

Paul O'Mahony (1946-2015): an appreciation

While a doctoral student at Trinity College in the 1970s, Paul O'Mahony also did research for penal reform groups. Then, from 1981 to 1993, he worked in the Prisons Division of the Department of Justice. Word had it that the Department of Justice didn't really want a social psychologist focused on research – but they got one anyway courtesy of the Civil Service Commission. They were fairly ok with psychologists looking inside people's heads, but not so keen at looking at wider issues such as the lives those in prison experienced, their backgrounds and the social issues which brought them into prison.

In that period, and later while teaching in Trinity College, Paul's research examined really important matters such as, for example, addiction, the situation in the old Women's Prison, the youngsters in St. Patrick's Institution and Shanganagh Castle, suicide in prison, the peculiar nature of the Irish prison system compared to other European countries and (at the urging of John Lonergan) seminal studies of the men and women in Mountjoy.

Paul also focused on the criminal justice system as a whole and published six books and a great range of other studies. So, for example, when a judge issued a report on the Kerry Babies case which whitewashed the behaviour of the Gardai, Paul's report on that report was forensic and scathing. Paul's work was always academically rigorous, but the core quality was always a seeking out of truth, often the uncomfortable truth, and, most especially, he spoke truth to power.

What also comes across greatly in Paul's research is the humanity. He could do the statistics, but we always see 'the whole person', people in all their complexity, their qualities as well as their problems, the lives they live, their backgrounds and experience. Through it all there is a deep commitment to social justice.

Paul's publications form the bedrock of crime and justice study in Ireland. His books include: *Crime and Punishment in Ireland* (1993), *Criminal Chaos: Seven Crises in Irish Criminal Justice* (1996), *Mountjoy Prisoners: A Sociological and Criminological Profile* (1997), *Prison Policy in Ireland: Criminal Justice versus Social Justice* (2000), *Criminal Justice in Ireland* (2002) - a massive landmark text of some 800 pages, which he edited and in which he wrote extensively - and *The Irish War on Drugs: the Seductive Folly of Prohibition* (2008).

Paul deserves recognition as the father – perhaps one should say grandfather - of criminology and criminal justice study in Ireland, work that speaks of and for the troubled and troublesome in our society. We should be hugely grateful for that, and no doubt his writing will endure and continue to be of value to us all.

