

CHALLENGING CRIMINOLOGY

Dennis Davis and Mana Slabbert (eds):
Crime and Power in South Africa, David Philip,
 Cape Town, 1985.

Whether or not one agrees with the radical theoretical perspective of the book, all must welcome its publication. Despite the predominantly sociological orientation of most of the contributors, it should give a livening impetus to the stodgy discipline of Criminology and should lead to further research and argument. Many chapters provide interesting and informative historical and political assessments of the areas addressed but, as can be expected from this perspective, few offer practical guidelines on how to tackle daily problems in the context of the existing society.

The first chapter, "Criminology in South Africa" by Davis, is a closely argued reasoning of the need for a new paradigm in criminology which takes into account political as well as social factors. However, Davis should be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water. A factor may be neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of crime but it could still be a contributory cause. Thus to brush aside all previously researched factors will not add to our knowledge. For example, 'blocked opportunity', however responsible the political system may be for it, is still a cause of crime. This is not to say that full weight should not be given to political factors.

In Chapter two, Slabbert, succinctly enumerates some problems specific to criminological research in all countries and in South Africa in particular. Her article gives some answers to the question why South African research lags behind that of other countries.

Pinnock's article on gangs and family structure is an indictment of forced removals which have resulted in the proliferation of Coloured gangs in the Cape. It presents a new angle for looking at an old problem. Here is an area where more research could lead to new enlightenments.

"Political Trials in South Africa" by Davis is a scathing attack on the security laws of this country. He highlights the differing conceptions of Black and White to political trials. He concludes that "during periods of extraordinary social unrest, the political trial becomes an important mechanism for legitimising State power".

Chapter 5 "Liquor, the State and Urban Blacks" by Wilfred Schärf, traces the history of the legitimate availability of liquor from the days of Paul Kruger. He views liquor laws as a political weapon of the State and outlines how changing commercial and political interests are central to the changes in the liquor laws. However, he leaves one

with the impression that, whilst he is not against prohibition, he also agrees with the legitimising of shebeens — an illogical position.

"Reforming Women: A Case of Disintegration" by Andrea Durbach addresses itself to sexism in our society, in our laws and the application of our laws. She discusses disadvantages of women before the law because of stereotypic conceptualisations about the 'nature' of women and their role in society. A case history is cited to underline her thesis that prison 'rehabilitation' takes the form of helping to propagate the sexist concept of domestic subordination and shows how imprisonment has drastic consequences not only for the woman but for her children and family. It is gratifying to note that female criminologists in South Africa are beginning to press for a further understanding and study of women as criminals and victims. (It may be noted that one doctoral thesis on the subject has recently been completed and that others are in the process of research.)

Mark Sher's article "From Dompas to Disc: The Legal Control of Migrant Labour" considers the iniquitous pass laws, the reasons why they have been instituted and the shift away from any judicial control of their implementation to control by administrative regulation, to the detriment of Black people. He also pinpoints the dismal failure of legal aid to help those it is supposed to help. The factors he discusses are closely linked to the crime rate in South Africa but have not previously been given sufficient in-depth attention by criminologists.

Mana Slabbert's contribution on "Violence on Cinema and Television and in the Streets" comes nearer to tackling day-to-day criminological problems than some of the other articles. She suggests that a more integrated family life counteracts the necessity for juveniles imitating screen violence. Thus she sees a connection between poverty, unemployment, alcoholism and the violence the young learn from watching screen violence. She lays much of the blame on the State and its mass media communications.

Wilfred Schärf's "Shebeens in the Cape Peninsula" analyses the establishment and growth of shebeens and traces the relationship between ownership of shebeens and small-time organised gang warfare. He concludes "The manner in which liquor capital and the State collude with informal-sector survivalists — the gang — constitutes a subtle but powerful form of control over the working class, and takes on strong ideological dimensions" (p 105).

“Drugs and Moral Panic” by Cathi Albertyn researches the panic surrounding the question of drugs and drug addiction. This panic is used by the State to gain White consensus for its repressive acts. However, one must question her contention that drug addiction, by its very nature, can be considered by the State as being “threatened by an alien force or even contraculture.”

Throughout the book attention is paid to reasons why the working class is criminalised but no mention is made of

the more socially costly crimes of the upper and middle classes (apart from their involvement in the state apparatus). Yet nowhere has it been positively proved that the working class is, in fact, the criminal class.

There are many assumptions and conclusions that one would like to argue. So the challenging nature of this book should lead to a deeper analysis of the problems with which it deals in order to verify or reject the conclusions to which the various writers come. □

by DARYL GLASER

IN THE SPIRIT OF FREE ENTERPRISE:

Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer (Eds)
Up Against the Fences; David Philip, Cape Town, 1985.

“Up Against the Fences”, edited by Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer, is a rather paradoxical book. It claims, in its subtitle, to speak on behalf of the impoverished, yet it is addressed very explicitly to the bearers of power and privilege: to reformers in the state and to businessmen. Its almost exclusive purpose is to persuade these parties that the amelioration of influx control, and the adoption of a “rational” urbanisation strategy (p351) will reinforce, rather than undermine political stability (pp156,298,318,332), boost capitalist profits (pp299-300, 341-2) and, moreover, avoid incurring major fiscal costs (pp115-116,ch12,ch27,p351). Like this collection as a whole, urbanisation is, A.M. Rosholt assures us, “linked to the spirit of free enterprise” (p284).

The most striking thing about the book is the conservatism of its vision. It views the demand for the “complete phasing out of the system of influx control” as “inappropriate at this stage” given “very powerful . . . anxieties amongst whites”. It accepts the need to maintain “some form of control over black movement” and insists on nothing more dramatic by way of reform than “adjustments to the policy to make it more flexible and attuned to the varying needs of individuals” (p332). Its attitude to the homelands is no less conservative. In spite of evidence – provided in a vivid contribution by Giliomee and Stanley Greenberg – that the homelands are characterised by “utter destitution and administrative disintegration” (p69), Giliomee, in another article, praises the

homelands as “discrimination-free zones” and sanguinely holds out the hope that the “homelands could still become important elements in a more just, stable federal state” (p56). A full chapter is given to Inkatha secretary general Oscar Dhlomo’s description of the evils of resettlement, and to his reassurances that KwaZulu does not collaborate in the implementation of this policy (ch19). Yet an article in the same book by P.M. Zulu exposes the corruption, regressive economic impact and unpopularity of chiefs and headmen in KwaZulu (ch17). The reader is therefore left wondering whether KwaZulu’s political order is meant to be part of the solution or a part of the problem.

URBANISATION

The alternative urbanisation strategy which emerges from this book is very much in “the spirit of free enterprise”. Relly calls for “a fairly high standard of squatter camp” (p301) while Schlemmer blandly advocates “upgraded informal settlements” (p181). In an example of sociology at its most uncritical, Schlemmer suggests that informal shack areas constitute “a specific type of urban ecology most suited to a marginal urban class with problems of adaptation to the formal system, and to people of lower socio-economic status” (p 189). In the same tenor Philip Smit warns that “over the long term” blacks in South Africa “will not have better houses and sewerage than