

Editorial Comment

This is the first edition of *Prison Service Journal* published since the General Election. The issue of crime and imprisonment featured little in a campaign that focussed more particularly on the economy, immigration and investment in public services such as health and education. The manifestos of the main political parties differed to some degree in the detail, but the broad strategies were to continue with levels of imprisonment that are high in comparison with Western European neighbours. This broad political consensus about prisons in contemporary society is picked up in several of the articles in this edition.

The issue of prison numbers is directly discussed in two pieces by a leading academic and a leading commentator. In her article, Professor Nicola Lacey argues that this 'counterproductive stalemate' where public figures are concerned about the impact of looking 'soft on crime' means that the social and economic costs of imprisonment are ignored in the public debate. She argues that if the public were presented with the opportunity to engage with this, support for high imprisonment would wane. Richard Garside from the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies takes up this theme arguing that the use of imprisonment is embedded in the wider social system and that high rates of imprisonment exist in countries where welfare provision is weaker and inequality is more pronounced. These two articles raise broad and fundamental arguments about the use of imprisonment and its relationship with society.

In his final interview for *PSJ* before his retirement, Phil Wheatley the Director General of the National Offender Management Service also explores the role of prisons in both their historical and contemporary context. Drawing upon over 40 years working in prisons and over a decade working at the most senior level of the criminal justice system, he describes how changes in prisons reflect broader changes such as attitudes to race as well the conduct of industrial relations and managerial practices. This interview provides a fascinating insight into the prison system

throughout that time and its leadership over the last decade. This will be essential reading for anyone who has worked in prisons or had an interest during that period.

PSJ always attempts to publish articles that are of value to practitioners as well as academics and this edition provides a rich resource in that regard. There has been a great deal of attention focussed on ex-armed services personnel in prisons. It is estimated that between three and seven thousand are in prison. This issue is explored by Michael Brookes, Chas Ashton and Amanda Holliss from HMP Grendon. They address the experiences of these veterans and discuss how the therapeutic regime at Grendon can be used to meet their needs. Marion Wilson's article on bereavement also has great practical value. This describes work carried out at HMP Everthorpe and uses this to draw out lessons that can be applied more widely. Rosie Meek, Kate Lowe and Kate McPhillips have contributed an article on the experiences of the effects of imprisonment on the siblings of young offenders. This is an issue that has not been widely considered in the past and this article provides an important role in highlighting the issue, emphasising its importance and providing an opportunity to reflect on what could be done to ameliorate the negative consequences and protect these young people. The final substantive article is written by Catherine Phillips, a correctional officer from Western Australia. *PSJ* is always pleased to have the opportunity to publish international work and that of those who work on the front line of prisons, particularly when they are written with such thought and intelligence.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the review of Ben Crewe's recent book *The Prisoner Society*. This book was based on a year of intensive research at HMP Wellingborough and provides a rich and enlightening insight into the prisoners world. This will be of value to those who work in prisons as much as those studying or researching prisons. It is set to become a contemporary classic.