

Zuzana Trubačová

MA Dissertation Evaluation

2016

Title of Dissertation: PRIVATIZATION OF THE CALIFORNIA PRISON SYSTEM

Zuzana Trubačová's topic for her MA thesis is a contemporary issue of significance in the United States, presently facing challenges resulting from the highest incarceration rate in the world. Governments, federal, state, and local, and concerned citizens acknowledge the need for reform of the entire criminal justice system from charges against individuals to prosecution, to sentencing, and to prisons. What is the primary goal of justice systems? The incarceration rate soared from the 1970's to the present., especially impacting minorities for minor infractions of laws, i.e., especially drug laws.

Trubačová introduces her work with a history of U.S. prison policies from the 18th century when private prisons were commonly used by all levels of government. The early 20th century witnessed a significant change due to social concerns to reform prisoners from the previous focus on punishment. The war on drugs not only resulted in a massive increase in imprisonment, mostly based on plea bargaining for lesser sentences. All levels of government confronted the challenges of providing facilities for the massive increase. California is of particular interest as, until recently, the state had the highest percentage of prisoners based on total population.

The thesis is very well organized and based on an impressive bibliography of primary and secondary sources. As writing in a second language is a real challenge, there are multiple grammatical and vocabulary issues sprinkled through the thesis but they do not detract from the power of the research or the clear presentation of the issues.

The thesis is organized in two parts after the Introduction which describes the methodology and periodization and an overview of the sources. Part I, "Prison Privatization in the United States" is presented in three sections. After a brief history of private prisons, the author presents an overview of the return and development of private prisons across much of the country beginning in the 1980's. The final section is focused on current trends with emphasis on California.

Part II includes three chapters, each focused on specific issues. The first is an overview of the contracts between governments and the prison industry. There are many issues, mostly unknown to the public in this relationship. The lack of accountability, due in large part to the closed records of these private operations which are making massive profits.

The next chapter reveals the funds contributed by the industry to politicians, the extent of their lobbying although they deny being involved in any lobbying, and the impact each has on the development of public policies. As is true in other arenas, there is also a common practice of hiring those formerly in government positions to work in management of the prisons.

The final chapter focuses on the issue of whether or not the private prison system is a cost effective solution for governments faced with court orders to address the issues of over-crowding in public prisons. Trubačová describes the three studies which attempted to answer the question of costs to the public of public and private systems. She recognizes the need for further research to be based on transparency of private prison records. The only studies to date have not answered this key question.

Her conclusions acknowledge the difficulties of achieving legislation under the current structures. Her sources include information published in 2016, a significant achievement. Her recognition of the social, economic and political issues involved leads her to join many Americans in demanding reforms.

Questions for the thesis defence:

- 1/ What are the consequences of prison privatization?
- 2/ Why did the practice of prison privatization become U.S. policy after 70 years of public prisons?
- 3/ What are the obstacles to prison reform in the 21st century?

This is a timely and impressive dissertation. Trubačová exceeds the requirements for a dissertation. I recommend acceptance of her work. I propose a grade of Excellent to Very Good depending on the performance at the state exam.

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