



## Applied Sociology Contact Email for July 2017

I have never thought much about Sociology and Law (criminal or common). My dictionary of Sociology tells me that Sociology stands in a critical relationship with orthodox legal theory and implies that in academia it clashes with the subjects of other departments and is somewhat frowned upon. What turned my thoughts to the law was an article on Terms and Conditions (see attached), which tells about the traps we can fall into by not reading them, and that many are written by the legal system to totally put us off reading them. As someone has remarked if you want a new programme for your computer you are much more interested in downloading and using it than reading the terms and conditions. Another area where people often fall into traps is with insurance policies. Recently, people have found that the Commonwealth Bank would not pay out on claims because some clever person worked out that if they used old definitions for a number of things, they could argue that the claimant could be told, they were not covered, thus saving the bank lots of money and probably getting quick promotion. As far as I know no one has been sacked or charged when the process was challenged.

Sociology, we are told is the "systematic study of the functioning, organisation, development and types of human societies." What do we have to say when the functioning of society is being thwarted by a legal system that is supposed to protect us? The politicians keep telling us that one of our great assets is the rule of law, but it seems that we must ask "who benefits from the rule of law?" There are various impolite comments about the legal system: "the law is an ass", "law is not about justice", but no one seems to be challenging the present system of laws with any success.

I am not sure where I am going with this email. As I said at the beginning I have never thought much about it. Now I am thinking there is a great deal that needs to be done about it and much of it ought to be coming from sociologists. At my age, and where I live leaves me in no position to do much about it. I tried once to talk to the local MP about a sociological issue, a questionnaire they had circulated, and I discovered that the member had a minder who, in front of me, said I will sit in on this one. When I tried to point out the flaws in the questionnaire I was told by the minder, not the Member, that the party have paid a lot of money to have the questionnaire prepared, and who was I to challenge what the party did. The member now has a senior position in the party but I don't know if he still has the same minder.

When it comes to the Applied Sociologist, what can we do? Probably very little. We usually don't have the freedom of being able to write about issues we think are important. We don't have students in whom we can instil a challenge to do something about it. We are beholden to our employer. I wonder if there are any Sociologists employed in a legal team. I suspect not. Lawyers and economists often seem to believe they have enough knowledge of society, without any contribution from sociology.

So where do we go with this issue? I don't know. Perhaps some of you will have ideas, if so please share them with us.

Any Terry Pratchett fans who followed my suggestion last month, might like to read his follow up on the subject by rereading "Raising Steam".