Social Work & Social Sciences Review 12(2) 2005 pp.74-77

Reviews

Crime and Justice 1750-1950

Barry Godfrey and Paul Lawrence

Cullompton, Devon, Willan Publishing, 2005, 208 pp.
ISBN 1 84392 117 X (hbk) £40.00 / 1 84392 116 2 (pbk) £17.99

This publication is a fascinating read for anyone who has an interest in the development of the criminal justice process over the period of time 1750 to 1950.

Godfrey and Lawrence have produced this book from a series of teaching projects that they have been involved in through their work with Keele University and the Open University. There is no doubt that this is the genesis of the book and it is written in a didactic style; once one is used to this, it does not form a barrier to the reader enjoying the book's contents.

The choice of dates is an interesting one. As Godfrey and Lawrence note, 1750 marks the beginning of any organised form of policing and thinking about the criminal justice system while 1950 marks a time where we see the modern systems in place. There is a robust legitimacy about this; however, there have been such significant developments in this field in the past decade that I found myself at the end of the book wanting to see an additional chapter tracing recent changes, not least the recent response and legislation around anti-social behaviour. This would have fitted in well with the rest of the book.

The book is separated into two parts; the first part is a series of chapters charting the development of the criminal justice process from the beginning of the semi-organised system through to today's more formal and organised system. The second part considers the changes in perceptions of crime in relation to specific issues. This works well and gives the book an interesting flow while at the same time making it a book which can be dipped into for specific information. Each chapter has a list of publications entitled *introductory reading* offering a handful of essential texts around the chapter subject. At the end of the chapter, there are a number of *key questions* which are designed to encourage the reader to think more widely around the issue – with some interesting hints as to how to begin that process. Finally, each chapter has a helpful *further reading* list. These sections add to the sense that this is a textbook aimed at students of the criminal justice process; again, this should not act as a barrier to others who simply have an interest in the subject.

At the end of the book, there is a glossary – always helpful in a publication of this

type – and an immensely useful timeline of key events. In addition, throughout the book, there are nearly 30 charts and illustrations, along with many quotes offering an invaluable 'real time' insight into the themes being discussed. The inclusion of these, along with a comprehensive index, makes this book accessible to anyone with an interest in the subject.

The first chapter traces the development of the formal police force from its very early amateur and idiosyncratic days – where each parish or local area would appoint its own people to keep order - to the professional force that we are much more familiar with today. This lays the foundation for the rest of the book as it discusses some important themes which arise throughout the following chapters – not least around the professionalisation of the whole criminal justice system.

The chapter considering the role of the victim has great relevance for students of modern day policy. It discusses both the practice and the ideological stance around the rights and role of the victims of crime. Historical illustrations and examples of practice offer an interesting insight into this matter.

The chapter entitled *Criminal others: women and children* is a very helpful inclusion in this book. The discussion of the perennial issue of whether youth crime should be treated by way of care or control, while brief, is well done and makes its points effectively. Equally, the discussion of the treatment and punishment of women convicted of offences offers interesting insights.

This well presented book was a fascinating read and it can be recommend to all – student, teacher or indeed anyone interested in the development of the criminal justice process.

Andy Lloyd
Teaching Fellow, University of Leeds
a.lloyd@leeds.ac.uk

Social Work: Theory and practice for a changing profession

Lena Dominelli

London, Polity Press, 2004. 320pp.
ISBN 0 74562 382 4 (hbk.) £55.00 / 0 74562 383 2 (pbk.) £17.99

For some time now the profession of social work has been in something of a paradoxical position. The period in which social workers were used a 'whipping boys' for everything the New Right saw as evil and degenerate about the welfare state appear to be over. With the introduction of a new three year degree, accompanied by bursaries and a public campaign encouraging people to train as social workers, as well as record numbers of students training at universities, the future of the profession appears more secure than it has for a long time. Yet life is far from happy in the world of social work. A

wealth of talented and experienced staff leave the profession every year, many bitter and disillusioned. Morale in almost all areas is extremely low, and more than ever, staff in the many offices and departments wonder what the point of it all is.

The truth is that the price paid for the present consolidation has been the domination of the profession by managerial and financially driven administrative regimes. Together these have constrained and undermined the capacity of social workers to act in a way which bears witness to the values which brought them into the work in the first place. The ascendancy of neo-liberalism has seen social work trapped in a pincer movement. Neo-liberalism at the level of economic policy continues to create new ghettoes of deprivation, for which New Labour looks anxiously at social work to 'prove its worth' and socialise these recalcitrants into model citizens. At the same time neo-liberalism at the level of social policy requires social work to clothe itself within the language of consumerist managerialism, epitomised by the obsession with performance management and targets, a discourse which, whatever its other failings, bears little relationship with the actual situations social workers encounter on a day to day basis. How therefore does a profession whose value base has sought, however unevenly, an appreciation of the social dimension of individual problems, manage in such an age? How do practitioners who seek to be person-centred negotiate a world where the worthiness of persons is determined by their ability to adapt to the needs of capitalism?

It is these sorts of concerns about the fundamental direction of social work which are at the centre of this book. The unqualified simplicity of book's title - social work – indicates that this is a book which seeks to restate the original purpose of the profession. Dominelli herself is one of social work's foremost academic spokespersons, and one would be hard pressed to find a single social work course in the UK where her work is not extensively cited and recommended. She has worked in the field of social work academia for over 20 years and is currently President of the International Schools of Social Work. Her work comes out of the impetus created by the new social movements of the 1970s; feminism, anti-racism and anti-oppressive practice have been central to her work. Like many people of this political generation, social work was attractive precisely because it provided a space in which the concerns of the social movements were able to be taken up and addressed within state policy. The floridly reactionary attacks on social work during the Thatcher years followed by the stealthy obliteration of welfarist principles under New Labour have, for the moment, defeated this aspirations of this generation. The central purpose of this book is to consider how the mantle can once again be picked up.

One of Dominelli's key opening themes is a defence of the concept of professionalism. While those on the radical wing of social work have historically looked askance at the idea of professionalism, Dominelli presents this as a vital resource for resisting the encroachment of managerial imperatives. This illustrates one of the most useful aspects of the book; not only does it restate the value of the labour which social workers carry out, it articulates a place from which students and practitioners can and must wage a 'war of position' in order to defend the judgements they make about complex situations. Professionalism thus becomes a means to resist the 'call-centre' model of social Work

which is presently being imposed. The message is reinforced by case studies which illustrate the way in which people engaged in 'mediating the social' (pp.15) really make a difference. One example she presents is the Crossroads Community Justice Team (pp.242-245). This project demonstrates the way 'responsibility', a key New Labour theme, can be effectively reframed by being placed within a collectivist framework. The project cited takes as its starting point the fact that the victims of anti-social behaviour are people who live intimately with the perpetrators. This example shifts the debate beyond simply denouncing the authoritarianism of New Labour's ASBO-driven agenda, and demonstrates how simple forms of social networking and negotiation can relocate agency away from the state towards communities, releasing people's own potential to address and resolve problems themselves. This example makes it clear that the fate of social work reflects society's view of 'the social'. Attempts to challenge neo-liberal social policy and managerialism must focus on the inability of these ideologies to produce the results that they themselves recognise as successful. Hence an attempt to debase social work impoverishes our sense of 'the social', and itself makes social problems more intractable. The need to put 'the social' back into social policy is the basis of the second main theme in the book, where Dominelli argues for a reconstructed discourse of citizenship, which is capable of dealing both with universality and difference.

Despite its many strengths, the book has not sought to develop the theory part of the theory-practice dyad, and in this sense it is typical of most social work texts, which by and large have failed to realise how much social theory has to offer to it. As people who are much more practically engaged with 'the social' than most branches of academic social science, it may seem odd that social work academics have appeared content to follow rather than lead debates on the theorisation of the social. Interestingly Dominelli is decidedly lukewarm about postmodernism. This may be reflective of how little post-modern theories of social work have to offer in any genuine challenge to neo-liberalism and managerialism. Indeed one would be hard pressed to think of a theoretical body which has had so little influence on practice than postmodernism, though it has of course influenced many in academia. While Dominelli's focus on citizenship toward the end of the book was welcome, any reconstructive project within social work will need more adequate theoretical tools than the profession has had to date. The work of Paulo Friere, particularly his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is an example of something which offers both a model both of how social work can be taught and practiced. Urgently we need theory capable of addressing real processes as they happen within practice at the same time as pointing towards transformative possibilities.

Stephen Cowden
Lecturer in Social Work
Coventry University