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# If the state fails us, we must defend ourselves

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By Simon Heffer

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LAST Monday 82-year-old Violetta Vella was found dead in a pool of blood in her flat in Finsbury Park, north London.

She had been attacked in her own home, in broad daylight, and repeatedly stabbed in the neck. A gang of youths was seen fleeing from the scene. The estate on which she lived, Six Acres, is infested with drug addicts who rob and steal to finance their habit.

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Two days after Mrs Vella was murdered, St Albans Crown Court heard how a wealthy man's wife was killed and their teenage son and his girlfriend maimed after being shot outside their home in suburban Hertfordshire. The object of the robbery was a pair of Rolex watches.

On that same day a drug addict, Andrew Aston, was given 26 life sentences for murdering two octogenarian war veterans in their homes and attacking 24 other pensioners. Aston's father announced, with commendable propriety, that he thought his son ought to be hanged.

It was also revealed that, 10 days ago, the head of a computer firm, his wife and baby son were ambushed in their home in Twickenham by a gang of eight raiders with an axe, knives and a baseball bat. We have become inured to the daily stories of carjackings, and resigned to the news that street crime in London rose by 39 per cent last year.

We all know things have become steadily worse since the 1960s. We might, however, be just about to reach that point where enough is, at last, enough.

To say there is an "epidemic" of violent crime is to push understatement to its limits. As this week's incidents show, it strikes across classes. At the root of it is the drugs problem.

The crime wave is being compounded by the complacency of politicians, by the bullying of the police into attitudes of craven political correctness, and by a creaking criminal justice system. Now we have reached a situation in which few can feel safe even in their homes, and this could be the breaking point.

Most of us had an implicit assumption that there was a contract between law-abiding people and the state. In return for our restraint, the state would use the various means at its disposal to control crime. It would police our society properly. It would severely punish those who attacked us.

It must, though, be clear to all that the state has broken that contract. When it comes to crime, we are no longer dealing with good, honest criminals. We are dealing with degenerates who view crime not only as a way of life but also as a recreation.

They have no regard for the property or even the lives of others. All of them are wicked. Many have their wickedness exacerbated by mind-altering chemicals. Above all, they engage in murderous, anarchic behaviour because they are confident the police will not catch them or, if they do, that they are highly unlikely to be condignly punished for their horrible crimes.

Since the contract has been broken, what should the public do about it? Ideally, we should persuade our rulers to enforce policies that deter people from committing such crimes: but they won't.

Mr Aston's repulsive son will not be hanged. Nor will the murderers of Mrs Vella. Nor will the drug dealers who are at the root of so much of this evil. Nor will the police be given the resources to put more men in uniform on the streets.

Nor, even if they were, would they be encouraged to take the sort of pre-emptive, aggressive action required against the perpetrators of so much inner-city crime, because many such criminals happen to be from those sections of society dealt with by the Macpherson Report.

The Government absolutely lacks the political will to deal with the violation of one of the most fundamental liberties of the people it governs: their right to feel safe in their own homes.

Given this scandalous situation, it is time for the Government to confer a new right on the people: the right to bear arms. Gun control in this country is in any case a joke. There is far more gun crime now than there was before the idiotic law passed by the Major government to ban handguns after the Dunblane massacre.

The police obsessively regulate shotguns and rifles held by sportsmen who have no intention of killing anyone with them, while failing utterly to control illegal weapons. In America, the two states with the highest level of gun ownership - New Hampshire and Vermont - have the lowest levels of crime.

One of the most murderous places in the United States, Washington DC, has the most rigorous gun control in the Union. For a householder to shoot a burglar in most states in the US is regarded not so much as permissible as part of his civic responsibilities.

There is, as a result, very little burglary in America. In this country, when a man shoots a burglar who is part of a gang with more than 100 previous convictions between them, it is he who goes to jail - for life, until Tony Martin's sentence was reduced on appeal.

Many of these appalling crimes are committed by junkies, which might lead some to argue that they would be insufficiently rational to respond to greater deterrence. They may well not respond when they are on drugs, but that is their problem.

In any case, this is not about the criminal, but about protecting the victims. The point is not to have a retributive free-for-all, but rather to bring a real threat of deterrence. The principle of protection could be extended.

While it might be unacceptable for motorists to carry a gun - even though many criminals routinely do - certainly a driver stopped by a carjacker or, indeed, a pedestrian attacked by a mugger, should be able to spray mace in his face, or use a stun gun on him without fear of prosecution for having used an illegal weapon.

The present weighting in these crimes of the rights of the criminal over those of the victim ignores the new realities: it cannot, in a just society, be allowed to continue.

Ideally, the Government would give the police the resources and moral backing, and the courts the draconian powers, to stem these depravities. As it shows no signs of doing so, it must allow people to defend themselves.

If that means criminals getting killed or horribly injured, so be it. As the saying goes, they have a choice: their victims don't.

- Simon Heffer is a Daily Mail columnist