Reviews

Book Review
Neoliberalism and prison management

The limits of neoliberalism: Authority, sovereignty and the logic of competition
By William Davies
Publisher: Sage (2017)
ISBN: 978-1-5264-0352-0 (paperback)
Price: £15.99

Prison management, prison workers, and prison theory: Alienation and power
By Stephen McGuinn
Publisher: Lexington Books (2015)
ISBN: 978-0-7391-9433-1 (hardback)
Price: £29.95 (hardback)

Key issues in corrections (second edition)
By Jeffrey Ian Ross
Publisher: Policy Press (2016)
ISBN: 978-1-4473-1872-9 (hardback) 978-1-4473-1873-6 (paperback)
Price: £70.00 (hardback) £23.99 (paperback)

Neoliberalism is a term that is used widely in academic literature and indeed increasingly in the broadsheet press. As described by William Davies, Reader in political economy at Goldsmith's, University of London, this term describes the transformation that has taken place in public life and has seen the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-endorsed norms (p.xiv). It is a process that has seen 'economic calculation…spread into all walks of life' and has involved 'the disenchantment of politics by economics' (p.xiv). In others words economic rationality has become such a powerful way of thinking about the world that it has displaced more value-based approaches. This has certainly been seen in prisons and other public sector organisations, where the rise of managerialism, with the focus on targets, audits and budgets has come to dominate.

In his book, *The limits of neoliberalism*, Davies argues that neoliberalism has gained an intense hold on public policy since the 1980s. He argues that this has come to be accepted as the norm by all political parties and major social organisations: 'The powerlessness of political or moral authorities to shape and direct society differently demonstrates how far the neoliberal critique of economic planning has permeated' (p.5). This domination, he argues has been so powerful that he draws upon the work of sociologist Luc Boltanski to describe this as creating a 'regime of violence' where there is no space to offer alternative visions and contest the domination of neoliberalism. From this perspective, it has become taken for granted as a foundation for public policy and practice. Despite this spine-chilling description of the ideological hold of neoliberalism, Davies, nevertheless argues that the grip is beginning to loosen. He suggests that the economic crisis in 2008 and the subsequent period of austerity has undermined the legitimacy of neoliberalism, the formerly taken for granted position is now contingent, and a space is opening up for contest and challenge.

It is within this context that it is worth considering two recent books that address prison management in America. The first is by Stephen McGuinn, an assistant professor of criminal justice at Quinnipiac University. His book *Prison management, prison workers and prison theory* is a report of a quantitative study drawing upon data from the Federal Bureau of Prisons Annual Prison Social Climate Survey, conducted on staff between 2006 and 2010. The study illustrates that organisations that deploy softer forms of power, such as legitimate, expert and referent power generate greater levels of employee commitment, rather than those that deploy coercive or reward power. Coercive power, however, does not have a detrimental impact upon efficacy according to this study. In other words, bosses that crack the whip can still get good outcomes, albeit at the cost of worker commitment and engagement. The study is also concerned with worker alienation, which this study shows leads to reduced efficacy and emotional hardening. It could be suggested that such results are unsurprising, but nevertheless, there is some value in providing this empirical evidence. It is also to be applauded that the premise of this study is that correctional employees are worthy of this attention.

The weakness of this study is that it is derived solely from quantitative data and does not involve any closer engagement with those who work in prisons. In the UK there is a strong recent

history of qualitative and ethnographic research on prison officers,[1] prison managers[2] and other staff working in prisons.[3] This has revealed in rich detail the complex and sometimes messy realities of prison work. The solutions proposed in McGuinn's book, in contrast appear simplistic and unrealistic. For example, he argues:

'Throughout this book, I largely contend that civil society should clearly define prison intention and prison philosophy *and* that prison will be successful if it consistently and fairly meets those definitions' (p.34, italics in original)

There have been many attempts to define the purpose and philosophy of prisons. This has never settled matters as the purpose of the prison is continually contested so that it shifts and evolves over time and between places. The simplicity with which McGuinn presents this argument comes across as callow. Similarly in relation to the use of discretion by prison staff, McGuinn argues that all rules should be codified with the area of discretion prescribed and officers made accountable by recording in detail any deviations or uses of discretion (p.14-17). This view that people operate with perfect knowledge, strictly in conformity with published rules and generating complete documentation, seems to be speculation on the potential of advanced artificial intelligence rather than a description of the realities of the fallible, contested and crafted ways in which prison staff negotiate order and exercise discretion on the ground. There is a concern that in producing such remote and mechanistic analysis, McGuinn is legitimising the use of neoliberal governance, in particular managerial techniques such as making prison work auditable so as to intensify control, and the deployment of human resource management so as to enlist the subjective capacities of workers, recreating them as self-managing corporate citizens.

In contrast, Professor Jeffrey Ross from University of Baltimore, offers a more critical perspective. Ross is one of the founders of the 'convict criminology' movement, which is concerned with ensuring that the voice and experience of prisoners is incorporated into academic discourse. This book is broad rather than narrow, attempting to offer an overview of the experience of prison for prisoners, but also the challenges for staff and administrators. It is primarily intended for an undergraduate audience but could usefully be read by professionals. The book draws upon a wide range of research, and other evidence including legal cases, personal testimony and popular culture. In doing so, it takes a consistently sceptical perspective on prisons, presenting uncomfortable findings and posing awkward questions. Ross concludes by acknowledging: 'I do not expect every reader to agree with the evidence I marshalled or my interpretation and conclusions…'. This is one of the most significant and welcomed aspects of the book. Ross recognises that prisons are shaped by contested values and that academia is one of the fields in which this struggle is enacted. Research, analysis and teaching are not politically neutral activities, but are saturated with meaning and contribute to the power struggle.

As William Davies noted, neoliberalism is in the ascendancy, but is coming under closer scrutiny and challenge. The books by McGuinn and Ross illustrate that this is the case in prison management as much as in other fields, where polarised views are being adopted and values contested. Together these books set out the field of struggle, and also invite readers to engage with the question: whose side are you on?

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1 . For example see Crawley, E. (2004) Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private Lives of Prison Officers Cullompton: Willan; Liebling, A., Price, D. and Shefer, G. (2011) The Prison Officer Second edition Abingdon: Willan.

2. For example see Bryans, S. (2007) Prison Governors: Managing prisons in a time of change Cullompton: Willan; Bennett J (2015) The working lives of prison managers: Global change, local culture and individual agency in the late modern prison Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

3. For example see Bennett, J. Crewe, B. and Wahidin, A. (eds) (2008) Understanding Prison Staff Cullompton: Willan.

Book Review

An introduction to green criminology and environmental justice

By Angus Nurse
Publisher: Sage (2016)
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The scale of the environmental challenge facing the world has been starkly outlined by the United Nations, who have stated that:

> *Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow.*[1]

1. Available at http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change-2/ accessed on 27 May 2017