

Zuzana Trubačová
M.A. Dissertation Evaluation
2016
Privatization of the California Prison System

Zuzana Trubačová has opted to write her M.A. dissertation on the privatization of the California prison system. It has been a pleasure to supervise her and the final product is indeed impressive. The work is divided into an Introduction, two parts (6 chapters) and a Conclusion. I will briefly comment upon each section of the treatise in the ensuing paragraphs.

The Introduction does precisely what it should do, namely provide the reader with an idea of the structure and content of the dissertation. The purpose of Zuzana's dissertation is to assess whether the existence of private prisons in the California prison system is helping California tackle some of its problems and whether such prisons are a good option for California criminal justice. Zuzana spells out the content of Part I (Chapters 1-3) and Part II (Chapters 3-6). Insofar as sources are concerned, the work relies primarily on statistics.

In Part I (Chapters 1-3), Zuzana scrutinizes the evolution of prison privatization in the United States. She points out that from the earliest days of the United States, the private sector has been involved in shaping the American criminal justice system. Chapter 1 places correctional privatization in historical context. She rightly mentions that criminal justice in the United States (especially matters of incarceration) was largely modeled on the English system. In the late 17th century, a new emphasis was placed on detention facilities being a place where most criminals could be rehabilitated. Interestingly, those running the private prisons made their money by putting prisoners to work and deducting money from their wages. Many states adopted the so-called convict lease system,

which ended in the 1920s when governments took over prisons directly and paid for their maintenance out of state government budgets. However, by the 1970s, society became somewhat disillusioned with the idea that convicts could be rehabilitated, which led to the reemergence of private prisons. This forms the content of Chapter 2. Indeed the 1980s witnessed the emergence of private corporations devoted to the incarceration business. In my opinion, this is an example of capitalism gone mad. Chapter 3 analyzes trends in prison privatization from the 1980s up until the present day. The rapid increase in incarceration since 1980 is alarming. Well, there are two types of prison privatization, namely a purchase-lease agreement (with some governmental involvement) and complete administration of some prisons by the private sector. In a section dealing with California, Zuzana describes how California's prison population had been growing at an alarming rate since the "three strikes" mandatory sentencing was introduced, but recent approval of propositions reducing some crimes to misdemeanors has reversed the trend of prison overcrowding.

In Part II (Chapters 4-6), Zuzana gets to the crux of the matter, that is, issues associated with California prison privatization. Chapter 4 deals with the contractual relationship between governments and private prison companies. The reader learns how private prisons (not housing federal prisoners) are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. In general, the staff in private prisons have less training than their counterparts in state-run prisons and services in private prisons are worse. Chapter 5 scrutinizes the influence wielded by the private prison lobby on overall public policy. One learns the disturbing news of how the business of private imprisonment has become a multi-million

dollar industry. In Chapter 6, Zuzana delves into the matter of cost-efficiency of private prisons. True, by cutting costs and hiring less experienced personnel, private prisons can keep up their profit margins. Zuzana lists a number of other costs incurred by the state, including higher recidivism rates of private prison inmates. California largely kept out of the private prison business until the state was ordered to ease overcrowding of the state prison system by the federal authorities. Because of a resistance to building private prisons on California territory, California has shipped prisoners to detention facilities out of state. Also, the sensible revision of previously draconian sentencing procedures has resulted in a decline of the overall prison population.

The Conclusion recapitulates Zuzana's main points and Zuzana states that her findings are somewhat inconclusive because of a lack of data. She calls for further studies to be conducted. Her view is that private prisons should be forced to have the same standards and be subjected to the same scrutiny as state institutions, which, sadly, is not the case today. She expresses her view that making money as a result of the incarceration of people is repulsive. I share Zuzana's sentiments.

My overall impression of the dissertation is positive. Zuzana tackled a tough topic. I must, however, criticize her use of written English. There are numerous grammatical errors and some sentences are structured in a most bizarre way. That being said, I recommend a classification of either **EXCELLENT** or **VERY GOOD** depending on Zuzana's performance in the oral defense.

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