

Overview of the Issue

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In different ways the contributors to this issue provide both a critique of the status quo and visions of social justice. In the past few years, we have tended to pay more attention to theoretical and policy pieces and to disconnect them from praxis and movements for social change. This was in part a reflection of the decline of mass and popular reform movements in the Reagan era, resulting in a tendency to abstract theory from its concrete social and historical context. This separation of theory from practice was a mistake, for analysis of struggles and social movements enables us both to penetrate ideological mystifications and to discover the possibilities for human equality.

This issue includes critiques of current policies of social control. There is a growing recognition that critique is a distinctive form of knowledge which, along with empirical correlations and interpretations of social reality, represents a legitimate form of theorizing about social and political life. In the “Prison Struggles” section of this issue, we focus attention once again on the inhumanity, racism, and injustices of the U.S. prison system. Some 20 years ago, through its writings and activism the prison movement educated the public about the realities behind “corrections” and “rehabilitation.” With the demise of this movement and the rise of a mean-spirited, law-and-order lobby, the prison system and those it contains have been relegated to the periphery of social concerns.

Meanwhile, the prison system has grown at an unprecedented rate, hopelessness has become institutionalized, and it has condemned millions of people to lives of boredom, futility, and desperation in the name of punishment. Kamm Laurence, drawing upon his own personal experience working with prisoners, reminds us of the humanity of these “captive souls.”

Harry Mika and Jim Thomas urge us not to abandon legal remedies as an arena of struggle for prison reform. Their point is echoed in a series of articles about the efforts of women prisoners, along with their supporters in the community and civil libertarians, to expose and close down a special prison within a prison at Lexington, Kentucky. We are pleased to include the full text of an investigative report conducted by criminologist Richard Korn for the American Civil Liberties Union, as well as Gilda Zwerman’s systematic overview of the political and legal issues relating to the Lexington Women’s High-Security Unit. Through the efforts of prison and community activists, national attention has been focused on the Orwellian techniques being prac-

ticed in this “pastel prison.” As we go to press, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has promised to close down the special unit at Lexington — but it also plans to redirect women political prisoners to a massive control unit in Mariana, Florida.

In the “Community Struggles” section of this issue, two articles examine different aspects of political-legal struggles in the community. Deborah Baskin examines the social and political dynamics of neighborhood dispute resolution, a new form of control disguised as community empowerment which has emerged out of both the crisis in the state and popular efforts to participate in “conflict management.” Margaret Burnham sums up the efforts (now ended by the Thatcher government) of the Greater London Council to make the police more accountable to their constituencies.

Jenny Hocking systematically develops in the case of Britain a theme alluded to by Zwerman’s examination of Lexington: the application of counter-insurgency methods to the prisons, police, and criminal justice system under the rubric of countering terrorism. Stuart Henry also addresses this dimension of the struggle in England against this vast concentration and centralization of state power and for community control in his review of a book about the policing of industrial disputes.

This issue also has a very lively “Forum” section. Dragan Milovanovic provides a comprehensive appraisal of Critical Legal Studies, a progressive movement whose proponents have come under attack for daring to challenge the hegemony of conservative law professors at Harvard and other leading law schools. Milovanovic’s call for greater cooperation between critical legal scholars and progressive criminologists certainly deserves attention. The pieces by Herman and Julia Schwendinger and James Messerschmidt represent an important debate between progressives about gender, crime, and criminal justice. While the tone is quite adversarial, we think that the three authors raise important theoretical and ideological issues for our consideration. Please continue to send your comments on the debates we publish; we would also welcome your suggestions on topics you think we should cover in 1989.