



Current Affairs Assembly

Citizenship and politics – the rule of law

Assembly



Page
1 of 2

Thou shalt not commit murder

Aim:

- To demonstrate how a change in the Double Jeopardy law can now mean justice for murderers

Introduction

What happened?

Stephen Lawrence was waiting at a bus stop in southeast London at 10.35pm on the night of Thursday April 22nd 1993 with his mate of seven years, Duwayne Brooks. Within minutes Stephen had been stabbed and fatally wounded.

The Metropolitan Police investigated his murder. There were suspects and some were charged with murder but in each case the Crown Prosecution Service concluded that there was insufficient evidence to proceed. Then in 1996 the Lawrence family initiated a private prosecution of two suspects. This also failed because of lack of evidence.

Because some of the suspects had been charged with murder and the case against them collapsed a verdict of not guilty is entered against their names.

As a result of Stephen's murder and a lack of any conviction there were severe criticisms of the way the police handled the investigation and gathered the evidence.

On 24th March 1998 a public inquiry opened into the case, with many people giving evidence and being cross examined.

The inquiry report (known as the McPherson Report) which came out in February 1999 triggered a radical change of the 'Double Jeopardy' law. This is 800 years old and says that a person cannot be tried for the same crime twice. Because the main suspects in the Stephen Lawrence case had been arrested, charged and brought to trial already (even though the trials fell apart because of a lack of evidence) the Double Jeopardy law meant that they couldn't be tried for this crime again.

But things changed in March 2005 when the double Jeopardy law relating to murder was amended. Since March 2005 a person may be tried for a second time for a murder, where compelling new evidence has come to light.

In the case of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, DNA and other forensic evidence came to light after a re-examination of stored clothing and other materials. This evidence only became available after significant advances in Forensic Science techniques.



Current Affairs Assembly

Citizenship and politics – the rule of law

Assembly



Page
2 of 2

So, on November 15th 2011 the trial began of Gary Dobson and David Norris, who both deny murdering Stephen Lawrence in south east London 18 years ago.

Looking Deeper

Thou shalt not commit murder

All mainstream faiths teach that murder is wrong. Christians are guided by the Ten Commandments, which include, Thou shalt not commit murder.

The way God-given skills and knowledge of science, in particular the developments in Forensic Science, have changed over the last 18 years has meant that we can re-examine evidence and get more meaning from it.

If this evidence is valid and robust under scrutiny, then it could clearly mean that courts can prove guilt where previously innocence had been the verdict.

Now that the law for murder has changed coupled with the commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit murder', it means that for murderers your sins will find you out and that no murderer is beyond the law, whenever the evidence comes to light.

Reflection

People argued about the medieval right not to be tried twice, as though fraudulently getting off was some sort of game.

Previous Home Secretary David Blunkett

Prayer

Father God where wrongs have been done we pray for justice, redemption and forgiveness. We also pray for the peace that only you can give Lord for the people and families when hurtful situations are revisited. Be with them Lord and strengthen them.

Thought of the day

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

Edmund Burke (1729 - 1797)

Keywords

Redemption
Commandment
Double Jeopardy