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Activity: Media

The Jury System

Learning objective

At the end of this activity you should be able to:

- describe ways in which juries trials may be flawed.

This clip mentions the case of Vicky Pryce, the ex-wife of ex-cabinet minister Chris Huhne. It was alleged that she accepted penalty points (for speeding) that ought to have been added to Huhne's driving licence.

The trial judge, Mr Justice Sweeney, discharged the jury in the light of a series of questions that the jury put to him. For example, the jury asked: "Can a juror come to a verdict based on a reason that was not presented in court and has no facts or evidence to support it, either from the prosecution or defence?"

A. Using the link below, complete questions 1 to 20 that follow.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8WzuDuXs80&feature=emb_logo

1. According to Professor John Spencer, what are the three defects of jury trials?
2. What had the jurors in the 1995 murder trial done? What was the impact of their actions?
3. Why did the judge discharge the jury in the 1981 trial?
4. Briefly describe what happened in the 'Crapland' case.
5. Why was the case of Delroy Grant a 'near miss'?
6. According to Spencer, what is the inherent problem of jury trials?
7. What does Spencer mean by the problem of quality control?
8. What qualities does Spencer suggest are important for jury service?
9. What two improvements does Spencer suggest to the selection of juries?
10. According to Spencer, what is the problem of no jury reasons when verdicts are given?
11. Why is the secrecy of the jury room maintained?
12. What is the argument against juries giving reasons for their verdicts? Give an example of this.
13. How could jury equity be maintained but juries still be required to give reasons for their decisions?
14. What arguments is put forward by those who defend juries? How does this compare to other public services such as hospitals?
15. What is the objection made against changing trial by jury?
16. What was the qualification for selection to a jury prior to 1972? What kind of juries did this produce?
17. What was peremptory challenge and why was it abolished?
18. According to Spencer, why is it essential to maintain jury trials?
19. What changes have been made to magistrates' courts?
20. What is the impact of the changes to magistrates' courts?

B. Overall, do you think juries will always give a fair verdict? Justify your answer