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Newstateman.com is looking for a guest journalist to investigate and report on the British Prison system, your aim is to inform on the current situation regarding reoffending rates and argue either for or against reforming inmates during their sentence to prevent the rise of this number.

Prisons- Do we lock up or lock out

The best way to stop people from re-offending is to reform.

BY **ELIZA CUDMORE**



The Ministry of Justice assures us that crime rates are at an all time low, but why do we feel the need to double lock our doors at night? In October 2012 David Cameron insisted that 'criminals

can be punished and rehabilitated at the same time' but as younger people are sentenced to longer years, we struggle to believe this.

Following David Cameron's optimistic remark I pose this question, does the increase of reoffending inmates contradict him? In 2007 the Ministry of Justices reported that reoffending rates for prisons around the England varied from 26.7% to 76.6% for inmates who had served for less than a year. A survey taken showed that roughly three-quarters of inmates who didn't find a job after release were reconvicted in the same year. As these people spend more time in prison they become reliant on the facilities, the medical care and the overwhelming feeling that they are redundant from real life situations, if the government aims to reform the inmates does the idea of keeping them isolated counterbalance their objective?

M. Farouk Radwan, PhD, argues that criminals are 'physiologically imbalanced' and committing crimes brings them balance, for example a need to feel superior may only be achieved through committing a violent crime. This analysis of the human psyche is one that could give criminals a 'free pass', enabling them to plead that they weren't in their 'right' mind, this can lead to a more productive time in prison, creating help programs instead of isolating them from the rest of society. By using a nonconformist approach and instead of locking someone up it would be more beneficial to supply them with work experience and social interaction.

Criminals are ostensibly portrayed as detrimental members of society, the branding of a 'criminal' is decided by narrow minded people who argue that once someone commits a crime they will follow that 'path' forever, however, reforming an individual can provide valuable services to society. The Ministry of Defence reported that it costs on average £39,573 per year to keep an individual locked up and considering that the number of inmates has doubled from 44,000 to 88,000 from the early 1900's the government can't afford to be narrow minded. The Prisoners' Earning Act was inaugurated by the current Conservative government which has enabled inmates to gain skills in basic tertiary jobs, like carpentry and cookery. This is constantly looking towards the future, giving them motivation when they get out, aiming to produce skilled workers who then make their own living and not to rely on government benefits.

However, throughout the prison sentence there are deleterious effects that can regress any progress made. This is hierarchy. Often associated with gangs, prisons too have adopted the same ubiquitous sense of hierarchy. The need to act in a certain way, react to people in a certain way and be a certain person stunts the idea of progress, like in a gang there are certain rules and a conduct to adhere to, it is this definite structure that is making it hard to reform inmates. Debatably it is said that inmates pick up worse routines and habits in prison, therefore making it virtually impossible to break the offending cycle as they repel acceptable social behaviour.

This leads me to ask can we have a prison that is interlinked with society? Numerous MP's loath the idea of using inmates to help society, they are inebriated with self content as statistically crime rate is at an all time low, but for those actually willing to efficiently use available manpower this is a solution, it can save millions off the annual spending as well as creating a

more trustworthy government. The National Audit Office reported that reoffending inmates cost the government £11bn in 2008 alone. Understandably this won't work for all prisoners as violent offenders may cause a furore amongst the inmates they work with, but under supervision there is no reason why they too can't change.

As David Cameron rightfully said that 'it is not a case of 'prison works' or 'prison does not work'- we need to make prison work better' it is clear that the government is trying to change, but I feel that instead of incarcerating someone we should look at the attributes they have and build off them. By introducing jobs to inmates it could reduce the amount of reoffenders as they will have a more stable surrounding, this would particularly enhance the time spent in prison for those less innocuous inmates. The idea of reformation is not totally dependant on the effectiveness of the prison, but a balance of inmate participation, facilities and commitment of those around them. But as the numbers continue to shrink and the need for prison space begins to dwindle will the need for prisons be in such high demand? Or are we just waiting for the next criminal boom?

<http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/index.php?id=101>

<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/04/why-american-right-closing-prisons>

<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/08/prison-population-crime>

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/nov/04/jail-less-effective-community-service>

<http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21572201-government-wants-prisoners-be-more-productive-their-release-well-after> (9/3/13)

Community Reoffending, BBC Website, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/21523413> (9/3/13)

Community Service, Guardian ,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/nov/04/jail-less-effective-community-service> (9/3/13)

TED Talks, Phillip Zimbardo, The Psychology of Evil,
http://www.ted.com/talks/philip_zimbardo_on_the_psychology_of_evil.html (9/3/13)

Prison Reform Trust, Prime Minister's Speech to the Centre of Social Justice,
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/PressPolicy/News/vw/1/ItemID/166> (12/3/13)

<http://cherieblair.org/speeches/2008/03/sheriffs-and-records-fund-sp.html>

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/offenders/before-after-release/obp>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bdcd5bjlgjU>

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/PRT%20submission%20-%20Labour%20Party%20Justice%20Policy%20Working%20Group%20Consultation.pdf>

http://www.2knowmyself.com/why_do_criminals_reoffend

<http://technorati.com/politics/article/prison-system-reforms-in-the-uk/> opinion

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/ProjectsResearch/Childrenandyoungpeople>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-20022794>

Considering my piece was to inform about whether the British Prison system and argue for or against reforming inmates during their sentence it was essential that my sources contained both facts and opinions. I chose a broad range of sources in order to have a wider view on the topic. Choosing the most beneficial sources posed numerous problems, for example could the information be trusted? Is the information relevant? By taking sources that were purely factual to only opinionated I was able to gather sufficient information to make my piece valid and accurate.

After researching various factual magazine articles I found the economist article, this included a vast amount of detail and it is a reliable source. The article is about inmates getting jobs in prison and earning a living, an idea fundamental to my article. This is an opinionated piece that posed many ideas that I could argue against and develop a sense of flow in my writing.

My second source is an BBC article about reoffending rates in England, this is an impartial source, which in contrast to the previous sources, and is a key source of statistics and details to use as evidence. It is taken from a reliable source as well as being written on the 21 February 2013 which means that the data used is relevant. I chose this article because it contained a majority of the information I need to support my ideas and the informative side of my piece.

For my third source I used an article from the newstatesman.com article which is an American related article however it helped me to layout my article to give it a sense of authenticity. It also enabled me to specify my tone of writing, a relatively sarcastic and opinionated piece. This piece is also very opinionated but is relatively short helping me to develop my form of writing.

The fourth source, a TED Talk is by a Professor Jeff Smith, is a primary source as the speaker has had first hand experiences of prison. It was useful talk as it gave a mixture of facts and opinions that were thought-provoking, this gave different perspective on the subject. Jeff stated several ideas that I contributed to, to help my argument. The video was only 5 minutes which is short but it was concise showing how to choose only relevant information.

My final source is a speech by David Cameron from 2012 which is about his aims for prison reforms. His political view point is objective, this bias gave enabled me to form an opinion as I researched the left wing politics and I was able to quote the Prime Minister, giving evidence to support my argument.

The five sources I chose gave me different interpretations of the topic and I was eventually able to produce a piece that informed the reader using the facts that I pulled out from the various articles. It is a topic that is frequently discussed and it was useful to have authoritative sources, like the Prime Minister's Speech, to show how high status this topic is. They also helped me structure my article and clarify the tone and style, which is why they are valuable sources.

For the website sources, except the BBC article, I printed the pages out and used highlighters and pens to annotate the key points. The BBC was factual and concise therefore not need to annotating. I also did research on the writers of the articles to make sure I knew their credentials. I kept all the sources in one file to make looking at the different sources easier. I listened to the TED talk several times whilst I was taking notes, I paused the talk when relevant quotes or statistics came up. By doing this it enabled me to select the information that would support my

arugment and give