CJM
CRIMINAL JUSTICE MATTERS

EDITORIAL

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The publication of the Woolf Report in 1991 has been widely seen as a watershed in the development of penal policy in this country. The Woolf Report was effective in consolidating a range of proposals which had been floating for some time and in presenting a package of penal measures which set a new tone and direction for penal reform.

For a relatively short period of time the Woolf Report has provided a point of focus for both prison reformers and government agencies. However, there are now growing signs that a change of direction is occuring and rather than imprisonment being seen as at best a necessary evil it is now being seen as a positive good. No longer is the size of the prison population to be seen as a negative indicator. Rather, according to Mr Howard, an increased prison population is necessary to reduce crime through a combination of specific and general deterrents.

Rod Morgan who was one of Woolfs' assessors, strongly opposes this recent change in government policy and foresees a new wave of riots and disturbances erupting in our increasingly overcrowded prisons.

Joe Sim, however, argues that Mr Howard's approach to imprisonment is not all that different from that of previous Home Secretaries and warns against the tendency to embrace Woolf's recommendations uncritically.

Andrew Ashworth and **Barbara Hudson** both comment on what is seen as one of the most significant 'U' turns in recent government policy - the abandonment of the principles of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act and the rapid passing of a new Criminal Justice Act in 1993.

Some of these reversals and paradoxes of penal policy are discussed by **Stephen Pryor** who is the governor of High Down Prison. **Alvin Bronstein** examines the proposition that more imprisonment will reduce crime from an American vantage point. The expansion of the penal system in California, he argues, has not only failed to reduce crime but has also drained valuable resources away from other services such as education.

Another recent measure which has attracted considerable attention and debate is the planned introduction of secure training centres for 12 to 14 year old offenders to be run by private agencies. **John Harding** expresses some scepticism in relation to these proposals and points to some of the problems which are associated with the introduction of these new regimes.

Taking a very different point of reference **Roy King** examines some of the changes which have been taking place in Russia and looks at the prospects of penal reform in a country undergoing substantial social, economic and political change.

Bringing the focus sharply back to the situation in Britain **Alison Leibling** outlines some of the measures which have been introduced to deal with the problem of suicides in prison. **Mary Eaton** offers an examination of the current position of women's prisons and looks at some of the more innovative programmes which have been developed in certain institutions.

Finally, **Mick Ryan** discusses an issue which has become increasingly central to debates about the future of imprisonment not only in this country but around the world.

The impression which arises from this range of timely and thought provoking articles is that the debate on imprisonment has reached a new crossroads. There are a number of conflicting policy choices available and they are all being strongly contested. The debate is characterised by swings of mood from optimism to pessimism, and by swings of policy from centralisation to decentralisation.

At the heart of this debate is an important discussion about the purposes and organisation of imprisonment, which is of significance not only to the growing number of people who are experiencing incarceration but also to those communities to which these prisoners will ultimately return.

Roger Matthews & Julia Braggins

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