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Book Review: Rogan, M. (2011). Prison Policy in Ireland: Politics, Penal-Welfarism and Political Imprisonment

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Rogan, M. (2011). Prison policy in Ireland: Politics, penal-welfarism and political imprisonment. Oxon: Routledge. ISBN: 9780415616195.

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The academic literature on criminology in Ireland is not as well developed in comparison with that of Europe. However, there is now a steadily developing corpus of work on many areas of Irish criminal justice policy from an increasing number of academics. Nonetheless, an in-depth analysis of the development of Irish prison policy, as presented by Rogan in *Prison policy in Ireland*, has never been previously attempted. The book deals primarily with the adult male prison population and policies.

Chapter One explores and critiques the theoretical literature on the sociology of punishment and policy making. The author argues that policy analysis can provide the missing link in the understanding of the nature of crime control and emerging penal policies. In order to create the most accurate picture of Irish prison policy, Rogan contends that it is also necessary to address the wider social context.

The second chapter examines the period from Independence to Second World War period. Despite becoming an independent Free State, the legal regulation and internal regimes of the prisons in Ireland remained the product of British administration and legislation. Low numbers of prisoners and minor procedural changes were the norm until the outbreak of Civil War (1922-1923), which had an acute influence on the prison system in the immediate and longer term.

The third chapter commences by assessing the impact of the Emergency on prison policy and the interconnections between the security of the state, the integrity of the prison system and the suppression of prisoner protest. Prison Rules were introduced in 1947, however, their purpose were essentially purely administrative. During the period between 1958 and 1964, there was legislative, administrative, philosophical and imaginative change within the system. The ultimate idea of a prison as a place of rehabilitation instead of just punishment began to emerge and it was supported by academics. The only problem, from the author's point of view, was that most of the ideas were recycled from the past, when more innovative approaches were required.

In the 1970s a period of crisis management in prison policy developed. The prison population began to increase, undergoing a substantial expansion in the early part of the 1970s with the outbreak of serious violence in Northern Ireland. Overcrowding became an issue again. The proposed solution was merely to increase the number of prison spaces. Political events during 1970 dominated the debates and therefore other issues, such as reform in penal policy, once again drifted away.

In the 1980s prison numbers continued to rise. Rogan concludes that, as had been the case so often in Ireland in the past, it was the issue of finance that dictated much in prison policy. There was a misleading perception that the provision of extra spaces would solve the problems of overcrowding and ageing infrastructure. Prison policy was in crisis.

By the new millennium, penal expansion became a clear aim. The constant contention remained that such plans would solve the problem. A number of significant reforms were suggested by Justice Minister Michael McDowell, including the construction of a new prison on lands at Thornton Hall. For Rogan, the improved accountability structures introduced by McDowell did not go far enough as they did not extend to creating an independent prisoner complaints mechanism: there is no prison ombudsman in Ireland and deaths in prison are investigated internally.

The author concludes that individual ministers and civil servants have a key role to play in penal reform. However, these actors seem to take steps without a great deal of reference to historical evidence or criminological research, including that produced by the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT). The book is a substantial addition to the growing criminological academy and a long-awaited contribution to penal studies in Ireland. It provides an in-depth analysis of the literature on the sociology of punishment and policy making, has a user-friendly structure and is excellent reference material for both students and academics.