

John Galsworthy's "Justice" (Effect of The Play on UK Criminal Justice System)

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ABSTRACT:

Justice is powerful tragedy. It is a strong satire on the contemporary English system of law and judiciary. Galsworthy brings into light the glaring short comings and defects in the legal system of England. He says that law is a blind and inhuman process. Law does not take into consideration human psychology and innate human infirmities.

The British judicial system is unfair and unscrupulous. It is a malignant process and which innumerable innocent unintentioned men are victimized. The Chariot – wheels of the system of law continue to revolve furiously and innumerable innocent men are caught into them and crushed to powder. The prisons are like an ill fated ship in which thousands of prisoners perish.

Once a man is caught and convinced to imprisonment, there is no escape for him. Once a man puts his step into the cage there is no withdrawal for him. It is a process of completing crime. This is the idea behind this social tragedy justice. This idea is brought home through the conviction and death of an innocent and noble hearted man, Falder.

Galsworthy seriously took the issue of prison and solitary confinement to the parliaments and the Home Secretary Winston Churchill made legislative changes. Revision of penal policy, improvement of prison condition, the exclusion of petty offenders, the reform of sentencing policy, various different Acts were passed in the Parliament. Reforms and amendments were made due to the impact of Galsworthy 'Justice'. Thus Galsworthy's efforts were rewarded.

Keywords:

Conviction, Psychology, Unfair, Solitary Confinement, Offender, Amendments, Reduction.

The influence of John Galsworthy's play 'Justice' in securing reductions in the time convicts spent in separate confinement has been widely acknowledged, in a rather minor way, in a number of penal histories.

Justice, had a small but direct impact on penal decision making in this period. He highlighted the evils of separate confinement in the prison system, the then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, and the then Chairman of the Prison Commission, Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, influenced the decision later that year to reduce the period spent by prisoners in such confinement.

But Galsworthy's penal interests, and his eventual impact, were greater. In order to understand the nature of Galsworthy's efforts and achievements, it is necessary to know something of the background to penal reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Since 1877, Sir Edmund du Cane, the Chairman of the newly created Prison Commission, had presided over a highly centralized penal system, whose explicitly deterrent philosophy produced rigid discipline and administrative uniformity throughout the country. Convicts, during the Du Cane era, spent the first nine months of their sentence in solitary confinement. They were forbidden to speak under the silent rule, and if sentenced to hard labour, they endured long periods on the tread wheel or at the crank. Despite some criticism of the psychological damage done by separate confinement, 'the prison medical officers and chaplains denied that it ever led to mental deterioration, and some wanted [prisoners] kept in separate confinement even longer'.

Influential as it was among some thinkers and political activists, the government could none the less ignore the radical fringe of debate on penal reform. The Daily Chronicle, however, appealing directly to the then. Home Secretary Henry Asquith for a change of policy, was a different matter; it was a respected organ of

Liberal opinion and its editor was part of Asquith's political circle. The Home Office response, in May 1894, was to appoint a Departmental Committee on Prisons under the Chairmanship of Herbert Gladstone, then an Under Secretary at the Home Office. The Committee canvassed widely, taking representations from politicians, prison administrators, ex-prisoners, and reformer-critics such as Morrison, Davitt, and Tallack, in their ambitious report the Commission generally supported the reformist cause, and a more flexible approach to penal administration. They urged a reduction in the amount of time spent by prisoners in cellular confinement, a corresponding increase in their hours of associated work, relaxing the rule of silence for long-term prisoners, and an end to useless and unproductive labour. They also recommended the creation of penal reformatories to remove juveniles, aged 16-23, from the existing prison system, and preventive detention for habitual recidivist criminals.

Du Cane resigned, discredited, after the publication of the Gladstone Report, but except for a flurry of debate around the Prison Bill 1888 there was little immediate change in penal policy along the lines suggested by the Committee. A number of factors worked to impede reform. The Liberals had been defeated in 1895, opening the way to a decade of Conservative government whose members showed far less interest in Gladstone's recommendations, which, by and large, pleased the majority of penal administrators. Even under the more progressive but still cautious leadership of Du Cane's successor, Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, the Prison Commissioners remained wedded to the primary concept of deterrence and were reluctant to make substantive changes. The 1888 Prison Act did improve the classification of prisoners, and time spent by prisoners in solitary confinement was reduced from nine months to six months under a change in the Prison Rules, but pressure for full implementation of the Gladstone Report was coming largely from the press, and from both new and old penal reform groups.

1907 was also the year in which John Galsworthy first became seriously interested in the issue of prison and solitary confinement at which point in his career as a writer he was barely ten years old.

In this period, 'Galsworthy shared the faith of many Liberals that English society could be made more equitable and humane', demonstrating, like them, 'a strong and genuine but often vague impulse towards social reform'. His many causes never amounted to a programme, and he was never politically aligned in any overt sense, unlike his Fabian contemporaries Shaw, Wells, and Granville-Barker. Nor was he religious, disliking what he saw as the formalism and hypocrisy of the Christian church, preferring to call himself a humanist who believed that 'the world has an incurable habit of going on, with possibly a tendency towards improvement in human life'. Darwinism, especially in its exploitative social manifestations, believing instead that there was an evolutionary spiritual impulse at work in the world, which he characterized as 'a need for justice'.

Galsworthy's efforts were rewarded; having twice pressed the Home Secretary for a meeting he was summoned to the Home Office and told personally by Churchill of the reforms, that he would propose in Parliament in eight days time.

Churchill's speech in the House of Commons on 20 July 1910 announced a series of measures aimed at reducing the numbers of people sent to prison. He proposed a wider application of the recently passed Probation of Offenders Act, more time-to-pay for debtors and fined offenders, and more help for discharged prisoners to keep them from re-offending. Juveniles, he hoped, would not henceforth be committed to prison except for serious offences. Lastly, he announced a reduction in solitary confinement from three months to one month for all classes of prisoners except recidivists, a change he attributed partly to the efforts of 'various able writers in the press and by exponents of the drama, who have brought home to the general public the pangs which a convict may suffer during long months of solitude'. He ended with his oft-quoted appeal for a more enlightened public attitude towards those who had broken the law, which was expressed in prose far more elevated than that which he had used to Galsworthy just four months before and whose sentiments are so indoubtly Galsworthian that it is difficult not to suspect a direct influence.

Churchill encouraged the correspondence with sincere, but calculated enthusiasm. He stated that he shall welcome any suggestion from John Galsworthy to make changes in prison administration and criminal reforms. After seeing 'Justice' he wrote. I greatly admire the keen and vigorous way in which you are driving forward for a good cause. Galsworthy genuinely believed in the necessity of moral leadership and prisoners can only be reformed by kindness.

In the end the most effective way to prevent crime was to reform the criminal, and this could only be accomplished, in Galsworthy's view, by encouraging his mental and moral development through expanded

educational facilities and by allowing him more communication with family and friends outside, in order to retain his links with the social network to which he would one day return.

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