The Politics of
Punishment

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF PRISONS IN AMERICA

By Erik Olin Wright

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Robert Barber
Brian Glick
Thomas Lopez Menewather
John Pallas
Eve Pell
Frank L. Rundle
James F. Smith
Fay Stender
CONTENTs

Preface xi

PART I
CRIME AND ITS PUNISHMENT
by Erik Olin Wright 1

1. THE MEANING OF CRIME 3

2. THE PUNISHMENT OF CRIME 22
   Forms of Punishment 24
   Punishment as Deterrence 34

3. THE REHABILITATIVE PRISON MODEL 42

PART II
SAN QUENTIN PRISON: A PORTRAIT OF
CONTRADICTIONS
by Erik Olin Wright 53

4. GENERAL FEATURES OF SAN QUENTIN PRISON 57
CONTENTS

5. SAN QUENTIN PRISON AS SEEN BY THE PRISON OFFICIALS 74
   Conception of the Role of the Prison 74
   Attitudes toward the Actual Functioning of the System 80
   Disciplinary Procedures 83
   Attitudes toward Prisoners 92
   Attitudes toward Radical Politics among Prisoners 95
   The San Quentin Prison Strike of August, 1970, as Seen by the Prison Administration 100

6. SAN QUENTIN PRISON AS SEEN BY THE PRISONERS 103
   The San Quentin Prison Strike of August, 1970, as Seen by the Prisoners 103
   Racism in Prison Life 106
   Racism among Prisoners 120
   Patterns of Social Control at San Quentin 123
   Rehabilitation 131
   Militants at San Quentin 134
   The Modus Vivendi between Guards and Prisoners 141
   The Meaning of Prison in the Lives of Prisoners 145

7. LIBERAL TOTALITARIANISM IN PRISON 152
   Totalitarian Means and Liberal Ends 152
   Liberal Means and Totalitarian Ends 155
   The Totalitarianism of Prison Liberalism 157

PART III
TROUBLES AT SOLEDAD

8. THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE AT SOLEDAD,
   by Frank L. Rundle 163

9. A CHRONICLE OF THREE YEARS IN THE HOLE,
   by Thomas Lopez Menewether 173

10. THE SOLEDAD SEVEN: ATTEMPTED MURDER IN MONTEREY, by Eve Pell 199
    Investigation and Interrogation 200
    The Witnesses 203
    The Defendants 213

11. VIOLENCE AND LAWLESSNESS AT SOLEDAD PRISON, by Fay Stender 222
    Law and Lawlessness 224
    Violence and Lawlessness 229

PART IV
CHALLENGES TO THE SYSTEM

12. FROM RIOT TO REVOLUTION, by John Pallas and Robert Barber 237
    Riots in the Early 1950s 238
    Black Muslims 243
    The Revolutionary Prison Movement 248
CONTENTS

13. PRISON REFORM THROUGH THE LEGISLATURE,
    by James F. Smith  262
    Prison Reform Bills in the 1971 California Legislature  264
    The Appearance of Reform  276
    Legislative Politics and Prison Reform  278

14. CHANGE THROUGH THE COURTS,
    by Brian Glick  281
    Prisoners and the Law  281
    The Law of Prisoners’ Rights  286
    The Limits of Judicial Action: a Case Study  295
    The Limits of Judicial Action: a General Analysis  298
    The Political Uses of Legal Action  307

15. PRISON REFORM AND RADICAL CHANGE,
    by Erik Olin Wright  313
    Perspectives on Reform  313
    Punishment, Class, and the State  314
    Liberal Reform: Obstacles and Opportunities  320
    Reform: Pitfalls and Strategies  333
    Humanizing Punishment and Socializing Society  337

Author’s Note  347

About the Authors  348

TABLES

1. Comparison of Occupational Experience in General Labor Force and Prisoners  27
2. Comparison of Educational Levels in General Labor Force and Prisoners  27
3. The Economic Cost of Crime  29
4. Alternatives Used in Sentencing Convicted Defendants in the United States District Courts  30
5. Incarceration Rates by Race, Age, and Sex  32
6. Incidence of Index Crimes per 100,000 Residents in Five Chicago Police Districts  39
7. Victimization by Race  40
8. Victimization by Income  40
10. Comparison of Median Time Served for Black and White Prisoners  116
11. Prior Prison Records of Black and White Prisoners, by Offense  118
12. Race and Time Served by Women Prisoners in California  119