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Re-integration of Ex-offenders

Editorial

The incarceration of men -and sometimes women - is generally not considered as a very satisfying reaction on criminal events. Incapacitation, retribution, rehabilitation, general and special prevention are the main reasons for sentencing offenders to imprisonment. But many people realise that a prison does not offer good opportunities to change their lives or to improve their attitudes. Imprisonment is rather seen as a necessary evil. Imprisonment can at best be considered as a compromise of the feelings that are related to crime: vengeance, despair and some compassion.

Nevertheless there seems to be, now and then, some hope that the goal of rehabilitation can be realised, that sentencing and execution of the penalty can contribute to a better life of the (ex-)offender. In the 1960s there was a belief that treatment of offenders and social programmes during imprisonment could rehabilitate offenders. In the 1980s this optimism was relieved by the idea that 'nothing works'. At the end of the 1990s there seems to grow - at least in some countries - slightly some optimism that imprisonment does not necessarily lead to recidivism. This new attention for improvement of ex-offenders lives is quite pragmatic. The rehabilitative efforts are not oriented on changing the personality but on improving the chances for employment of ex-offenders.

George Burns of the British National Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) suggests that criminal justice system programmes for offenders are seeking a new balance between treatment approaches and the creation of opportunities. In the first article of this issue he reflects on the policy frameworks which give rise to these approaches, and considers the danger that criminal justice systems may place emphasis on diverting people from crime without directing them towards opportunities for re-integration. The author considers the needs of offenders in relation to housing and employment in particular.

According to Andrew McCall the challenge of effectively re-integrating offenders into society and reducing crime, with all its attendant costs, is a growing one. He emphasises however that the success in meeting that challenge will depend upon the commitment and leadership shown by the political masters. For the past five years the European Offender Employment Group (now Forum; EOEF) has been seeking for political initiatives and good practices in the European countries. The EOEF has gathered a large amount of information about projects all over Europe and has benefited from debates amongst policy makers and practitioners. McCall informs about positive, practical steps which can be taken to improve the opportunities for ex-offenders

. Nancy Loucks, Olwen Lyner and Tom Sullivan underline that punishment for a crime does not necessarily end with the completion of a sentence; the stigma of a criminal record may follow people for years after they have 'paid' for their offence. A clear example of this is the tendency to refuse employment to people with a criminal record, often irrespective of whether the offence relates to the post in question. The research described, *Regulating the Yellow Ticket*, exposes the fact that employment policies in many countries either actively discriminate against or simply fail to protect people who have a criminal record. As an example of how to deal with the problems encountered by ex-offenders, the *Coping with Convictions Unit* is described. This Northern Irish project (established in 1995) attempts to engage directly with employers and thereby bring about fundamental changes in their recruitment practices and perhaps more importantly their attitudes to ex-offender applicants.

> Peter Nelissen did research on attitudes of prisoners and personnel toward rehabilitation. He noticed in practice the ignorance of a objective, rational approach of correctional intervention and decided to investigate the psycho-social conditions to develop such an approach. The author stresses that he has certainly not an unrealistic belief in the possible renaissance of the rehabilitation ideal. In his view imprisonment can however - according to humane standards - not do without these programmes.

Moreover, these programmes may perform a very important counterbalancing, positive function in an essentially detrimental and negative environment. Correctional research shows fruitful attempts to improve the effectiveness of at least some correctional interventions with at least some offenders. One of the results of this research is that positive attitudes towards rehabilitation seem to be most strong early during imprisonment.

Alison Rieple discusses an important -and mostly forgotten - possibility to stimulate ex-offenders to live

a non-criminal life: the start of a business for their own. The attitude and background of ex-offenders do not refer naturally to work for pay. According the research results of Rieple ex-prisoners do score quite high on a test for enterpreneural capacities when compared to civil servants or nurses. This research shows that there might be a discrepancy between capacities of ex-offenders and the opportunities to start their own business. Offenders could during imprisonment be better prepared for an enterprising life after imprisonment.

Fred Hoogenboom informs about Dutch policy and experiments with the re-integration of ex-offenders. Early in 1994 a new policy paper of the Dutch Minister of Justice was published: Effective Detention. The policy paper set three goals for the regimes in the prisons: they should be liveable and humane, they should become more austere, and extra facilities (vocational training, education, help from specialist staff) should only be given to people who really needed them, or who showed the motivation to use them well. This was the start of new activities that led to the development of effective programmes to integrate prisoners into the labour market at the end of the sentence. A very successful project to do so is described.

In the section Current Issues a summary of the White Paper No More Excuses: A New Approach to Tackling Youth Crime in England and Wales is published. The editors of the European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research would like to encourage the debate on the British proposals concerning youth crime. In the next issue comments on the British proposals will be published. The Current Issues also contains a report on Football Violence in Greece by Nestor Courakis. The Crime Institute Profile is written by József Vígh of the Department of Criminology of the Eötvös Lorand University in Budapest, Hungary.