UK Conservative Government 1979-1997, should prove of interest to readers of this journal, particularly as there are comparatively few books on this area, although Daniel Gilling's *Crime Prevention: Theory, Policy and Politics* (1997) gives a successful overview of the topic. *The Politics of Crime Prevention* provides a welcome dissuasive for those who believe that national crime prevention policy is a value-free form of activity, in which budgetary decisions are made exclusively on scientific grounds. Unfortunately, the book frequently betrays its origins as a PhD thesis, therefore restricting its usefulness to some extent.

The book is written by Brigitte Koch, of the Institute of Criminology, Cambridge, and sets out to examine how national crime prevention policy has been structured, organised and determined in England and Wales over the past 20 years, focusing particularly on the period 1995-97. Wherever possible, the story has also been brought up to date with regard to the impact of 'New Labour' (to the end of 1997). Much of the text, as readers of this journal will appreciate, concerns therefore the origins, development, and implementation of the situational approaches pioneered by Ron Clarke. The book considers crime prevention in the contexts of the Home Office, police, probation service, Crime Concern, and local authorities. It also provides *ade mecum* for those who, like myself, have never really been very sure about the swiftly changing names and organisations associated with crime prevention during much of this period. So, if you want to know how (and why) the Home Office Standing Conference on Crime Prevention relates to the National Board for Crime Prevention, and the National Crime Prevention Agency, this is the book for you.

One aspect brought out by the text is the influence of a comparatively small number of individuals on the determination of national crime prevention policy. As well as Conservative politicians, who, according to the book, believed in a trinity of (1) toughness on crime, (2) imprisonment, and (3) providing more power for the police, there were a small group of civil servants and 'networkers' that were particularly interested in developing situational approaches.

The text shows the success of two industries in dominating the agenda of crime prevention, (vehicle and retail), without, however, discussing why this should be so. Crime prevention policies in this period were also focused narrowly on CCTV, Neighbourhood Watch, Street Constables, and Street Wardens. The author criticises the emphasis on situational approaches at the expense of policies which tackled the social origins of crime.

The text would have benefited from a stronger editorial hand, to avoid duplication and to eliminate some of the occasionally jejune conclusions and stilted sentences. For example, on pages 66-7 the author states: 'It is not an unknown fact that the Conservative Government attempted to provide an image of being very much pro-police and pro-prison'. Also, this may be a new policy at Gower, but the use of < and > in place of brackets or inverted commas throughout the book, did not make this reader think 'how good to see another aspect of Euro-

pean integration', but rather to question why it was necessary to make certain sentences look like programming code. A more active editorial policy would have eliminated this and other infelicities.

With greater experience of this area, the author would have been able to produce a much more powerful account of this topic. This is one of the disadvantages, of course, of the practice of publishing PhD theses. Nevertheless, the value of the examination in *The Politics of Crime Prevention* of the ebb and flow of crime prevention policies and their interaction with the practices of civil servants, politicians, the police, and other interested parties, is considerable, and represents a welcome addition to the literature.

I strongly recommend this book as a contribution to what is going to be a developing area of practice and research.

Professor Joshua Bamfield
Centre for Retail Research