

Book review

Lee Delaney reviews *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* by David Garland. Oxford University Press.

The *Culture of Control* follows in the footsteps of Garland's previous books *Punishment and Welfare* (1985), and *Punishment and Modern Society* (1990). He retraces the steps of these works, bringing them together in a larger analysis of the forces which have propelled the criminal justice system in the USA and UK throughout the last century. From a correctionalist philosophy, through the law and order agenda, to the populist policies of the modern mainstream political parties.

Yet it covers more than merely the development of the criminal justice system. While it is undoubtedly an institution with its own driving force and internal dynamics, it does not exist in a vacuum. The thrust of Garland's argument is that the shape the criminal justice system now takes has been moulded by the development of wider society, in particular the transition of the Western capitalist nations into the period of late modernity. This transition has brought about a shift in social relations, which have had widespread repercussions.

Modernity, for Garland, is embodied by the welfarist policies and philosophy that came to

were much lower, the phenomenon of crime itself was less visible, and there existed a significant spatial gap between the upstanding citizenry of the ruling classes and the delinquent lower classes, in whose areas crime was seen to be concentrated.

But what happened to undermine the dominance of penal-welfarism? Garland takes us through the history of the political and economic events of the 20th century out of which the backlash against penal-welfarism was able to grow. Crime rates have increased steadily over the last century and came to reach record levels towards the later decades. Western liberal democracies have thus become high crime societies, as Garland terms them. The growth of the media has meant that crime was not only occurring more often, but it was also becoming more and more visible. This in turn affected the political world. As crime rates continued to increase year by year, the methods of the criminal justice system began to be questioned.

Crime was no longer a fact of life only for the lower classes. It was a society-wide phenomenon. It was now on the doorsteps of the middle-class

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characterise the American and British states up until the 1970s. The industrial revolution and subsequent growth of capitalism had increased class antagonisms as the middle and upper classes enjoyed growing wealth and prosperity off the labour of the working class. The introduction of welfare provisions in the USA and UK was a response to these antagonisms, a peace offering from the bourgeoisie to lull the workers into acquiescence.

Welfarism provided better housing, better education and better healthcare for those in need and was intended to take the edge off the more extreme realities of capitalism. However it was the middle class who had the most to gain. They grew in strength and confidence as their children took advantage of free education to follow their parents into new areas of work, social care, probation, psychology etc., that were maintaining welfare policies.

The effect of modernism on the criminal justice system was one of professionalisation. The main policies for dealing with crime and punishment were created by policy makers, who looked to criminal justice experts. These experts became the very members of the middle classes who were benefiting from welfare provision. Crime was not at that time the major political issue it is today -- rates of crime

professionals and became an issue of great importance in the political realm. Furthermore, the return of the economies to the boom and recession cycle meant that full employment became a dream. There now existed a steady and consistent group who were unemployed, sitting idly by, 'sponging off' welfare while everyone else went out to work. The middle classes began to question their support for welfarism, and hence the rehabilitative ideals of the criminal justice system. Now that crime was on their doorsteps it became harder for them to be so sympathetic towards the perpetrators of these acts. They no longer saw criminals as poor and deprived, in need of help. Now they were a threat to their property and their safety.

After the 1970s we began to see an admission within criminal justice circles, that the war against crime was being lost and the best that could be done was to try and control it and maintain it at a certain level. This paved the way for the reassertion of retributionist penalty. If criminals could not be corrected to stop them committing crimes, then the best thing to do would be to just punish them for punishment's sake.

The punitive philosophy of today's criminal justice system is a more extreme form of what was actually intended, and has strong elements of social control.

Garland argues that this is in direct response to the new instability created by rising crime, economic insecurity and growing social tensions, undermining the legitimacy of the nation-state to rule over its citizens.

The 1980s saw the birth of a new conservatism within US and UK society. The left suffered great defeats in both countries as the ruling class sought to affirm its control of the population and protect its economic interests. The criminal justice system got caught up in this reaction. The professional elite was abandoned as increasingly populist governments sought quick fixes to appease the voting public.

A new intellectual base grew in this atmosphere producing the crime prevention orientated criminology that currently dominates the subject. Within such discourse the causes of crime are reduced to physical factors such as situation or opportunity. The social aspects of criminality are theorised out of discussions. The state is thus able to defer some of the responsibility for crime control into wider society. Prevention becomes a matter of individuals investing in alarm systems, steering-wheel locks, etc. Crime is big business.

Garland's book offers a highly sophisticated analysis. Throughout he manages to avoid the pitfalls to which weaker theorists of a Marxist persuasion will succumb. He avoids over stressing the influencing factors of both the economic and political realms. One does not entirely rule the other. Instead their relationship is one of interdependence in which conscious actors make conscious decisions. As Garland points out in the book, nothing that has occurred has been inevitable. This is a

comforting thought. The steamrolling populism of neo-conservatism is leading the criminal justice system into harsher and harsher forms. But all the while there is the opportunity for people to step in and alter this course. It is reassuring that there are critical writers like Garland who are continuing the struggle and do not resort to the opportunism of left realism, remaining firmly within the revolutionary tradition.

The strongest aspect of the book is that it is very timely. It fits in well with the general level of activism and dissatisfaction with the extremes of capitalism that we've seen on the streets of various world cities in recent years. Democracy is continually being eroded as multi-national corporations become ever more powerful. Governments are unwilling to check this progression.

The state was formerly the vehicle through which the conflict between the ruling and working class was mediated. Now, however, capital is taking it upon itself to dampen the harsher aspects of its accumulation. Corporations are becoming more and more involved in social issues and organisation. The state is standing idly by and allowing this to happen. We are finding more and more schools, hospitals and other social services being funded and maintained by private capital. The criminal justice system is very much a part of this process. And this is exactly what Garland is tracing throughout the book.

Lee Delaney is the IT Officer for the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. He recently completed an MA in Political Philosophy at the University of York.

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