

ENQUIRE WITHIN

Question: *Do you have any views on the causes of the rioting and looting which happened in August 2011? And do you blame anyone for what happened during those crazy few days?*

Answer: There has been a lot of spouting about the riots and not all of it has been creative!

It all happened when I was away on holiday in Worcester and I did feel distanced from it all, especially the events which took place in Ealing. During our week in Worcester, we went to a concert given by the Scottish Youth Orchestra, and the person introducing the concert commented on what a contrast there was between the young people on stage and the young people rioting. This drew loud applause, but I wasn't sure if it was appropriate because it did rather tend to show up the divisions and inequalities of modern Britain. Music lessons cost money and are paid for by parents with vision for the future. It is these divisions and inequalities which are probably at the heart of why people rioted. This is not an excuse, of course, but it may well be a cause.

I have been watching and waiting for news and for expert analysis before offering too much of my own opinions. Caution seemed to me to be the best policy.

The initial reactions were often marked by anger, which I suppose one can expect from those who were in a state of shock or badly affected by what happened.

Political reactions varied considerably from the knee-jerk to the thoughtful. On the knee jerk end of the reactions was, sadly, the Prime Minister who was fulminating and uttering threats of retribution and punishment. At the other end were people like Theresa May, the Home Secretary (pictured) who spoke well encouraging everybody to be calm and look for analysis of the events before making judgements and speaking out in public. Mrs May said:

"It is not helpful for politicians to suddenly speculate over what happened and the causes would only be known once all the evidence had been analysed."

How true and sensible.

Kenneth Clarke MP, who may have been in Mrs May's sights, came out quickly to identify causes of the riots. He blamed two causes, one being what he has identified as the "broken" prison system and the other the creation of a "feral underclass" also linked to prisons policy, in which large numbers of ex-prisoners had become criminalised in the eyes of key people like employers and so found it almost impossible to find jobs and start a normal life in Britain.

In the end, and I am no expert, I do feel strongly that in our country there has been a drifting apart of the "haves" and the "have-nots" and here I am not only referring to money.

The "haves" include those who have access to better than average schools, parents with a commitment to be responsible for the whereabouts and behaviour of their children, even their teenage children, families which look to the future and plan ahead for

themselves and their children, and young people who feel that they have a stake in the future for themselves and for their children when they have them.

The "have-nots" include those who may have enough money but for whom there is no vision of the future and so no impetus to build for one. They include people whose parents prefer to spend money on cigarettes and booze rather than gymnastic or music classes for the children. Sadly, these failures are probably to be found in the way their parents were brought up and their grandparents as well.

Who is to blame?

Those who take illegal action must be held accountable of course. But blame is a deeper issue. There is a malaise in our country and it is very difficult to analyse it and very difficult indeed to see how we can overcome it.

I am hopeful that there will in time be a deep and accurate review of what happened and that from this review will come action plans which may take years to make a difference, but we need to set something in motion to raise the rioters to a better vision for their lives and the lives of their children.

