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250th Special Edition

Editorial Comment

This specially commissioned edition is the 250th *Prison Service Journal*. *PSJ* was produced intermittently in 1960s, but was re-launched in 1971 with the first edition and has continued ever since. Throughout the intervening years, and 250 editions, it has always offered a space in which research and practice could connect. The Journal has, however, never been solely about trying to do imprisonment better. It has also been questioning, even provoking, seeking to ask sometimes uncomfortable questions about the role and function of imprisonment in contemporary society.

For the 200th edition of *PSJ* in 2012, a special edition was produced. This included re-publishing five articles from the first edition and commissioning distinguished practitioners and researchers to respond to those articles. This brought to light the many changes that had taken place in the intervening years but also the continuities. In many ways the problems and controversies of imprisonment are enduring.

For this special edition, a different approach was taken. A looser commission was offered to distinguished academics to take the past half century as a starting point for their own reflections, commentary and provocations. Each writer crafted their own distinctive contribution in their own unique voice.

The first article is on the topic of prisons and politics and is written by Richard Garside, Director of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, and a regular contributor to *PSJ*. His article traces the development of penal politics over the last half century. This has often been conventionally described as a period in which post-war liberalism waned, particularly in the 1980s, with a distinct punitive turn in the early 1990s and on to the current period of embedded punitiveness with historically high levels of imprisonment. Garside, however, offers a different account, noting the dramatic rise in the prison population from 1939 through to the 1960s, which then continued, albeit at a slower rate in the 1970s and 1980s, before intensifying in the 1990s. This account challenges any complacency about a 'golden age' and suggests a longer and more deeply entrenched history of penal punitiveness. Garside's account attempts to expose the ideologies at play in order to prompt a challenge. From this perspective, the current global crisis in both health (with the global coronavirus pandemic) and equality (with the killing of George Floyd and the rise of the

Black Lives Matter movement) offer an opportunity to rethink criminal justice institutions and their role in society.

In their article, Rod Earle and Bill Davies draw upon their own experiences of serving prison sentences and their subsequent careers in criminology. They sharply draw the reader into the reality of the experiences of imprisonment including the personal degradations. These experiences and their subsequent involvement in the 'convict criminology' movement has led them to a particular vantage point where they see the wider social role of imprisonment and see prison reform not solely as a matter of ameliorating poor conditions, but instead as an issue of social justice.

Professor Joe Sim, another regular contributor to *PSJ*, brings a critical and abolitionist perspective to the last half century. For Sim, the prison is a harmful institution that criminalises the marginalised and sustains the power structures of society. Sim continues to argue that liberal reform will not address the fundamental problems and that abolition is needed — a whole scale reconstruction of social relations and institutions including imprisonment. At the time he wrote the article, Sim saw grounds for optimism in the public agitation to release people from prison due to the threat from the coronavirus pandemic. Since then, the killing of George Floyd and revitalisation of the Black Lives Matter movement has given greater attention to radical ideas including abolishing and defunding the police. Sim has been a long-standing standard bearer for such arguments in relation to prisons.

The media representation of prisons is the topic of Sarah Moore's article. In particular, Moore uses representations on prison escapes to explore different and changing cultural ideas about prison and society. In the 1970s, Clint Eastwood in *Escape from Alcatraz* is the archetype of a prisoner escaping from a prison that is brutal and dehumanising. He is making a flight from the institution. In contrast, Red and Andy in *The Shawshank Redemption* are making a flight to their idealised fantasy of life on the Mexican coast. Moore goes on to discuss the more complicated depiction in the 2018 TV series *Escape at Dannemora* where the prison and the town it is situated in are monotonous, soulless and stuck in a rut. Dreams of escape are a fantasy for the inmates and workers. Through these representations, Moore outlines not only changes in

penal values and the growth of mass imprisonment, but also broader ideas of freedom and individuality in an increasingly homogenised world.

The fifth article is not a historical article, but instead reports research on the Learning Together initiative, which brings together students from universities and students from prisons. *Prison Service Journal* has always sought to integrate research, knowledge and practice, and therefore the Learning Together initiative is one that *PSJ* has an affinity and solidarity with. This important research shows how the programme has had a positive impact on those who have engaged and it is as much in the social connectedness as the academic content that personal transformation is achieved. This important work offers a new way of thinking about the relationships between prisons and communities and about learning and development in prisons. It is a contribution that has the potential to shape the next 50 years.

As well as the specially commissioned articles, this edition also has the first interview with the Chief Executive Officer of HMPPS, Dr. Jo Farrar. *PSJ* has regularly published interviews with senior figures including those who lead prisons. It is therefore fitting to have this important voice from inside the prison system included in this edition.

As well as marking the 250th edition of *Prison Service Journal*, this is also the first to be published following the passing of Dr. Ruth Mann. Ruth was a distinguished forensic psychologist and editorial board member of *PSJ*. Her work in prisons drew upon research to inform practice in progressive ways. In particular, she was at the forefront of developing innovative interventions for people who had committed sexually violent offences. She also made a major contribution to

promoting rehabilitative cultures in prisons. Her work for *Prison Service Journal* leaves an important legacy, including special editions on responses to sexual offending, published in 2008, and on reducing prison violence, in 2016. Her most recent contributions included two articles, published in 2018 and 2019 that outlined and promoted the practices of a rehabilitative culture. In these articles, Ruth argued that, 'Rehabilitative culture is focused on enabling change — not on creating or maintaining stability'. This could be a description of her own practice, restlessly and imaginatively seeking ways to make a change and have a positive influence. The 2019 article closes with another telling description:

'...it is my observation that the most powerful understanding of, and efforts towards, rehabilitative culture in a prison occurs when it is personally driven by the prison's senior operational leadership, involving all levels and disciplines of staff, and when the men or women residing in that prison have a voice and role in culture change too. It is in these prisons where the most exciting transformational work is taking place.'

Of course Ruth personally led the changes she wanted to see, she would bring people together and energise them. She would gently take people along with her, getting them to do things that were difficult or uncomfortable, but could be the catalyst for change. It was in these moments that she had a profound impact on those around her.

The 250th edition of *Prison Service Journal* is dedicated to the life and work of Dr. Ruth Mann.