

JOURNAL

PRISON SERVICE

November 2011 No 198



Editorial Comment

Prison Service Journal and the *Perrie Lectures* have a long-standing partnership. The Editorial Board are proud to be publishing two of the lectures from June 2011. These lectures took the theme: 'Imprisonment and its values: the cost of cuts'. The Perrie Lectures Committee is to be applauded for taking on such a theme and situating the crisis of public finances in a social and moral context.

The lectures published here are by Professor Alison Liebling, a world-renowned prison researcher, and Michael Spurr, Chief Executive Officer of the National Offender Management Service. Spurr takes an operational perspective, arguing that tighter managerial and financial control has enabled improvements in prisons, the experience of prisoners and re-offending rates. He also argues that whilst practitioners cannot choose how much finances are reduced by, they do have choices about what is cut and how this is done and through this discretion there is a space in which they can act with values. In contrast, Liebling argues that 'economic rationality' is becoming a pervasive way of viewing the world, excluding moral perspectives. She argues that in prisons this is pushing a move towards more commercially-informed practices including managerial monitoring and the increasing size of prisons. She argues instead for practices that are attuned to the human experiences of imprisonment, work and society at large. These two contributions are fascinating in themselves, but they also illuminate critical questions for the contemporary prison system. Most obviously, these questions are economic. How can expenditure of prisons be controlled or reduced? Can the expansion of the prison population be halted or reduced in order to stabilise costs? How can the market contribute towards economy either directly through competition or indirectly through importing ideas and practices? However, the questions facing prisons are also moral and go to the issue of legitimacy. How will the experience of prisoners and staff be affected? What do the public want and expect from the prison system? The system is at a particular time and place and a particular juncture where the future will be forged. These articles invite the reader not only to reflect upon those issues but also to actively participate in creating that future.

In the rest of this edition, there are articles on a range of issues. Amy Ludlow makes an important contribution to the analysis of prison unions, charting the regulation of their ability to take strike action. The article rightly ends by highlighting that the current challenges place the union at a critical juncture as much as the rest of the prison system. In their article, Kimmett Edgar and Chris Bath summarise the findings of research carried out for the ex-prisoner charity UNLOCK, which addresses the need to help people managing what are often already

limited finances. This article explores the individual effects of poverty and economic recession for those in prison.

Another area where economics and social policy intersect in a highly charged way is in the approach to migration. Liz Hales and Loraine Gelsthorpe contribute an article that sets out the expansion of migrant women in custody and outlines a research project focussing on the experiences and circumstances of these women. This is an example of how research can inform and challenge public policy, highlighting hidden issues such as trafficking. Although this is a work in progress, it is nevertheless a valuable insight into an unexplored world.

Other articles in this edition address how prison crises have been addressed at different times and in different places. Lars Thuesen and Laura Schmidt-Hansen describe work carried out in Denmark using a technique known as positive deviance which, like appreciative inquiry used in the UK, focuses on examples of good practice as a means of understanding and solving problems. The article describes how this approach has been used in order to understand and improve the practice of front-line prison workers. John Moore contributes a fascinating account of the innovative work of Alexander Maconochie, a prison governor on the Norfolk Island penal settlement in Australia, and at Birmingham prison in the mid 19th century. Many of his ideas, including conditional rewards, reducing offending on release, and developing meaningful work, can be seen echoing down the years to this very day. His eventual failure also stands as a poignant warning to those who follow in his footsteps.

Another fascinating historical piece is Yvonne Jewkes and Helen Johnson's emerging work on prisons during the two world wars. Their article is a tantalising glimpse of a forgotten history, delving into the impact on imprisonment and crime, the particular effects of war including air raids on prisons and questioning how the everyday world of the prison changed during those years. Their article introduces a research project they are developing and ends with a call to those who chart the history of individual establishments to contribute.

This edition closes with an interview with Danny Dorling, a professor of human geography who has a growing public profile. In this interview, he discusses inequality and wealth in the UK and its effects on society including crime and punishment. These are crucial issues that directly return to the questions posed in the Perrie Lectures.

There is a spread of articles in this edition, ranging from the narrow to the broad, from contemporary to historical and from the local to the global. What they have in common is the ability to challenge and excite the reader with the ideas, debates and controversies that characterise prison life.