

# Prisons Research Centre

## Annual Report on Research Findings 2010

The Prisons Research Centre is now in its tenth year, under the Directorship of Professor Alison Liebling. The Centre has received funding from the Prison Service, the Nuffield Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust, the ESRC, The KPMG Foundation, the Home Office and UKDS (now Kalyx).

PRC Members include: Professor Alison Liebling, Dr Ben Crewe, Ms Helen Arnold, Ms Clare McLean, Ms Vicky Gadd, Mr Guy Shefer, Dr Caroline Lansky, Dr Susie Hulley. Ms Ann Phillips is the Centre's Administrator (part-time). Ms Jennifer Cartwright is the Administrator (part-time) of the ESRC-funded Values Project. Associate Members include: Dr Adrian Grounds and Dr Joel Harvey.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS 2010

#### VALUES, PRACTICES AND OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CORRECTIONS

*Alison Liebling, Ben Crewe, Susie Hulley and Clare McLean*

This research had two main components: an interview, survey and observation based study of senior managers in public and private sector corrections, and a mainly ethnographic study of four matched public and private sector prisons (and three additional establishments). The main objectives were: to provide rigorous empirical evidence about the relative quality and effectiveness of public versus private prisons; to describe differences in culture, relationships and experiences in the two sectors; and to provide an analysis of motivations, orientations and attitudes among senior practitioners.

In the senior manager study, we identified some clear professional styles, representing distinct approaches to the Governing task, including different depths of moral vision. We have defined these styles as: *highly skilled operational*; *performance-plus managers* (including some *technicians*); *entrepreneurs*; *moral dualists*; *thinker/speakers*; and those who are *alienated* or *complacent*. We found few systematic differences between managers in the two sectors. It is a false assumption that public sector professionals are 'knights' – heroic altruists with professional ethics – or that private sector professionals are 'knaves' – pursuing only profit under any circumstances.

Our typology of managers has two key axes: values and style. The balance within the Service has shifted towards the security, 'robust management' end of the style axis, while there is widespread unease with some liberal-humanitarian values and orientations. Some younger governors are uncritically focussed on performance targets, while, at more senior levels, a form of 'economic rationalism' has started to dominate. Despite being almost like 'knights' in their public sector habits and orientations, the senior leadership have created a 'knave-like' organisational culture. Although largely unintended, this is having major effects on prison life.

In our evaluation of the two pairs of matched prisons, the two

public sector prisons generally outperformed their private sector comparators. The public sector training prison scored significantly higher than its private sector comparator on seventeen of our twenty-one prisoner quality of life measures, and below it on none, while the public sector local prison scored significantly higher than its private sector comparator on eight of the measures and below it on none. Data from the three supplementary private prisons complicate this picture, however. One of the private sector training prisons scored significantly above the public sector training prison on nine of the twenty-one dimensions, while the additional private sector local prison scored significantly higher than the public sector local prison on fifteen of the dimensions.

Both of the private prisons in the main ethnographic study exhibited weaknesses in the areas of policing and control, organisation and consistency, and personal development. The emphasis in staff training on interpersonal skills – and the effort made to inculcate staff cultures that were positive and respectful – did not lead to our two main private sector prisons outperforming their public sector comparators in the expected areas. In these private prisons, relationships between prisoners and staff were courteous, and prisoners generally recognised that staff were benign and committed, but the lack of experience and expertise among uniformed staff (and their low numbers) meant that prisoners' legitimate expectations were often unmet. Alongside – and linked to – these issues with staff professionalism, there were problems in both prisons with both the over-use and the under-use of authority.

In the public sector prisons, officers were confident and knowledgeable, delivering regimes that were safer and more reliable than in the matched private sector prisons. Power was generally exercised fairly and confidently. However, prisoners sometimes described an experience of imprisonment that felt 'heavier' than in the private sector comparators, and uniformed staff could sometimes be indifferent towards prisoners. Although their interactions with prisoners were often informal and professional, their dispositions towards them were more negative than those of most private sector staff.

The two high-performing private sector prisons that were added into the study combined the strengths of both sectors. Unencumbered by the cultural baggage of the public sector – in particular, a union culture that tends to promote an ethos of cynicism – the relationships that staff formed with prisoners appeared to be largely respectful, supportive and caring. Uniformed staff seemed confident and knowledgeable, having built up more experience than staff in the poorer-performing private prisons. There were indications, nonetheless, that in the domain of security and policing even the high-performing private prisons were less strong than in other areas.

The results from both studies constitute original and significant contributions to ongoing debates about prison privatisation and the nature of modern penalty. The project has resulted in a significant revision of the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life survey, and it is clarifying and building upon our understanding of prison life in general.

## References

Crewe, B., Liebling, A., Hulley, S. and McLean, C. (2010) 'Prisoner Quality of Life in Public and Private Sector Prisons' (under review)

Liebling, A., Crewe, B. and Hulley, S. 'Conceptualising and Measuring the Quality of Prison Life', forthcoming in D Gadd et al (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Criminological Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications

Crewe, B. and Liebling, A. (in press) 'Are Liberal Humanitarian Penal Values and Practices Exceptional?', forthcoming in T. Ugelvik and J. Dullum (eds) *Nordic prison practice and policy - exception or not? Exploring penal exceptionalism in the Nordic context(s)*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing.

---

## POWER AND VULNERABILITY IN PRISON: UPDATING THE FINDINGS FROM HMP WHITEMOOR TEN YEARS ON - June 2009 to November 2010

*Alison Liebling, Helen Arnold and Christina Straub*

This research consists of a repeat of an influential exploratory study carried out at HMP Whitemoor in 1998-9 by Alison Liebling and David Price ('An Exploration of Staff-Prisoner Relationships at HMP Whitemoor'). The original study explored the nature and quality of staff-prisoner relationships and the work and role of prison officers and led to a deep understanding of the complex role staff-prisoner relationships play in prison life, the experiences of long-term prisoners held in conditions of maximum security, the peacekeeping work of prison officers, and the use of discretion in accomplishing order in prison on a day-to-day basis. It identified good prison officer work and the characteristics of role model officers, and described prison officer work at its best. It resulted in the publication of the book, *'The Prison Officer'* by Alison Liebling and David Price (Waterside Press, 2001).

The aim of the present study is to re-investigate the nature and quality of staff-prisoner relationships at Whitemoor in a new context, exploring how life for prisoners, the work of prison officers, and the nature of staff-prisoner relationships have changed, using the original study as a baseline. The study will also explore the nature of relationships between prisoners. The context has changed in two significant ways.

1. The population consists of 40 per cent Muslim prisoners, some of whom have converted to the Muslim faith whilst in prison. Many of these prisoners feel 'under constant scrutiny'.
2. The sentences being served are significantly longer, and more likely to be indeterminate. There is considerably more emphasis on risk and risk assessment.

Lower levels of trust, uncertainties of role and identity, a perception of time in prison as more punishing than rehabilitative, and a reorganisation of the information flow, have left prisoners and staff feeling uncomfortable. Divisions and conflicts between prisoners have impacted on perceptions of safety, as well as on the 'presentation of self'. A new governor and newly energised chaplaincy team are seeking ways of opening up a dialogue and building better relationships between staff and prisoners.

## STUDENT VOICE & PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS & SECURE SETTINGS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

*Dr Caroline Lanskey – Research Associate*

This 12 month post-doctoral fellowship project has explored in part the influence of penal and reform agenda on education in secure institutions for young people under 18 years in England at a time of legislative change. Drawing on writing by Government and specialist educational organisations and data from an earlier Prison Research Centre project in two young offender institutions and two secure training centres it has considered assumptions underpinning the aims and reach of education for young people sentenced to custody and ideological and practical challenges of aligning education in secure institutions with mainstream education. The findings from the analysis have been presented in two articles: one discusses the relationship between the aims of education and the agenda of punishment and reform, the other focuses on the teaching of citizenship.

The articles highlight tensions between principles, policies and practices of the education and criminal justice systems in England. They suggest the value of disassociating the aims and purposes of education in secure institutions from punitive agenda and ensuring that education is seen as more than a tool for reform, such as by avoiding the identification of young learners as 'offenders' and the use of evaluation tools which prioritise standards of behaviour over academic standards. The conclusions point to the importance of further research on the relationship between educational and residential provision in secure institutions with the aim of understanding how institutions can systematically support the full humanitarian and transformative potential of education for young people in the secure estate. Taking the example of citizenship education, there is scope to evaluate creative projects which aim to foster 'active citizenship' through the systematic inclusion of young people's voice in the management and organisation of the secure establishment and through opportunities for young people to 'build bridges' with their local communities.

### Publications

Lanskey, C. (in press) Citizenship Education for Young People in Secure Institutions in England and Wales *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*. Vol. 30.

Lanskey C. (forthcoming) Promise or Compromise? Education for Young People in Secure Institutions in England. *Youth Justice Journal*.

## Ph.D RESEARCH

### DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF TWO EFFECTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SECTOR PRISON SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAMS (SMT)

*Vicky Gadd – PhD Research*

Despite management practices arguably being one of the most important factors influencing the quality and environment of a prison, very little is currently known about prison management and its impacts, both on the establishment and the individuals within it. "Studies of prison management are few and far between" and this is an area "in need of much further empirical study" (Liebling, 2004:376). Of those studies that have been

conducted, few have focussed on the British penal system, and to date no systematic empirical study has considered senior management teams in any detail. This is a vitally important area of study, as Bryans (2000) states 'it is only when we understand how prisons are governed and by whom that we will have a better insight into life behind bars' (pp.15).

This study employed appreciative ethnographic methods (shadowing, observation and interview) and quantitative data collection (Staff Quality of Life [SQL] Surveys and psychometric assessments for managers) in order to investigate the main research question: how does a good senior management team look, talk, act and think. The synthesis of both observational and interview data in this study was crucial, as Bryans (2000) notes that 'research based solely on managers' accounts of what they do is necessary but not sufficient. There is a need to analyse how they act, through, for example, participant observation and future researchers should consider such a methodological approach' (p. 186). Data collection took place at two distinct sites: HMP Guys Marsh and HMP Wandsworth. Fieldwork began in August 2007 and was completed in May 2008.

A wealth of qualitative and quantitative data was collected and hence data analysis was lengthy and time consuming. The time taken was more than justified by the rich and detailed analysis which emerged. I am currently writing up the results of this study. I have developed a typology of senior manager style (and associated effectiveness) based on two emergent themes: optimism and resilience. I have considered the role of the governor in detail, including assessing their role as the 'key senior manager', their leadership of the SMT and their changing role in the contemporary prison landscape. Other considerations will be the role, function and power of the SMT, relationships within the SMT and composition of the SMT as well as reflecting on what is effectiveness and how do we measure it. This thesis is due for submission August 2010.

#### **Publications**

Tait, S., Shefer, G., Gadd, V. McLean, C. and Liebling, A. 'Measuring Prison Staff Quality of Life' (in progress).

Gadd, V. 'A Typology of Prison Senior Management Style and Effectiveness' (in progress).

---

### **DOING REHABILITATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY PRISON – THE CASE OF THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITIES**

*Guy Shefer- PhD Research*

This research studies different aspects of organisation of treatment and culture in two models of prison-based Therapeutic Communities (TCs). Based on focused ethnographic work the study analysed, compared and explain the main dilemmas, strategies, forms of interactions and unique aspects of prison life in two therapeutic community wings.

Both TC programmes which were studied were located each in one wing in a mainstream prison. One of them followed the Democratic model and the other followed the Addictions model. Both models are based on some level of self management and self discipline ('self' here refers to prisoners). Both involve work on offending behaviour issues in small groups.

The central dilemma both TCs faced was how to maintain the integrity of the programmes and their demanding nature while

keeping a reasonable retention rate. This dilemma was intensified by population pressures and the requirement to accommodate prisoners who did not participate in the programme when the wing was not full. It was also intensified by the requirement to meet completion rate targets and by an expectation for clear evidence and 'due process' when enforcing the rules or discharging destructive prisoners from the programme. Different audit requirements and different management perceptions have led to development of different strategies in each of the programmes. The staff and management of TC 'A' adhered to a highly selective admission approach, rigorous enforcement of the rules and extensive use of the dismissal sanction. The staff and management of TC 'B' maintained a less selective admission process and less rigorous enforcement of the rules. The differences between the strategies resulted in TC 'A' having a lower completion rate and having more non TC members in the wing (lodgers) than TC 'B'. However, there were some strong indications that TC 'A' was able to maintain a higher degree of integrity.

The different strategies also had an important role in shaping some aspects of the prisoner culture on both wings. In particular, there were differences in terms of levels of trust and the sense of community on both wings. Despite flaws in the formal delivery of TC programming in TC 'B', some of the essential cultural aspects of TC environments meant that levels of violence were low in both. The study analyses the reasons for these differences and similarities as well as the unique nature of staff-prisoner relationships which characterised both wings.

#### **Publications:**

Shefer, G. (forthcoming) The organisational challenges of contemporary prison-based rehabilitative interventions – the case of Therapeutic Communities. PhD Thesis: Cambridge University

Liebling, A and Price, D. with Shefer, G. (forthcoming) *The Prison Officer* (2nd edition) Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

Shefer, G. and Liebling A. (2008) 'Prison Privatization: In Search of a Business-like Atmosphere?' *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 8(3) 261-278.

Shefer, G. (2010) 'A quantitative perspective of staff and prisoners' quality of life', in E. Sullivan, and R. Shaker (eds) *HMP Grendon and Beyond: Studying Therapeutic Communities in Prison*, Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

---

### **POWER RELATIONS IN A UKRAINIAN PRISON**

*Anton Symkóvych- PhD Research*

This PhD research studies the forms of power used in a Ukrainian medium security prison for men. The study's main aims were to: (1) explore main forms of power used by prison authorities and prisoners; (2) examine mechanisms of sustaining order and compliance; and (3) identify forms of resistance. This is the first study of the Ukrainian prison in the English language, and one of the first to examine the dramatic transformations within the prison system following the collapse of the Communist régime. The project involved extensive periods of observation, shadowing, informal conversations and formal interviews with prisoners, frontline staff and prison

managers. The analysis is also informed by data that were collected in HMP Wandsworth in London in 2007.

Similarly to other studies, this research found that order in prison, unless defined narrowly as situational compliance, was a product of compromise. Nonetheless, the involuntary nature of imprisonment meant that arrangements of social life in prison were often maintained by power rather than by consensus. Similar to prisons in England and Wales, compliance normally rested on a combination of incentives and sanctions which were at staff's disposal. Yet, cultural, legal and economic peculiarities made the process of negotiation of order in the Ukrainian prison more informal than one would expect in the West.

I argue that the history of powerlessness of the ordinary Ukrainian citizen vis-à-vis the state apparatus and its representatives explains why the law in Ukraine in general, and in prison in particular, is used arbitrarily. The law in Ukraine often serves as a coercive mechanism used by state employees than as a regulator of social relations. As a result, coercion and reliance on prisoners' habitualised fear enabled the prison authorities to control prisoners utilising limited resources (for example, 30-40 staff ran a prison for 800 prisoners). Such power arrangements, however, were hard to defend morally. This legitimacy problem, combined with inadequate resources, necessitated considerable tolerance for rule infringement on the part of the prison authorities. The 'trade-off' between, on the one hand, officers and managers and, on the other hand, prisoners was more common, more extensive and more acceptable than previously described in the prison literature or than was observed in HMP Wandsworth. Despite the instrumental utility in controlling prisoners, such power arrangements in the Ukrainian prison undermined the very principle of the official goal of rehabilitation (formally – 'correction' and 're-education'), let alone such declared principles of imprisonment as legality, respect, justice and democracy.

---

## **INNER TRANSFORMATION AND SOCIAL ORDER IN FAITH-BASED PRISON UNITS**

*Abigail Wild - PhD Research*

This is a sociological study of Horizon faith-based prison units in the United States. "Horizon communities" are voluntary residential programs contracted by the relevant state's Department of Corrections, and delivered in large part by volunteers who are drawn from faith communities near the prison. This study takes particular interest in the role of "faith" in the design, delivery and experience of these programs through considering three Horizon units: a Christian unit (though it is open to people of all faiths), a 'character-based' unit (designed as a secular alternative to the faith-based community), and a multi-faith unit.

This study involved five months of research at Tomoka Correctional Institution, a medium-maximum prison in Florida that houses two Horizon communities (a Christian unit and a character-based unit) and five months at Marion Correctional Facility, a medium security prison in Ohio which houses a multi-faith unit. The research involved interviews with program participants, program graduates, Horizon staff and volunteers, prison officers and prison administrators, observation of programming, religious services, and daily life in Horizon units, questionnaires (developed in focus groups with program participants), and many informal conversations.

People involved with these units described Horizon communities as safe and respectful places which facilitated trusting relationships and provided opportunities for personal and spiritual enrichment which were largely unavailable in prison. They also described a paternalistic and authoritarian style of governance: a form of order that was stricter and pettier than elsewhere in the prison. This imposition of discipline was welcomed by many participants as opening up more meaningful opportunities for self-development (what Berlin has taught us to call 'positive liberty') and restricting avenues of self-destruction. Other participants, however, resisted this discipline and resented the pressure to conform to a particular script of personal responsibility and religious transformation. The 'inside account' of Horizon participants provided a complicated story of how such units can enable the construction of new identities and communities but, by the same token, can be psychologically intrusive and present crime as an individual moral issue and rehabilitation as spiritual transformation.

Observing how the prison staff and Horizon program staff collaborate on-the-ground in governing Horizon units pointed to the difficulty of balancing the aims of treatment and confinement and to the ethical complexity of a partnership between religious and secular authority in Horizon units. But this study, like several other studies of prison programs that have included the voices of participants, points to the value and meaning and that these programs can have for people, cautioning against resignation to the impossibility of rehabilitative efforts in prison.

---

## **WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?: EXAMINING THE RE-ENTRY OF EX-PRISONERS RELEASED FROM A FAITH BASED PRISON UNIT**

*Ruth Armstrong – PhD Research*

This research project was born of a desire to get behind the much debated statistics on the miraculous role of faith based prison programs to reduce re-offending. In order to tell the tale behind the 'tally', I spent eighteen months in the USA following the progress of 48 men released from a faith based unit between March and August 2007. Only three of those released between these dates did not participate in this study. The research aimed to be as ethnographic as possible. I spent two months in the prison with the men prior to their release and then aimed to meet up with them as much as possible according to their availability. As a minimum the short term longitudinal research plan involved one interview and questionnaire prior to release, one interview and questionnaire within two weeks after release and one interview and questionnaire at least six months after release.

The ethnographic nature of the research allowed me to get to know some of the participants well, to attend church services with them, to meet their family and friends, to hear of the struggles they were facing on a day to day basis, their achievements and their disappointments. My initial aim was to build up a realistic picture of the role that faith communities play in the lives of those released from faith-based programs, and how these communities help them to deal with the struggles of life on the outside. However, the fieldwork revealed men leaving prison very enthusiastic to join faith communities, but disintegration of this practice once they hit the streets. A minority of participants remained involved in faith communities

by the time of the third interview. This was not due to the individuals concerned losing their faith. I am currently analyzing the data collected in an attempt to understand the problems which prevented the men in my study from engaging in these communities, and the differences present for those who did manage to connect to faith groups in the free world. Themes emerging from my analysis are the role of volunteers in prison and post release, the deep and pervasive nature of the difficulties people leaving prison face in re-establishing a life outside, and the role faith can play in facing these difficulties.

---

## THE PRISON BASED FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGIST: IN PERSON AND PRACTICE

*Jason Warr - PhD Research*

### Introduction

The last twenty years have seen a significant increase in the demand for and expansion of psychological services within the prison system. Overwhelmingly, these services have been provided by specialist forensic practitioners. The expansion of psychological services is an outcome of a number of factors. One such is a shift towards, and an overt commitment to, the ideals of public protection that have come in the wake of the 2003 Criminal Justice Act and the more recent Rice Report. These changes have impacted directly upon the nature and level of work faced by psychologists in prisons and have thus resulted in a new range of occupational, institutional and individual pressures that affect not only themselves but also the prisoners whom they assess.

The proposed study would explore the role, practices, motivations, values and experiences of the modern forensic psychologist. Set against a background of contemporary penal power and forensic psychological literature, it would provide a sociological account of the complexities involved with being a forensic practitioner in the modern penal environment. The central research questions are:

- What are the key functions of psychologists in the modern prison?
- What are their backgrounds and motivations?
- What are the practicalities involved with the risk assessment process?
- What are the main frustrations and conflicts experienced by forensic practitioners working in prisons?
- How do practitioners feel about prisoners? What kinds of relationships and identifications do they form with them?
- What influence do psychologists feel they have over prisoners' lives, and how do they experience their own power?
- Whose interests do forensic psychologists primarily serve?
- What emotional impact does the job have on forensic psychologists and how do they deal with the strains and burdens of their work?

### Progress

The extant literature concerning forensic practice in prisons is rather limited, being largely practitioner based and mainly focusing upon the technicalities of the construction and delivery of assessment tools and CBT programmes. A sociological account of forensic practice and practitioners would be an original contribution to the current penal and forensic psychological literature.

Access is currently being negotiated with the Prison Service.

## Publications

Warr, J. (2007), 'Personal Reflections on Prison Staff', in J. Bennett, B. Crewe and A. Wahidin (eds.), *Understanding Prison Staff*, Willan Publishing.

---

## IDENTIFYING THE HIGH PERFORMING PRISON OFFICER

*Helen Arnold - PhD Research*

This PhD research explores two central questions concerning the individual performance of main grade prison officers: what makes a good prison officer and how can they be identified? It seeks to examine what the key characteristics, qualities, skills and abilities are that define an effective or high performing officer. The main aim of the research is to develop a theoretical model, or typology, of prison officer performance. A further objective is to explore the role of emotions and their management in the work and performance of officers and to consider the relevance of the concept of 'emotional intelligence' within the prison context and, in particular, in staff-prisoner relationships.

The research consists of two component studies: 1. a participant observation study of the new entrant prison officer training course in 2002 and 2. a multi-method, single-site, cross-sectional study of officers, and their work, in 2005. This second study included focus group discussions with staff and prisoners; the shadowing of officers identified as high performing; periods of unstructured observation; and in-depth semi-structured interviews. In addition a self completion questionnaire was distributed to all main grade prison officers within the prison which consisted of four pre-existing and standardised measures of emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, and custody orientation.

Some significant themes and findings have emerged from the research. There is consensus in the qualities and attitudes used to define the 'best' officers: the list of personal characteristics identified by staff and prisoners (including integrity, confidence, fairness, consistency, professionalism and reflexivity) is exhaustive and impossible to constantly fulfil. There is no one 'ideal' type of officer and there are different concepts of high performance. A key ability of good officers, and a central component of effective performance, is selecting the right skill at the right time; in metaphorical terms, picking the right tool from a tool-bag of skills. Good officers are also capable of achieving the right (and delicate) balance of skills; too much or too little of some of the identified qualities can hinder effective performance, for example, in terms of empathy and associated levels of involvement and detachment. The core 'traits' identified are considered to be part of a good officer's underlying character that have to exist before an individual can 'become' high performing: it is a common belief that to be a good prison officer 'takes a certain kind of personality'. The importance of officers managing their own feelings and those of the prisoners they deal with was a recurring theme: resilience, empathy and emotional intelligence are significant inter-related elements of good officer work. There are clear, identifiable cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects of prison work that are primarily related to aspects of adaptation and survival. Other themes included the construction and redefinition of meaning within the job; the transition from new to experienced officer; the existence of

elements of the prison officer sub-culture as a coping strategy; and the way in which the emphasis on security and Control and Restraint during the initial training course reflected critical occupational values and embodied much of trainee officers' occupational socialisation.

#### **Publications:**

Arnold, H. (2005) 'The Effects of Prison Work', in A. Liebling and S. Maruna (eds) *The Effects of Imprisonment*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

Arnold, H. (2008) 'The Experience of Prison Officer Training', in J. Bennett, B. Crewe and A. Wahidin (eds) *Prison Staff*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

Arnold, H. (in progress) 'Prison Officers: Thought, Talk, Action and Emotion'.

---

### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY AND THE CURRENT ROLE OF THE POA SINCE 1970**

*Claire Lea - PhD Research*

This is the first year of a study exploring the contemporary history and current role of the prison officers' union, the POA, at local and national level. The prison system in England and Wales has experienced poor industrial relations since the 1970's which have, on occasion, brought the prison system to crisis point (May, 1979; Woolf, 1991; Hurd, 2003). The POA is the principal union for public sector prison officers with some members in the private sector. It has been accused of cherishing narrow and destructive instincts, exacerbating difficult industrial relations and holding prison governors and the Prison Service to ransom. The POA positions its activities in terms of protecting the jobs, terms and conditions and health and safety of its members and ensuring security can be maintained in prisons. Recently, the POA has become more politically active with its campaign 'Prisons are not for Profit' and greater involvement in the wider trade union movement. In September 2008 the POA joined the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group, an alliance of more left-wing activist unions.

The main themes which are beginning to emerge are the way power and legitimacy flows within the POA and in its external relationships with local and national Prison Service management, other unions and non-governmental organisations. Traditionally, two constituencies have been identified in the POA: the National Executive Committee (NEC) which has been viewed as the power base and source of militancy, and the local POA branches which have tended to engage in benign relationships with governors in most establishments. There appears to be a third activist faction within the POA which is more politically motivated and predisposed towards exercising the POA's industrial muscle despite the illegality of industrial action and the risk of imprisonment and the sequestration of assets. The interplay of these constituencies determines the conduct of industrial relations nationally and locally. Members of the Prison Service and the POA have suggested that the best industrial relations are found in the high security estate where the best staff/prisoner relationships and lower levels of 'traditional culture' have been identified. Union activity is higher in prisons with traditional culture and these mechanisms need to be explored.

Working papers have been prepared on whether prison officers should have the right to strike, the history of the POA and the

POA's position on privatisation and the broader contestability agenda.

---

### **IS CANADA EXCEPTIONAL?**

*Rachelle Larocque – PhD Research*

In the last ten years, criminological literature has been dominated by discussions of the "new punitiveness," most prominently in the United States. While historically and structurally similar to the United States and Britain, less focus examines the emergence of punitive ideologies in the Canadian context. The available literature illustrates a divided system with both liberal humanitarian and punitive attitudes. In one view, Canada's imprisonment rates have remained relatively stable since the 1960s with only small fluctuations during the 1990s; there is no consistent upward trend in Canada's prison rate. In contrast, criminological scholars argue that the current definition of punitiveness is too narrow and should include other aspects of punishment such as the psychological effects of imprisonment which may have detrimental effects on the prisoners overall well-being; some argue this is punitive. While the state of Canada's penal practices is a contentious issue within the criminological community, what is clear, however, is the need for more research on Canadian penal policy. Therefore, my thesis research will address this gap by examining to what extent Canadian penal policy and practice can be characterised as ever having been liberal humanitarian, and to what extent its current form is either liberal humanitarian or punitive. This type of research is a novel and important contribution to Canadian criminological literature as it will provide a contemporary examination of current Canadian penal trends and policies.

A number of studies examine imprisonment rates of several countries, but tend to exclude or subsume Canada under other English speaking countries thereby including Canada as part of the larger punitive trend without sufficient evidence to sustain this claim. The tendency to generalize across countries must be cautioned, especially since Canada's culture of crime is quite distinct from the United States, despite being geographically linked. To understand the current situation in Canadian penal policy, my thesis will explore a variety of criteria most commonly associated with studies in prison research such as imprisonment rates, suicide rates, parole rates, administrative segregation, complaints, legislation, human rights violation and quality of life in order to determine whether they suggest liberal humanitarian or punitive attitudes. In addition, a focus on issues of depth, weight and tightness as well as elements of "Scandinavian Exceptionalism" will be considered in an attempt to provide a better understanding of the prison experience in Canada's federal institutions.

---

### **Prisons Research Centre**

Institute of Criminology  
Sidgwick Avenue  
CAMBRIDGE CB3 9DA  
Tel: 01223 335364  
Fax: 01223 335356

<http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/research/prc/>