

ARTICLES

Barter in Russian Prisons

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses findings from research in Russian prison colonies. There has been a decline in central government funding of prisons in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This has led to the utilization of barter to provide maintenance and resources for prisoners and staff. I argue that the introduction of barter has created a unique scenario in which the sustainability of the prison infrastructure is dependent on community involvement. Current practices can be looked at in two lights. On one level, a very high prison population is maintained because the prisons have become economically self-sufficient and this might lead to prisoner exploitation. On another level, current practices suggest a symbiotic relationship in which the prisons and the local community are dependent on each other for survival. As Russia moves towards greater economic stability, the potential concerns posed by the use of barter provide further opportunities for criminological research.

KEY WORDS

Russia / Prison / Labour / Barter / Community.

Introduction

The Russian prison system is best known for the still not fully calculable, but mainly negative, system of prison labour that operated to sustain the economic development and hence international supremacy of the USSR from the 1920s until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Solzhenitsyn, whose name has become synonymous with forced prison labour, has stated that the Soviet prison system went way beyond crime control in the usual sense because huge numbers of people were hastily and 'greedily consumed' by the state for its own benefit (Solzhenitsyn 1986: 214). Firm figures on the extent of crime and punishment in 20th-century Russia are impossible

to come by. Any official data are likely to be imprecise owing to the practice of falsifying official records and census population figures, which leaves considerable latitude for legitimate debate and disagreement (see Bacon 1994). Even so, by the 1980s it had become indisputable that crime and punishment were not incidental but central to the Soviet regime and that imprisonment was more gruesome and inhumane than previously thought (Malia 1999).

I shall start with a brief exposition of trends in crime, punishment and imprisonment in Russia up to 1991. The picture remains woefully inadequate because there is still considerable and intense debate on crime rates and criminal justice in the Soviet Union.

Crime and criminal justice in the Soviet Union

For almost 70 years crime and criminal justice in Russia reflected the changes in Marxist–Leninist ideology. Under Lenin, crime was reconceptualized as a form of ‘transitional social excess’ so that it was no longer seen as an innate character flaw. Stalin redrafted criminal justice policy in 1933 to present the Soviet Union as the underdog at war with capitalism (Serge 1979). Stalin’s view of crime was, in part, faithful to Marxist theory: crime does not exist in sustained and established socialist societies (Tucker 1992). However, Stalin’s definition of crime was extreme: all crime was anti-Soviet and hence sympathetic to capitalist ideology; that is, if hooliganism was punishable then it was because it was capitalist.

The 1933 legislation was used to control anti-Soviet elements by criminalizing wreckers of the Soviet cause. Propaganda conveyed the message that ‘enemies’ existed in all walks of life so that, once society had been forced to submit to ideology, legislation could then be used to control citizens through the relentless pursuit of agitators in need of political correction. Criminal justice legislation was useful in creating a totally submissive population, and also for contributing to the calculated myth-making of Stalinism whereby criminal justice came to have unbreakable ties to the political and economic arenas of Soviet life (Zhuk and Ishchenko 1983).

Throughout the Soviet period the primary goal of imprisonment was to correct offenders politically. Yet, under Stalin, the economic role of imprisonment was to transcend the goal of creating perfect proletarians. Briefly, in 1925 Stalin abolished Lenin’s New Economic Policy (NEP) because industrialization of the rural and manufacturing economies had failed to materialize quickly enough (Tucker 1992). Stalin’s replacement ‘Five-Year Plans’ aimed ‘to leave behind the age-old Russian backwardness’

(Stalin, quoted in Tucker 1992: 92) through forced collectivization and industrialization. A series of resettlement programmes were introduced that offered tens of thousands of engineers, doctors and scientists attractive housing and job packages for relocating to less populated areas of the USSR in order to build up the economic infrastructure (Bacon 1994). But the plans were at best ambitious and, at worst, wholly unachievable and depended on a vast non-existent labour force (Tucker 1992).

The Gulag Prison Agency was the solution. Established in 1934, the Gulag evolved in the industrial period in response to the changes in capital – it was built with the principal aim of providing additional labour to realize the economic plans. The 1933 legislation enabled the widespread use of prisoner work. First, it was used to force individuals accused of posing a potential threat to the USSR to take up new jobs in new cities. Second, it was used to arrest and send into exile the intelligentsia and those party members who were high on Stalin's target list. By 1940 the stability of the command economy and political structure was dependent on the vast prison workforce.

Prisoners were told that they were living and working the Soviet dream, the outcome of which would be rehabilitation and honour as worthy members of society. Yet former camp survivors who were interviewed for the wider study describe how prisoners were debased in the eyes of Soviet society. Poor health combined with non-acceptance by society meant that personal and social rehabilitation was a struggle. None of the former prisoners interviewed believed that they became more loyal to the Soviet cause as a result of forced labour and education. Instead, oral histories expose the procurement of prisoners for exploitation.

During interrogation we were rigorously 'assessed' about our loyalty to the Soviet regime. But when we got to the Gulag, the most important question on the Gulag registration card was 'Trade or profession'.

Solzhenitsyn 1986: 589

The Gulag Prison Agency was the model for centralized management and organization of labour in both prison and non-prison life. The Agency managed most prison camps (known also as Gulags)¹ and comprised several specialized agencies created to administer different types of industrial projects. Metallurgical industries, railway construction, road construction, timber and forestry work – all these industries were developed by

¹ There were also camps and colonies managed by the NKVD (Ministry for Internal Affairs), which was responsible for policing. Some camps were semi-independent. Bacon (1994) argues that these camps would have been few in number and that matters to do with administering ideology and coordination of the types of industry conducted would have been controlled centrally.

scores of engineers, scientists, workers and managers. The smaller Gulag administrations undertook many of the tasks that the government of a nation-state would have to fulfil. Security, health care, education, provision of food, political indoctrination and surveillance – all of these roles exercised by the Soviet government in national life had their Gulag equivalent in prison life. The Gulag became an exaggerated microcosm of the bureaucracy and social control of the Soviet system of government.

The size and extent of the prison population under Stalin have provoked many debates.² The highest estimates are provided by former victims and it is claimed that in the Stalin period (1926–52) 20 million citizens were imprisoned (Wheatcroft 1985). Lower estimates come from methodologies based on the size of the Soviet economy, census figures, mortality rates and arrests by the Soviet police (Rosefelde 1987). Bacon's figure of 12 million for the years 1934–47 is widely accepted as accurate because it is based on the actual numbers imprisoned and not on the numbers 'repressed' (those persecuted, harassed and exiled to work and live in other cities), and the figure also takes into account the different types of camps (forced settlers were not classified as 'prisoners') (Bacon 1994).

Although the Gulag was disbanded in 1956, the integration of prisoners' work into the centralized command economy and the imprisonment of dissidents and anti-Soviet 'elements' continued until the collapse of Soviet communism in 1991. For the best part of a century, prisons were presented as mechanisms that benefited the regime and therefore its citizens, but there is little doubt that they also blurred the boundaries of civil society.

Crime and criminal justice in Russia since 1991

After the USSR collapsed in 1991, criminal justice practitioners were faced with the task of building a justice system that was more democratic, transparent and acceptable to Europe (Zubkov et al. 1998). This was a massive undertaking because Russian criminal justice was inextricably linked to the political economy of the Soviet Union. To create a more democratic criminal justice system would mean doing away with the Soviet system and its integrated ideology, departments and administrations. For Russia to be welcomed as part of the international community, certain conditions were – and continue to be – attached. Personnel had to be retrained and, for the first time in almost a century, crimes such as

² See Conquest's (1994) review of *The Gulag at war: Stalin's forced labour system in light of the archives* by Edwin Bacon (1994) and subsequent responses in the *Times Literary Supplement*, February to April 1994.

'burglary', 'assault', 'murder' and 'fraud' were to be redefined based on the complex linkages between the offender and the offence and not on the political allegiances of the offender to the state.

The increased openness and the greater level of transparency and accountability in the recording of crime and the management of the criminal justice system have made it easier to gather reliable and accurate figures on crime and punishment. Total recorded crime increased by 85 percent over the period 1989–99 (Barclay et al. 2001). Between 1995 and 1999 crime increased in some areas and decreased in others. For example, domestic burglaries increased by 134 percent and drug trafficking increased by 147 percent, but violent crime fell by 46 percent and motorcycle theft by 23 percent (Barclay et al. 2001). Russian analysts explain these increases in crime as symptomatic of the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Gilinskii 1998). Since 1991 there has been social, political and economic turmoil following the failure of market reforms. Before perestroika, Soviet society was governed by symbols, bureaucracy and secrecy. Even though Gorbachev's reforms were planned with democracy in mind, the collapse of a system that had shaped the lives of citizens with a degree of reliability and stability provoked anxiety and fear. The unstable economy and the weak internal infrastructure have led to a decline in the overall standard of living (Gilinskii 1998). Poverty, unemployment, alcohol abuse and drug abuse have escalated, as have illegal business, illegal bank activities and money laundering (Rawlinson 2000). According to Gilinskii, 'social and economic inequality is one of our biggest crimogenic factors' (1998: 8). As a result, the prison population increased by 52 percent over the period 1989–99 (Barclay et al. 2001).

The reform of the prison system is one of the greatest challenges to the process of liberalization in the Russian Federation. The legacy of the Soviet system, which has been described as 'massively brutalizing' (Mandelstam 1971: 56), coupled with the rising levels of crime, has contributed to the maintenance of a very high prison population – the second highest in the world. The most recent figures collected by the International Centre for Prison Studies (2002) show that, in March 2002, 968,000 prisoners were held in places of confinement (or 670 prisoners per 100,000 population).

Since 1991 the central government in Russia, despite its good intentions, has been unable to treat prisoners humanely. Rodley (2000) found that in 1994 practices in Russian prison establishments fell into the 'grey zone' of his mandate to report on the treatment of prisoners under international law; that is, practices bordered on ill-treatment and torture. The Russian government has endeavoured to improve standards in prison establishments since joining the Council of Europe in 1996. The twin problems of excessive prisoner numbers and the ill-treatment of prisoners

are being addressed. There is currently a system of amnesties for releasing prisoners and there has been a moratorium on the death penalty, which means that for the first time there are prisoners serving life imprisonment. There is also a new Penal Code (1997).³ But much remains to be done, especially in the area of funding the prison system and the management of prison establishments.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, so too did the relationship between the prisons and the political and economic spheres. Consequently, the management of the prison system has undergone significant reforms. Under the 1997 Penal Code, the management of the various types of prison establishments has been transferred from the central government to devolved regional administrative governments (*oblast*). The regions are allocated a budget from the central prison authority in Moscow that is intended to cover all maintenance costs and personnel costs. However, economic instability from 1995 onwards has adversely affected prison budgets. The central government is currently unable to provide the necessary funds for running the prisons and so it has been left to the regional managers and prison governors to manage the budgets and implement policies and initiatives accordingly.

The research findings presented in this article were gathered in the course of a wider study of the function of prison labour in present-day Russia. The next section describes the research design and process, the location of the research and the methods used.

Methods

Following a successful pilot trip to Ryazan, near Moscow, in 1998 it was agreed that the Ryazan administrative region would be a suitable research

³ Under the 1997 Penal Code, prison establishments are categorized as follows: 'remand prisons' (SIZO), 'prison colonies' and 'prisons'. The remand prisons are used for persons awaiting trial. It is in these establishments where Rodley (2000) has described conditions as cruel, inhuman and degrading. Most people are sent to prison colonies that were established after Stalin's death in 1952. The colonies are designed around the dormitory system, with up to 200 people living in one dormitory section or 'detachment'. Colonies are divided into the following types: 'special' regimes (very dangerous offenders); 'strict' regimes (dangerous offenders and recidivists); 'general' regimes (first-time offenders and less serious crimes); 'educational' colonies (for children); and 'village' colonies (open prisons). There are also prisons based on the cellular system; these are for very dangerous offenders. There are 749 prison colonies, 184 remand prisons, 13 prisons and 64 juvenile colonies (International Centre for Prison Studies 2002).

venue for the main study. Given that I might not be permitted to circulate survey questionnaires or interview respondents, no decision was taken about what kinds of research methods would be used. Criminological research in Russia is unexplored territory, so a priority of this research was to develop an approach based on *flexibility* and *opportunism*. This entailed utilizing every opportunity to obtain information from any source about the questions in mind. Such a random approach occasionally offered up some interesting opportunities for triangulation (Denzin 1970).

The political and economic instability that has blighted the development of Russia since 1991 worsened in the 12 months between the pilot trip in 1998 and the main study in 1999. The economy had collapsed in 1998, Yeltsin's government was in crisis, the war in Chechnya had resumed and, in February 1999, war broke out in Kosovo. Russia's stance against the NATO campaign in Kosovo led to a temporary resurgence of Cold War secrecy. Living in Moscow in the early weeks prior to the main study was often distressing. The Moscow military police were suspicious of 'foreigners' and routine passport checks turned into mini-interrogations. In the ensuing tension and disquiet, the plan to visit Ryazan collapsed. The locations that were offered instead were a 'strict' and a 'general' colony for men in Omsk, Siberia (3000 kilometres east of Moscow), and a 'strict' and a 'general' colony for men in Smolensk, western Russia (700 kilometres west of Moscow).⁴ The fieldwork would also involve living in the staff quarters of the four prison sites. Omsk prison region was built from the ruins of a Gulag in the early 1950s. Smolensk prison region was established towards the end of the 1950s.

The new research locations permitted two kinds of comparison – between regimes and between regions. As it turned out, the differences between regions were more important than those between regimes. This could not have been shown in the original design. Moreover, material could now be gathered on the relationship between the prison colonies and the region and between the region and the central administration in not one but two regions.⁵ The first phase of the fieldwork was conducted in Siberia and involved spending two weeks in each colony. The second phase involved spending two weeks at each Smolensk colony. The remainder of

⁴ See Piacentini (2001) for a fuller account of the four prison colonies visited.

⁵ This approach did not provide a complete picture of either region, nor did it allow a comparison of colonies other than 'general' and 'strict' ones. Given that the differences between regions were greater than those between regimes, the probability is that the differences between these regimes and those I did not study would have been similarly smaller than the differences between regions.

the fieldwork was in Moscow, gathering materials and interviewing prison officials.

In the main study, to some extent I followed the method of cultural anthropology, that is, first learning Russian and then living in four male prison colonies. The approach adopted was not so much about becoming an insider in the institutional setting, but rather about seeing the world from the perspective of that setting and being sensitive to changes in it. Insofar as was possible, this involved getting into the mindset of Russians. Cultural anthropology also favours empathy for the subject and rejects distance and objectivity in the relationship between researcher and the researched (see Smith and Wincup 2000). The high level of social interaction resulted in getting as close as was possible to understanding how Russians (both prisoners and staff) think about and reflect on their prison system: their experiences of work, training opportunities, prison management and officers' attitudes.

Giving out interview schedules or questionnaires was not possible. The methods deployed took the lead from the triangulation approach, which is suited to a qualitatively driven, non-positivistic study (King 2000). The methods were: semi-structured interviews with prison managers, prison officers and prisoners; and observations of meetings between staff and between staff and prisoners. Where it was not possible to conduct semi-structured interviews, checklists were utilized that listed points and areas that were essential to cover in the course of an interview.

There were differences across regions in the effectiveness of the methods used. These related, first, to the distance of each region from the central prison authority in Moscow and, second, to issues arising from gender.

Russian people are generally reluctant to express uncomfortable truths in formal settings, having lived under the presence of a bugging system for most of their lives. The Smolensk respondents were nervous and suspicious of the research, largely owing to the colonies operating in the glare of the central prison authority in Moscow. The Omsk participants were less anxious because they did not feel that the central prison authority was 'breathing down their necks', as one prison officer put it. In situations where respondents were reluctant to talk, it was vital to be receptive to non-verbal communication in which silence and body language could convey meanings.

Being a relatively young woman (27) at the time of the fieldwork made it difficult for me to be taken seriously by prison officers. Masculine values routinely dominate Russian society and are often expressed in the form of misplaced paternalism, cultural misogyny and chauvinistic hostility. Russian female researchers rarely get the opportunity to conduct

empirical research into prisons.⁶ Prison officers were open about their views on female researchers and the general impression was that male prison colonies were an unsuitable research venue for a woman. In order to ensure that the best possible data were obtained, my feminist principles were discarded for the duration of the fieldwork.

Living inside the colonies provided a invaluable insight into how the prisons function in the present day. At all four sites a prison officer was assigned as a bodyguard. The accommodation was made safe – despite being 30 yards from where the prisoners were held – by armed guards, barbed wire fencing and the presence of other staff living in the building. One cooked meal was offered daily, as food was scarce. The relationships that developed while living in the prison sites were evaluated constantly for their worthiness and basis as so many people, some essential to the research and others peripheral, wanted to ‘meet the westerner’ and it was necessary to remind staff continually of the academic purpose of the research. Although living in the establishments provided opportunities for both humorous and disturbing observations, the uniqueness of the fieldwork did raise problems in reflecting on the research experience outside the prison colonies in Russia and in the United Kingdom.

At the end of the fieldwork, data had been gathered from 224 respondents who had answered a range of questions on prison labour. Where there was a significant number of responses and it was possible to categorize them, statistical tests were used to explore whether there were significant differences between colonies and between regions. Other responses were used qualitatively around the themes that emerged and also illustratively to generate qualitative description.

Findings

There were two main findings from my research into prison labour. First, prison reform has resulted in changes in the management of the prison system and also in the rationales underpinning imprisonment. Under the present system, people are sent to prison as a punishment for a crime committed and not for political reasons. The utilization of Marxist–Leninist symbols in prison establishments continues, to some degree, in the regions that are geographically distant from western Russia (as I found in Omsk). The Smolensk prison colonies have imported western models of treatment

⁶ My source was three female researchers (Veselovsky, Russakova and Schafft) who conduct sociological research in Russia and whom I met at various periods during the fieldwork for my doctoral thesis.

where the focus is on cognitive behavioural therapy delivered by psychotherapists, social workers and psychologists. Elsewhere religion, once the opiate of the masses, has flowed in to replace Marxism–Leninism.

The second finding of my research concerns the practical uses of prison labour. Although ostensibly prisons are expected to reform or rehabilitate as well as to punish, prisoners now have to work in order to live and not for the sake of the economy. As I shall show, the fact that prisoners have to do this and the manner in which they do this are the direct result of the collapse of the old economy. Central government funding, resources and support are no longer guaranteed and so it is left to the regions themselves to provide for, and sustain, the prison system. When the centre allocates its scarce resources, it does so on the basis of what the prison colonies can do for themselves, bearing in mind their access to raw materials and markets. In 1998, the Smolensk prison region received approximately 70 percent of its funds from the central authority; the Omsk region received a far lower figure of 30 percent.⁷

There are two explanations for the differences in funds provided. First, Smolensk region receives more because it cannot support the prisons through prison industries, which are predominantly in light assembly. Omsk region is viewed as better able to exploit the vast natural resources (timber and agriculture) in western Siberia, which can be integrated into prison industries. The second factor is the prisons' degree of independence from the central prison authority. As mentioned earlier, the regions located near Moscow are subject to greater scrutiny by the Moscow government and also by intentional observers and human rights groups. Hence, it is essential that the necessary funds are provided to the colonies that are regularly scrutinized to ensure that Russia meets its obligation to achieve minimum standards in conditions and treatment.

The shortfall in essential resources is provided through a system of barter. As it currently operates, the prison labour system is not just a mechanism for achieving the reform of prisoners. It has become the very means of survival for the colonies and for the staff, as well as for the prisoners. Only when basic needs have been met can provision be made for treatment. The different ways in which barter sustains prison establish-

⁷ The costs of maintaining prisons remain one of the last mysteries of the Soviet period. According to Tatiana Illyana, a senior researcher at the British Council in Moscow, obtaining data in the first instance is extremely difficult because there are no readily available figures such as those provided by the Prison Service Annual Reports for England and Wales. Any data that can be obtained are not presented in a clear or systematic way and they vary depending on the organization gathering the figures. Where the figures do match, it is almost impossible to guarantee that they are accurate because the dollar/rouble exchange rate fluctuated wildly in the decade following the collapse of the USSR, so figures should be treated with caution.

ments are explored in detail in the next section. This is followed by a critical assessment of the implications of barter use for the survival of the prisons, the prisoners and the local community.

Bartering for survival

According to Vincentz (2000), the Russian economy has failed to develop a functioning financial system in the course of a decade of economic transformation. The lack of 'rule of law' is cited as the main factor in the failure to establish a stable financial sector (Thompson 1999). There is little transparency in the economic system: there is a weak banking system; a high level of lending arrears in both public and private sectors; ineffective competition arising from poor trade relations; overdue government payment of wages, pensions, and so on; and a high level of international borrowing (Thompson 1999). There are many consequences of this financial crisis, but two are directly relevant to the operation of prison establishments. The first is the explicit use of barter as an alternative to the cash economy. The second is corruption, because low government wages, often paid after a long delay, force employees to make money through corruption. Although regional prison managers and prison officers consider barter to be entirely normal and acceptable because so much of non-prison life is reliant on barter, the barter practices become corrupted when staff do not record transactions and withhold goods for personal use.

Barter is commonly associated with less developed countries, where economies can hover between collapse and stability on a daily basis.⁸ Russia is no exception and barter is used between families, at the market, in hospitals and now in prison colonies, where it provides essential maintenance, resources and provisions for the entire institution. There is little question that barter transactions reduce some of the basic inefficiencies of the state subsidy of the prison system, and, as will be shown, in some settings it is an innovative enterprise. However, barter is notoriously inefficient and outmoded because it depends on a coincidence of needs (Marvasti and Smyth 1999). Although the regular and growing practice of barter is an inevitable development in the current economic and social transition in Russia, barter offers much more than the means for survival in the context of prisons. It has become so important for maintaining the social welfare of prisoners and staff that, without it, the prisons might

⁸ However, organized barter through exchange is a regular and growing practice in the United States, among not only individuals but also corporations, regardless of their size (Williams 1996).

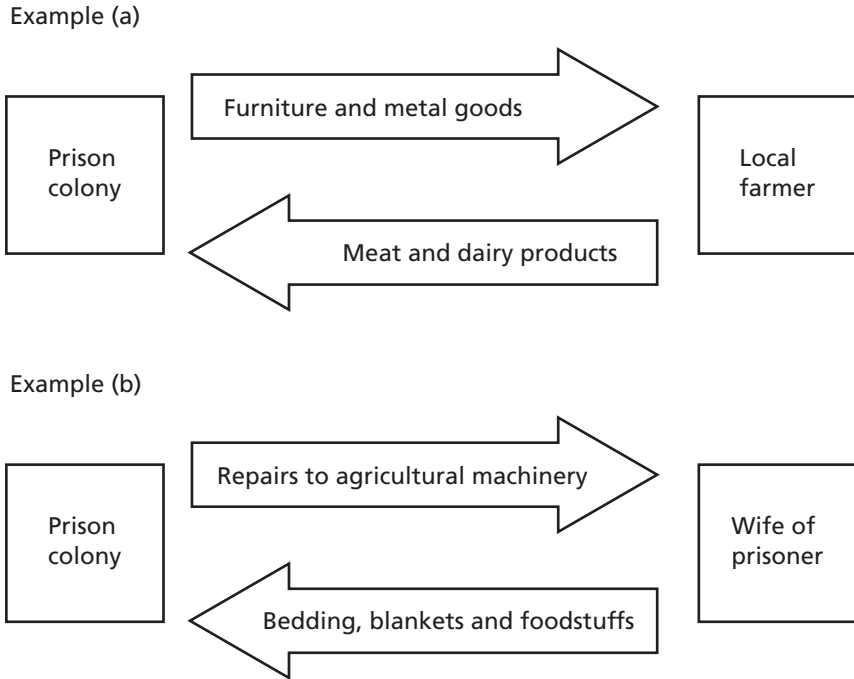


Figure 1 Basic prison barter: 'Goods for goods' exchange (*tovarii na tovarrii*)

destabilize. The local community also benefits from barter because it contributes to the sustainability of local farming, retail and light industry.

Basic prison barter

Different barter arrangements were operating in all the prison colonies visited. The most basic system is called *tovarii na tovarrii* ('goods for goods'). Figure 1 shows how this arrangement operates.

In this type of exchange, a customer, for example a local farmer, makes an appointment to meet the Director of Prison Industries in the reception area of the colony and the goods offered are assessed for quality and usefulness. On conjugal visits, which provide families with the best opportunity to barter, the local farmer brings foodstuffs (meat, bread and dairy products) and other goods (bedding, soap and furniture) and exchanges them for furniture and metal goods. Another example is the wife of a prisoner regularly bringing eggs and potatoes from the family farm and exchanging these goods for agricultural machinery parts.

When both parties reach an agreement, an 'exchange contract' is established. Every type of product (including combine harvesters, tractors, police boxes, farming equipment, prisoner training and children's toys) is

exchanged using this type of barter transaction. Barter is used to manage a whole range of relationships, both legal and illegal, and between all kinds of customers (the local community, local businesses and commercial businesses) and the prison colony. In the more formal processes (for example, legal exchanges), a cash value is calculated and goods to the value of the amount determined by the director are then exchanged. The director records the transaction in a logbook showing the amounts exchanged, which is submitted for audit by regional headquarters.

The majority of the exchanges observed during the period of study were legal. Other examples aside from those described in Figure 1 were: weekly exchanges of 20 dozen eggs from a farm in return for repairs of dairy farming equipment (Omsk 'strict' regime); the provision of meat by local farmers in exchange for holiday cottages (*dacha*) provided by the prison (Smolensk 'general' regime);⁹ and the more macabre example of mattresses sent to the prison by local hospitals in exchange for prison-produced coffins (Omsk 'general' regime). In 1997, Omsk 'general' regime opened a shop stocking funeral paraphernalia and products (ornate headstones, artificial flower arrangements) that could be purchased using barter.

A first-hand experience reveals how the successful utilization of barter depends as much on the quick-witted thinking of staff as it does on matching colony needs with consumer wants. A travelling circus that had broken down near one colony received repairs to its small fleet of lorries in exchange for a circus performance after a prison officer noticed the breakdown of the lorry fleet on his way to work. The prison officer had negotiated, in a lay-by, a barter contract to provide entertainment for staff and prisoners. This was recorded as a 'primary exchange' because it met one of the articles of the 1997 Corrective Labour Code (CLC): 'To provide cultural activities for prisoners' (*Ugolovnie Iсполnitel'nie Prava*, 1997, part 70: 203). The role of the prison officer in this situation is a somewhat modified version of what Ledeneva (1998) describes as the *blatmeister*, a person who administers exchange networks and arranges barter between friends and acquaintances. Rather than having to locate the elusive someone who can produce the good or service needed by the friend (of a friend), the prison officer can have the prisoner make the goods.

Illegal barter transactions were used to provide certain prisoners with privileges. Senior officials overlooked these exchanges, regarding them as 'entirely normal'; they also stood to benefit from the illegal exchanges by

⁹ Because of the colony size and the constraints arising from building inside prison establishments, the holiday cottages were much smaller than those built by private companies. However, they were equipped with basic facilities and were comfortable.

keeping goods for personal use. One illegal exchange that I observed involved a *mafiya* gang bartering an agreement with a colony whereby one of its members received benefits during custody in exchange for televisions provided by the *mafiya*. According to the Director of Prison Industries for that colony, who was interviewed for the research: 'Where else are we to find televisions? The region certainly does not have the funds, so we negotiate with prisoners.'

Barter is used at the most basic level, providing the colonies with essential items ranging from pork to cleaning materials. In each colony, 70 percent of all barter exchanges were between the colony and the local community and the majority of products were light assembly goods. With prices 25 percent cheaper than retail prices, and given widespread economic instability and negotiable prices for all products, it is hardly surprising that local people purchase prison-produced goods.

Most of our customers are from the villages surrounding the colonies. They exchange eggs, cheese, bread, anything really, for items like kitchen furniture and chopping boards.

Chief, Smolensk Prison Region

Although barter provides a proportion of essential resources, it does not compensate fully for the shortfall in funds.

Innovative prison barter

'Goods for goods' exchange was in operation in all four colonies. In Omsk region, three additional methods were used to provide resources: cash; barter between the client and the central government on the colony's behalf; and Community Liaison Partnerships. All three types of transaction could be used concurrently.

Cash was used to pay staff and for purchasing specialist or heavy machinery. This was called a 'colony to bank transfer' (*peredacha cherez bank*) because it was supervised by a regional bank and it involved each party paying a deposit to the bank to protect the sale against collapse. The arrangement was not used often because many banks became unstable after the collapse of the Russian economy in 1998.

The second additional method is non-monetary and involves the client paying some of the colony's debts or land taxes directly to the Moscow government. This arrangement has arisen because sometimes the colony offers products for exchange but does not need the products being offered in return. This agreement is called 'customer-Moscow exchange' (*zachiot k Moskvu ot klienta*). The use of this method is restricted to exchanges with large companies such as Omsk Gas, a multinational gas company providing

gas services throughout Siberia.¹⁰ The contract for transactions between the prison establishment and the sponsor is presented to the parties involved in the form of a flowchart outlining how goods, services and costs are transferred between the three different groups.

I observed one example of this type of transaction during my fieldwork in Omsk and it is illustrated in Figure 2. Omsk 'strict' regime provided some labour and equipment (gas piping). However, the colony did not specify goods in return even though goods were very much needed. Instead, the colony governor negotiated with Omsk Gas to pay some of the colony's overdue land tax to the central prison authority in Moscow. In this instance, Omsk Gas acted as the colony's 'Official Penal Sponsor' by liaising directly with the central prison authority. The outcome was that the central prison authority received the tax it was owed, the client received gas piping and manual labour, and the colony was relieved of some of its accrued debt to the Moscow administration.

Figure 2 shows that the process of exchange did not follow the typical 'two-way relationship' or *quid pro quo* that characterizes barter agreements (Marvasti and Smyth 1999). Instead services or goods were exchanged by transferring the 'product' from one group to another. Although none of the groups involved exchanged a service or product with the group from which it received a service, the arrangement was accepted by the central prison authority because all parties received some kind of payment. It is likely that this method of providing goods and services extends to

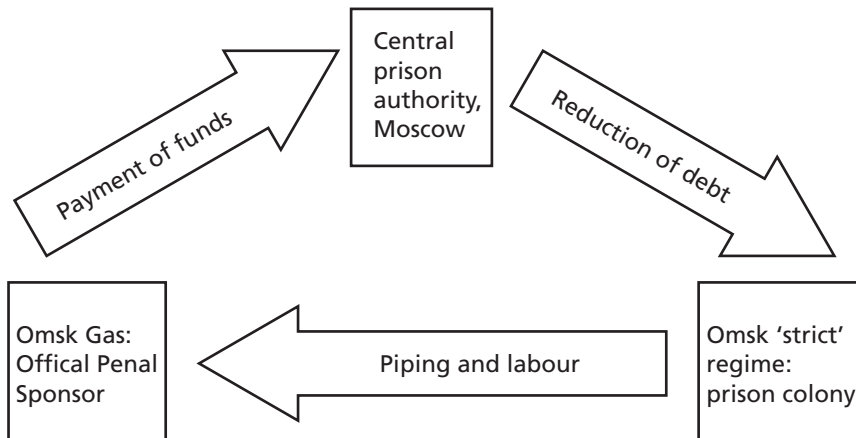


Figure 2 Innovative barter techniques: 'Customer-Moscow' exchange (*zachiot k Moskvu ot klienta*)

¹⁰ It is not known if Omsk Gas is involved in trading with other prison establishments in Siberia or elsewhere.

other large agricultural, manufacturing and commercial companies based in the western Siberian region. The arrangements also ensured the maintenance of a federal connection between the colonies and the central prison authority, although this was diluted somewhat by the involvement of the private sector as the colonies' 'Official Penal Sponsor'. This will be elaborated in a later section because it raises issues of accountability.

A third non-monetary method of providing resources is the exchange by the colony of prisoner training and goods made in prison for the secondment of experts (training managers, industrial staff, engineers and business experts) to the colony through a programme called Community Liaison Partnerships (CLP). This was a new initiative, at the pilot stage until 2001. It is too early to assess whether the CLPs are meeting their objectives of providing reform programmes through community involvement in the prison colonies.

These methods (singly or in combination) are not meeting the shortfall in funds entirely. At all four sites, barter and other solutions were providing up to 50 percent of the missing funds. Where barter could not make up the shortfall, staff worked without pay for up to eight months at a time. Meanwhile, conditions continue to deteriorate, workshops close down, treatment programmes start and end within months, and prisoners continue to face degrading prison conditions (see Walmsley 1996). The central government continues to provide different levels of support to the regions based on information about prison industries. Yet it is wrong to suppose a correlation between better industries and self-sufficiency, as is assumed about Omsk region, because all sorts of factors affect the successful functioning of a prison (the local and wider market, unemployment, staff, expertise and numbers, to name but a few). It is also incorrect to assume that a wide range of industries can produce a good variety of merchandise, or that this necessarily guarantees that the prison colonies will cope in the absence of state funds. For example, the Community Liaison Partnerships were very unstable because they depended largely on the stability of the various private industries involved.

The pressure that prison staff were under to provide goods and services using barter and the gravity of the financial situation were reflected in the ways that prison goods were marketed, or otherwise, in local media and in local communities. Where barter was relied on less, as in Smolensk, organization and marketing were poor and staff attitudes conveyed a casual approach. Advertising was restricted to villages in the immediate vicinity of the prison colonies, even though there was a potentially rich array of clients in the numerous villages and enclaves in the Moscow area, close to where the colonies were located and where it was inexpensive to advertise. The professional background of staff curtailed the effective

further utilization of barter arrangements. The two staff members who were responsible for the delivery of barter transactions worked without additional support. They had trained under the Soviet system, and thus had neither the skills nor the creative imagination vital to operating prison systems in the current economic and political climate.

The data also show that in the Omsk region, where fewer funds were available and where more innovative techniques for providing resources were in place, the marketing of goods was methodical and formal. In each colony within that region, a department of marketing devised strategies for the locations where advertisements would appear. There was quality control of goods, product development and product control (switching products on demand). Up to 30 senior prison officers had responsibility for setting up barter contracts. Staff who trained under the Soviet system worked alongside graduates of the post-Soviet university system who had studied business law and economics. This diverse professional background meant that the Director of Prison Industries could draw on a range of expertise and experience. Prison officers have abandoned the Russian term for marketing, *xodkii tovarii*, in favour of the English word 'marketing'.

We use the English term because we think like capitalists now. Marketing is an international business word that everyone identifies with.

We are free to look at marketing books. I am keen on branding. The idea of creating a prison brand is intriguing.

In their attempts to make use of Western business speak, Omsk prison officers were more likely to parody the jargon than consciously make a statement about the direction of penal policy (see Hogan 1997 and Davis 1999 for US comparisons). Omsk prison region advertised barter in businesses throughout Russia as well as in council offices, schools and higher education establishments in Omsk city.

The inconsistent support given to the devolved prison regions affected how staff and prisoners perceived the use and organization of barter and attitudes towards the central prison authority. The majority of prisoners and staff interviewed stated that relying on the local community and private business for resources was not the preferred way to operate the colonies. However, prison staff in Omsk took full advantage of the distance from the central prison authority to devise their own strategies for managing the financial situation. In principle, at least, the colonies in Siberia were becoming self-governing.

Prison officers appeared eager to manage, independently of political patronage, the problems of finding a new ideological basis for imprisonment and the practical problems of funding and management that have

arisen from the collapse of the Soviet system (see Piacentini 2001). Although this is not particularly alarming, and it makes sense in the transition period of post-Soviet political and economic devolution, it should be kept in mind that Omsk region is located 3000 kilometres east of Moscow. Criminal justice officials rarely visit the Omsk colonies, so any changes in the management of the prison and the provision of resources are likely to take place with little or no central monitoring, and that includes the potential to abuse barter for personal gain. There is currently no criminal justice legislation in place to monitor barter or to control the nature and scope of barter arrangements.

In the remainder of this article, I discuss the fact that at least some prisoners *have* to work in order to provide for barter transactions in two lights: first, as a process that might be contributing to the very high prison population in Russia and related issues of prisoner exploitation; and, second, as a new development in penology whereby the social welfare of prisoners, staff and the community is maintained through the symbiotic relationship of dependency realized through barter.

Barter, survival and prisoner exploitation

The problem of surviving imprisonment is not unique to Russia. The term usually refers to the coping and psychological issues that prisoners address during custody, such as maintaining contact with families, partners and friends and surviving possible brutality from staff or other prisoners. Cohen and Taylor describe imprisonment as 'disturbing the orderliness of life' (1981: 53) in much the same way as the death of a loved one does. They argue that the prison environment is extreme and the prisoner must survive through secondary socialization or 'prisonization', to quote a term used originally by Clemmer (1958). Survival skills are also essential after release when often-cited difficulties include coping with the extreme cultural changes of life after imprisonment. Nor is it the case that using barter to survive in prisons is a new development in Russia. In an environment where prisoners were deprived of adequate foodstuffs and clothing, barter became an important sub-economy of prison life in the Soviet period. According to one survivor of Stalin's Gulag who was interviewed for the wider study on prison labour, '*if we didn't barter for basic things like soap, shoes or some bread, our suffering would have been prolonged*'.

What distinguishes present-day Russian prisons from the past is that the private sector has become inextricably linked to the use and organization of barter and the prisoners' struggle to survive. This is about balancing economic survival with psychological survival in a changing penological

and political landscape. The burden of trying to survive while working to ensure that essentials such as food, clothing, heating, wages and industrial materials are provided for has therefore become greater. One other, crucial, aspect of prisoner survival in the Russian context is that prisons have become economically self-sustaining and high prison populations might be maintained as a result of private sector involvement, leading very possibly to prisoner exploitation.

Ever since the 19th century, the involvement of the private sector in prisons has divided the academic community (see Harding 1997). Two main questions are raised in this debate: Where does accountability lie? Can private profit be made out of public misery? There is an historical argument that private prisons were abandoned so long ago that it is now accepted that the management of the prisons and prison services is an intrinsic function of the state under the guidance of the 'rule of law' (Radzinowicz, in Shaw 1992). The state, through its agents, has the rightful authority to convey the moral message of prisons to the public (see Christie 1995). If the state is no longer the bearer of that message, then the moral authority of the state is eroded. Although the nature and kinds of private sector involvement in the Russian prison system differ from other systems, and cannot be said to be a result of political decisions to contract out services, my findings show that the state is unable to meet the required costs of incarceration. The prison establishments – and the state through tacit acknowledgement of barter – have come to rely on private sources for necessities.

One problem facing Russian criminal justice practitioners is how to ensure that the state retains its 'moral authority' over prisons when there is an unstable financial sector. Recent research conducted by Vincentz (2000) reveals that public institutions in Russia are now experiencing some of the problems of the financial sector. Public services operate without the kinds of legislative frameworks, policies and guidelines that are designed to make public services accountable in the West. Although barter is not part of official penal policy or formal procedures, it has nonetheless gone through a process of *normalization* as a result of its everyday use and also because prison officers had no other option but to use it. In Omsk region, the use of barter has gone way beyond the typical 'goods for goods' exchange (see Figure 1). Some companies are acting as the Official Penal Sponsor to the colonies by paying some of their debts to the central government (Figure 2). This involvement has intensified in recent years. Omsk region has drafted a framework for innovative barter transactions with private companies. The Chief of Omsk Prison Region did not feel obligated to disclose barter contracts to the central prison authority: 'How I run my region is between

me and my staff and the funders of some of the resources. Moscow is not involved.’

The economically self-sufficient prison establishments, particularly in Omsk, are no longer reliant on the state, and this has led to structural changes across the prison colonies. First, as far as prison officers at the Omsk sites were concerned, the central prison authority had abandoned its responsibility for managing the colonies, so staff welcomed any other support and guidance that could be provided. Business leaders from Omsk Gas, which provides machinery in exchange for cheaper labour in one of its plants, are already involved on committees that discuss improvements to prison industries. At first glance, this might seem like nothing more than knowledge sharing. However, it should be borne in mind that private prison operators are in the business of making a profit (see Moyle 1995; Hogan 1997). If this can be realized through the provision of cheaper labour, then the private business in question will favour a continuation, and even an increase, of imprisonment rates (Davis 1999). In the regions where the private sector is providing a greater number of services, private enterprises might become influential in offering financial and political support to those regional governors (not the prison chiefs) who favour tough law and order policies.¹¹ In effect, what might be happening in Russia is that the economically self-sufficient prisons are contributing to the maintenance of a large prison population.¹²

The very large prison population in Russia could also be explained as a hangover from the Soviet period. The Moscow Centre for Prison Reform (1993) has campaigned for the release of unknown numbers of victims who were sentenced as children in the 1940s. Whatever the explanation for high prison population rates, if in some colonies there is greater autonomy from central government then there is very little to stand in the way of businesses increasing their stake in the prison realm.

¹¹ In the United States, the influence of business on criminal justice policy has prompted a wide literature on the topic (Christie 1995; Hogan 1997; Davis 1999). The argument is that, because senior criminal justice figures such as state judges are voted into office, corporations may offer electoral, lobbying and financial support to candidates who are seen to impose tougher sentencing laws such as the ‘three strikes laws’, which lead to accelerated prison population rates and hence a vast, cheaper, labour force.

¹² None of the criteria for evaluating the impact of private sector involvement in the prison realm in Russia has been placed on the public record and little is understood about the relationship between the prisons and the private sector. This is an area that deserves closer scrutiny and public debate. I was awarded funds to return to Russia in 2003 to conduct a follow-up study of the prisons visited. My aim is to commence a theory-building process by identifying qualitative issues concerning the interface between high prison populations and heightened private sector involvement. The research will be written up into a follow-up paper.

The second structural change in the economically self-sufficient prisons concerns whether private companies will be required to provide genuine reform or just physical improvements to the prisons. The emergence of Community Liaison Partnerships in Omsk region suggests that Russia is not moving in the direction of countries such as Australia where concerns have been voiced over the absence of 'social learning models' in prisons where the private sector has emerged (Moyle 1995: 58).

Outside of the prisons, the self-sufficiency of the prisons might lead to structural changes in the community. The community might benefit from high prison population rates, because the prison economy contributes to the stabilization of local economies. Local people therefore have a vested interest in the utilization of custody as a penal sanction: the more prisoners are working, the greater the opportunity to trade with the prisons, which increases the standard of living for local communities.

If the role of companies in prisons intensifies, this could be extremely problematic for Russia as it moves towards incorporating human rights principles in imprisonment. A possible area of concern might be the involvement of companies in setting the hours of prisoners' work. Companies, large and small, already have a say in the types of work undertaken, the hours of work, staff recruitment, health, safety and wages. Although national criminal justice legislation restricts the number of hours prisoners can work to a level that meets minimum standards, those regions that are more autonomous from the central government may ignore these guidelines and intensify the workload, fearful that, if they do not, then their barter contracts and all the resources will be terminated. Prisoners are, therefore, under pressure to work hard. In Omsk, their wages are linked to output and, in a nod to the Soviet period, a sign hangs on a wall inside one of the massive industrial warehouses:

The more you work, the more we eat, the happier we are.

One way of looking at the situation is that, in working to survive, other goals of imprisonment are subverted because treatment programmes depend on the very basic resources provided by barter. It is too early to conclude that a modified version of Gulag forced labour is currently in operation, because there are signs that the political outlook and economic stability of Russia are improving (Cockburn 2002). However, until President Putin makes regional governments more accountable, prison populations may increase as a consequence of private sector involvement.

There are two ironies in the findings on the emergence of barter. One is that nowadays prisoners are forced into working, as they were in the Soviet period. The other is that the community is involved in the day-to-day activities of the prison. This could benefit prisoners by helping them learn

skills that might be useful after release. Thus prison colonies as they currently function in 21st-century Russia are arguably rehabilitative. Barter relationships mean that the community becomes aware of the roles that prisoners play in providing them with essential goods. Through these contacts and exchanges, the community, whether consciously or not, becomes involved with the prison and hence engaged in a debate about the practical and social functions of imprisonment. This leads on to the question of how barter assists in providing for social welfare.

Barter as a facilitator of community integration and social welfare

I have described the dynamics of the use of barter in detail. This account has shown that the growing volume of barter trade in Russian prison colonies has mitigated some of the basic problems experienced by the prisons because of the decline in central funding. As well as providing resources, barter is a vehicle for community integration into the prison realm. There are three kinds of benefit to the local community. First, local people and local businesses use barter regularly to purchase a whole range of products, from manufacturing to buttons. Second, the local community can to some extent plan ahead for the goods and services it needs because it is kept informed about timetables of production and product development. This is achieved as much by 'word of mouth' as by advertising – most of the staff live in the villages surrounding the colonies so they are able to inform their neighbours and friends (see Ledeneva 1998). Third, since all the products are chosen specifically with the local community's needs in mind, the local community has a direct say in the prison industries.

The consequence is that, at the lower end of the scale (the Smolensk sites), local people come into the colonies daily to find out if changes have been made to production and also to enquire whether the colony administrators require new products from the general public. The community is kept informed about changes that might affect the local economy. For Russians, who have been used to fluctuating rouble/dollar exchange rates and ineptitude from political leaders since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, this level of support is vital. The situation of mutual need has created a sense of trust between the prison managers and the local communities. Moreover, where the central prison authority has 'let down' prison managers by failing to meet its commitment to provide the barest minimum of resources, the local community has stepped in to create opportunities that have led to the survival of the prisons. It could be argued that, in the early 21st century, some Russian prison colonies are more

dependent on the local community than on the state for essential support, resources and guidelines. As one client involved in barter said in an interview:

They [colonies] always need foodstuffs, we need parts for machinery. It's a mutually beneficial relationship.

At the upper end of the scale (the Omsk sites), local businesses and representatives in the local community have established Community Liaison Partnerships (CLPs) and the Official Penal Sponsor programme. The CLPs provide advice on improving prison industries, but they also discuss ways of providing continuing care for prisoners once they are released into the community. The guidelines of the CLPs state that the prisoner must be of low security risk and must have acquired some skills before the custodial sentence or during custody. The overarching aim is to provide for 'social reform', which, according to the regional Chief of the prison colonies, is achievable because representatives in the community want to participate in the management of the prisons.

In most prison systems in the West there is a lack of consultation between the prisons and the local community and this exacerbates the difficulties of the after-care process (see Simon 1999 and Van Zyl Smit and Dünkel 1999 for recent debates on prisoners' work and social exclusion). The opposite is happening in Russia. There are greater and more imaginative possibilities for the provision of continuing care in Russian prison colonies owing to the symbiotic relationship between the prisons and the local community. The community has become engaged in an open dialogue with the prison establishments through the wheeling and dealing of goods and services and the various barter transactions struck between many different clients. Current obstacles to implementing these strategies include: shortages of resources in prisons; increased prison populations; failure to match treatment measures to those that might be found outside prison; and diversion of resources towards increasing security measures. Should these obstacles be overcome or at least diminished, then Russia may provide a test-case for a prison system in which the local community is directly involved in the management of prisons and the care of prisoners.

A problem with the application of resettlement strategies that is often cited in the prisons literature concerns unrealistic target-setting and hasty initiatives (see Simon and Corbett 1994; Simon 1999). Prisons in England and Wales, argues Simon (1999), do not currently support prisoners' needs. Consequently prisoners leave prison with a lack of skills and a lack of familiarity with work or motivation to work. Simon adds that prisoners are sent the wrong signals about work. These signals are administered on the

back of social exclusion strategies that bear little resemblance to individuals' experiences of work and that eventually become submerged under tightened security, which curtails the movement of prisoners. If programmes do not match those found outside, it is better to do away with them (see Van Zyl Smit and Dünkel 1999 for international comparisons).

In contrast to Simon's study, the prisoners in the four Russian prison colonies were fully aware of the importance of work, as shown in the following quote from an interview with a prisoner:

I know why I work. I work to live. It's a struggle to survive here. We have to work harder than most but it is a challenge.

Prisoner, Omsk region

However, a minority of prisoners did not understand how reform could be achieved if they were forced to work in order to survive. This relates to points I made earlier about how current practices may lead to prisoner exploitation and the maintenance of high prison population rates:

I work my life away in here and for what? Some stale bread, a bowl of *kasha* [porridge]. I don't feel reformed. I feel overworked.

Prisoner, Omsk region

Clearly, for prisoners to survive, they must work. Without work, they cannot achieve a basic standard of living acceptable to international observers. It follows that, in present-day Russia, prisoners may be forced into working. The implications – in terms of whether Russia is meeting its obligation to provide for prisoner reform, as assumed in the 'pan-European criminal justice ideology' (Zubkov et al. 1998) to which it now subscribes – are immense. However, the current situation in Russian prisons in relation to international instruments that prohibit forced labour should be viewed with caution. Working to live threw up a whole range of feelings and opinions from staff and prisoners that were not entirely negative. Indeed, in most cases, prisoners stated that the work undertaken was 'realistic'. Working to survive gave prisoners a sense of purpose and identity:

Those who work the hardest are given the most respect from the officers and from the *zeks* [prisoners]. They are the strongest.

Prisoner, Omsk region

It's better to know that this day you will work to produce something for the local farmer, than to have a situation where you make toys just to fill in some target sheets.

Prisoner, Omsk region

And other prisoners viewed the situation with humorous irony:

I am working to keep the prison working. That is it, I am working to keep myself in prison!

Prisoner, Smolensk region

Staff stated that it was sometimes necessary to exert pressure on prisoners to work:

I tell my men in no uncertain terms, 'without your work, we will all suffer'. They understand because we are a collective.

Prison officer, Omsk region

In present circumstances it is unlikely that prisoners would openly complain, and staff and prisoners discussed the state of the prisons frequently. Sometimes it seemed that prisoners were being blackmailed into working, which was interesting because it was reminiscent of the bygone era of the Soviet Union when prisoners were reminded continually of the usefulness of their work. Mostly, though, staff were mindful of how they informed prisoners that the self-sufficiency of the prisons was dependent on prison labour.

In summary, prisons in Russia today function way beyond crime control in the usual sense and are a social and economic necessity. Barter contributes to a form of social welfare. Prisoners benefit by learning barter skills that can be used when they are released, and the community benefits in that the prisoners are viewed as individuals who are able to provide the means to sustain a basic standard of living.

Conclusion

In this final section, I present some prospects for the future in two areas: first, the prospects for greater private sector involvement should the current situation continue; and, second, predictions about the impact on the relationship between the prisons and the community should full state funding resume.

The situation in Russian prison establishments in the period since the original fieldwork in 1999 is difficult to determine. Russian criminologists and researchers conduct very little formal academic research in prisons (see King 1994). Although human rights groups are monitoring prison conditions, there has been little critical debate by Western criminologists about the direction in which the Russian prison system is heading. Based on these findings, the following are some questions and areas that might become important in future penological debates.

Looking first at the integration of the private sector, the form and manner of this integration in Russian prison establishments is unique because prisoners must work for personal survival and for the survival of the institutions and local economies. In one sense, this development is worse than the situation during the Soviet era because Russia is attempting to move towards more democratic structures and at the same time seems to

be regressing in its prison management, where barter is used as a substitute for money. Other pressing questions concern what will happen if the private sector increases its role in providing resources. Private companies might soon lobby for certain types of skilled prisoners to be sent to their regions. Valuable tradespeople may be refused parole on the basis that their skills are needed. None of this is given yet, but further prison research in Russia may yield answers to these questions.

Moving on to predictions about the future relationship between the prisoner and the community, my research showed that the most important and useful skills that prisoners learn while in prison are survival skills, which are enhanced through learning how to barter and observing how contracts are negotiated. Prisoners are aware of why they are working, and that they could leave prison with relevant up-to-date knowledge of the economic and social climate they are being released into. Although these skills might not be best suited to an environment such as the UK where employers place emphasis on training qualifications (Simon 1999), such skills are absolutely vital to survive the current climate of instability and social disorder in Russia. Since 70 percent of barter contracts were with the local community, this involvement might also minimize the lack of self-confidence, the sense of bewilderment and isolation, and the possible deterioration in interpersonal relationships arising from forced separation from loved ones, which are cited as factors that can lead to recidivism (Simon 1999).

Should full state funding resume, this symbiotic relationship may cease to exist in its current form. The Russian economy has been stabilizing since 2000 and there are indications that President Putin is in favour of a more centralized form of government, which means that the management of the prison regions is likely to follow this model (Cockburn 2002). Although a full resumption of central funding is the preferred option both nationally and internationally (see Zubkov et al. 1998), this may have a negative impact on the relationship between the prisons and the community. A return to full state subsidy of the prisons might lead to prison establishments no longer relying on local communities for support, services and resources. New groups (local hospitals or schools) might surface and trade with the community. What will be vitally important is how the community receives prisoners once they are released, and how it regards the resettlement of offenders. The community will no longer have a direct involvement in the daily lives of prisoners. Prisoners might become isolated from the communities into which they are eventually released because they will have little way of knowing about the daily lives of local people, family and friends.

In the long term, the local community may be antagonistic to a prison

community with which it has little interaction. The resumption of full funding might also affect the prison economies and consequently the local economies. The types of industry undertaken reflect the local economy, so the prison economy is regulated by local markets in a similar way to that described by Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939). Certain trades, skills and work programmes might cease if there is no longer demand for them; local economies might collapse as a result of the loss of services provided by the prison establishments.

In conclusion, I have argued in this article that the current reliance on barter should be understood within the bigger picture of what prisons intend, or hope to achieve, in the 21st century. Indeed, it is extremely important that prisoners are protected from exploitation; there were concerns about this in Omsk, where private business was coming to have some influence over prison matters. At the same time, the Council of Europe would do well to pay attention to the innovative and complex ways that barter is contributing in the short term to achieving the goal of rehabilitation by providing useful opportunities – as understood by prisoners, prison officers and the community – before concluding that Russian prisons are failing to meet international minimum standards and obligations.

The findings presented in this article are drawn from doctoral research into Russian prison labour. The doctorate was completed in 2001. Thanks to Dominique Moran at the Department for International Development, University of Birmingham for her very helpful comments on an earlier draft.

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