European Group for the Study of Deviance & Social Control*

1. The dominant mode of analysis of crime, deviance and social control, as represented in research literature and policy practice, consists of variants of positivism: a concentration on the collection of criminal statistics and the attempt to characterise criminal and deviant acts as the products of psychologically defective and "abnormal" personalities. Agencies of social control are studied in an uncritical way or from the point of view of how to make them more effective. The control perspective dominates comparative criminological research: in individual countries and in international organisations such as the Council of Europe, official and governmental agencies are funding research and expecting academics to provide findings which will help to improve methods and techniques of social control.

2. In recent years, however, such analytical frameworks are being challenged by a growing number of academics in their teaching, their research and their publications, and by social workers and by students. An increasing number of organisations and associations of the "clients" and "victims" of such frameworks and indeed of the political economy that conditions those frameworks, such as Women Liberation, Gay Liberation, Prisoners Organisations, Tenants Associations and many others, is further evidence of the challenge to that dominant perspective and practice.

3. It is within the context of this challenge that the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control is located. The European Group is an attempt to contribute to the development of a critical academic and political framework, to criticise social theory and political practice. It is committed to a theoretical approach that grants "deviant" actors a conscious past, a present perceived problem and a future praxis. At the same time, an approach that recognizes that action takes place within a world of circumstances not of an individual's own making. It is, therefore, committed to develop theory that delineates the nature of the whole society which engenders such problems. In general the framework to which the Group, as an organisation, is committed is Marxist. Yet recognising the problematic nature of that framework, avoids a dogmatic stance within that debate.

Commitment is to a theoretical and practical programme that generally is concerned to relate systems of domination and control to the structures of production and the division of labour.

4. At another level the European Group is intended to facilitate communication between social scientists across national boundaries. Such communication is all the more necessary given the contemporary development of a variety of cross-national economic, political and social control enterprises. There is a need to exchange information about current developments in research and theory, to encourage research into crime, deviance and social control in a socially and politically relevant context, to relate individual research to less parochial interests and to foster joint research projects. The Group facilitates these objectives:

(i) through regular meetings, not only of the Group as a whole but through the formation of working groups, e.g. Social Control of Women, Schools as Institutions of Social Control, Politics and Deviance, a Social Work Group, and a European Prisons Group.

(ii) by publishing a Newsletter and a Register of Members Research Interests and

(iii) by encouraging co-operation in social and political reform and policy with and between specific organisations and pressure groups with whom we share general theoretical and political perspectives.

5. The European Group is independent of any official agencies and is financially self-supporting.

6. The initial formation of the Group took place in Florence, Italy in 1972 and has subsequently held two conferences, one in Florence another at Colchester, England. Papers and discussions have been wide ranging and include Penal Institutions and Prisoners Movements, Psychiatric Control, Police Practice and Procedures, Politics and Deviance, and the Changing Nature of Legal Repression.

7. The organisation of the European Group is undertaken by an annually elected Steering Committee and a permanent secretary, from whom further information and details can be obtained.

ManMan -1974-

* The Group, whose first conference was held in Italy in 1973, is a left, primarily academic organization concerned with developing a progressive alternative to established criminology in Europe. For a report on the Group's 1973 conference, see Crime and Social Justice I (pp. 11-17). For more information on the Group, contact Mario Simoni, c/o Dipartimento Statistico, Via Curatone, 1, 50123 Firenze, Italy.