

YOUNG MEN IN DETENTION CENTRES by Anne B. Dunlop and Sarah McCabe. *Routledge and Kegan Paul*, 28s.

During 1960–1961 the authors interviewed about one hundred young men (aged between 17 and 21) in two Detention Centres a few days after their arrival and again a few days prior to their discharge, in addition they sent out a questionnaire to their subjects three months after their release. Members of the staff at the Centres, at Aylesbury and Werrington, were also asked for their assessment of the subjects in terms of the degree to which they appeared to have ‘benefited’ from their stay and the likelihood of their reconviction.

The picture that results from the attempt to correlate the information thus obtained is scrappy and confused. The confusion must in part stem from the evident lack of any coherent theory underlying the Detention Centre experiment. Even those concerned with the day-to-day running of the places appear not to be clear just what they are supposed to be about: we are told, ‘Aylesbury inmates appeared to embark upon it (detention) as punitive and deterrent treatment only; the Werrington men may have sought for a reformatory training element’, and this must be a reflection of the staff attitudes.

The information might have been more coherent and easily classifiable had the interviews been

more highly structured but this might not have brought to light the odd bits of evidence that prompt such fascinating questions. Why should the method of discovery influence the offender’s attitude to his punishment? Why is it that the ‘men who see positive possibilities in their training do no better than those who think the training will be pointless?’ What value is to be attached to the remark of one of the most intelligent of the subjects that ‘it would be better to sentence people to one month’s detention, because after that it becomes a way of life and doesn’t teach you a lesson?’ And, most curious and unexpected of all, why is it that apparently the highest level of achievement in drawing and painting in the Centres is reached by those who had spent some time in an Approved School?

Such incidental discoveries as these appear potentially the most valuable part of the book but the more ‘expected’ findings that it provides should be of help in any more comprehensive and theoretically based attempt to assess the value of Detention Centres: it also points to the need, in such a larger study, for the co-operation of psychologists and sociologists.

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