THE SENTINEL GAZETTE

Opinion Column: Two Ways of Seeing

P**UBLIC SAFETY**

By John News (Writing from Llançà, Catalonia)

THE ANCHOR

Sitting in a quiet café in Llançà, surrounded by tranquil coastal streets, demanding more police presence, surveillance cameras, or harsher penalties for repeat offenders can easily sound like unwarranted authoritarianism. Yet step into a working-class neighbourhood in Barcelona, London, or Paris plagued by weekly muggings, street dealing, violent theft, and illegal squatting (*okupación*) of homes and commercial premises, and that same demand ceases to be an ideological preference—it becomes an urgent requirement for daily survival.

The argument for robust policing, visible deterrence, and swift legal evictions against persistent reoffending and illegal occupation is rooted in the most basic obligation of any democratic state: protecting the physical integrity, property, and peace of its citizens. When repeat offenders or organized squatter networks occupy properties, degrade local coexistence, and accumulate dozens of arrests only to walk free hours later due to legal loopholes, the rule of law is severely eroded. It is not the affluent who suffer most from street crime and squatting, but working-class residents and local shopkeepers who cannot afford private security or gated communities.

As Thomas Hobbes famously observed in *Leviathan*, without a sovereign authority capable of enforcing order and guaranteeing security, human life inevitably degenerates into a state of constant fear and uncertainty. When a state abdicates its primary function to protect public space, it fractures the social contract that holds a community together. The perception that lawlessness goes unpunished breeds a profound sense of abandonment among honest, tax-paying citizens.

A society that fails to guarantee basic public safety and respect for property rapidly loses the trust of its people. When law enforcement and the judiciary are rendered impotent by misguided leniency or endless procedural delays, the vacuum is invariably filled by vigilantism, fear, and populist anger. Police presence, clear legal boundaries, and swift judicial consequences are not reactionary measures; they are the essential preconditions for public freedom and democratic coexistence.

THE HORIZON

To view crime and illegal occupancy exclusively through the lens of police deployment, surveillance cameras, and longer prison sentences is to treat the symptom while actively ignoring the disease. While immediate protection and legal certainty are necessary when violence or property violations occur, an over-reliance on punitive measures creates an illusion of control that fails to address the underlying drivers of urban distress: systemic poverty, severe housing shortages, social marginalization, and the lack of economic opportunities for young people.

The perspective prioritizing social prevention, community mediation, and rehabilitation recognizes that a society cannot simply lock away or police out its structural failures. Conflating vulnerable

families in desperate need of shelter with organized criminal squatter networks leads to overly broad punitive responses that punish poverty rather than crime. Mass incarceration and hyper-policing often harden young offenders, turning prisons into incubators of crime rather than centres for reintegration, while turning public spaces into high-surveillance zones gradually erodes civil liberties for everyone.

In *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo illustrated how a society that responds to human misery exclusively with the uncompromising iron hand of Inspector Javert, ends up perpetuating injustice rather than resolving it. When laws focus entirely on punishment without addressing the material desperation that drives people to the margins, the penal system becomes an instrument of social exclusion rather than a mechanism of justice.

The moral legitimacy of a justice system is measured not by how severely it punishes, but by its capacity to prevent harm, guarantee social welfare, and rebuild broken lives. True long-term security is not achieved merely by placing an officer on every street corner or hardening penal codes, but by building an inclusive society where fewer people feel driven to marginalized survival in the first place.

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