

Editorial

Rebecca Roberts introduces this issue of *cjm*.

*While the pages of Criminal Justice Matters frequently examine and assess criminal justice policies and often make recommendations on how to reform the system, this edition takes a more reflexive approach. Rather than focus on the nature of criminal justice reforms, this issue of *cjm* shines a spotlight on the reformers.*

Edited by **Jamie Bennett** (Governor of HMP Morton Hall and editor of the *Prison Service Journal*), the themed section of *cjm* brings together a wide range of contributors to critically evaluate and discuss strategies for reforming (and in some cases abolishing) different aspects of the criminal justice system. The contributions encourage dialogue about strategies for reform, raising questions about the dilemmas and challenges faced by those interested in bringing about change in criminal justice. Thomas Mathiesen's work (1974; 2004) has long highlighted the contradictions in reform, identifying the conflicts between short- and long-term reform and reform versus revolution – the themes of which are picked up in many of the articles here. As Jamie Bennett discusses in his excellent introduction, penal reform 'is a contested area with many different ideas about what this means and whether it is possible at all'.

A number of contributions to this issue of *cjm* emerge from a debate the Centre hosted in January 2009 on the challenges facing the criminal justice voluntary sector in a period of commissioning and contestability. The challenge of retaining a coherent and genuinely independent vision for reform in the face of the enormous financial and political pressures was a key theme to come out of that debate. This issue of *cjm* continues this debate. We would like to thank the LankellyChase Foundation for supporting the original debate and the publication of this issue of *cjm*.

In addition to the work on penal reform *cjm* 77 features a series of fascinating articles in our 'Topical Issues and Comment' section. **Bernard Gallagher** is critical of public ignorance regarding child sexual abuse, which centres largely on the popular myth that child sex offenders are anonymous strangers. Highlighting the evidence indicating that most sexual abuse occurs in the home, he calls for a government-led public education campaign similar to road safety initiatives. Such a public discussion may be uncomfortable for some, but is

essential in beginning to address such instances of hidden harm, Gallagher argues.

Victoria Brittain tells the story of the 'forgotten detainees' – Muslim men held prisoner by the British state – and highlights the failure of the legal system in protecting them and their families. Brittain argues that their experiences 'show British racism and Islamophobia at the official level, encouraged across the media and have served as a form of social control of the Muslim community in general'. The hidden victims of the 'war on terror' have found themselves subject to stringent state control and denied access to proper trial and legal process.

Philip Whitehead warns that the ongoing restructuring of prisons and probation will further erode the role of probation and leave the criminal justice system 'unbalanced' with an overwhelming emphasis on punishment. **Helen Mills** at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies reports on research undertaken by the Centre on the use and impact of community sentences. The evidence suggests that the community order and suspended sentence order has had very little impact in reducing the use of custody and has failed to tackle the problem of 'uptariffing'.

Robert Chernomas and **Ian Hudson** describe the phenomenon of 'social murder' whereby conservative economic policies and corporate activities are routinely responsible for many deaths in what the authors describe as a 'corporate pandemic'. Reflecting on current economic and social conditions, Chernomas and Hudson conclude that 'the current conservative policy environment has made our society less healthy, more dangerous, less stable and more unequal.'

As always, *cjm* and the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies aims to encourage and facilitate discussion about an understanding of the complex nature of issues concerning crime and related harms. In doing so, we are keen to encourage a space for thinking critically about the role of criminal justice in addressing harm and the range of social, economic and political interventions necessary to create a society in which everyone benefits from justice, safety, economic and social security. ■

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