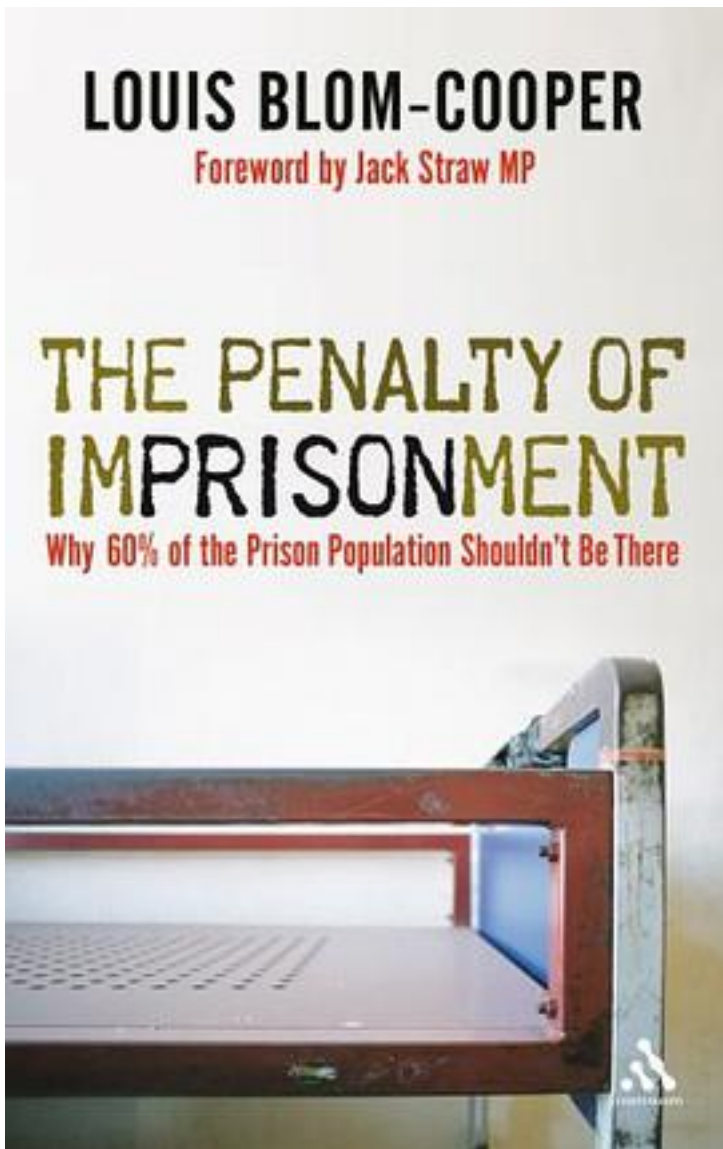


The Penalty of Imprisonment



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This is a highly controversial thesis on penal reform from a very well-respected QC - argued with verve and supported by accessible statistics. It is Blom-Cooper's contention that Tony Blair and David Blunkett have had a disastrous effect on legal and penal reform in this country. He views their 'Tough on Crime and Tough on the Causes of Crime' slogan as a prelude to authoritarian regression and argues the Government is hell bent on building more and more prisons and condemning more and more convicted people to gaol sentences. Sir Louis' argument is that 60 per cent of the prison population should not be there at all and it is notable that Jack Straw has felt able to write an introduction to this book. The argument begins from a historical point by asking what the purpose of imprisoning people originally was. Blom-Cooper also examines the philosophy of those two great Quaker reformers George Fox and Elizabeth Fry. He draws the reader's attention to the misuse of custody as the instinctive punishment for serious crime. The inexorable response of contemporary Britain in resorting to prison as the prime penal sanction is still morally and practically unsustainable. Restorative justice as a viable alternative method of dealing with some (if not the majority of offenders) is not sufficiently appreciated by politicians or the legislature. We have not yet developed the full potential of non-custodial penalties and the time has come when we really must mean what we say: that prison is the last resort. It is argued that imprisonment - other than those who must be kept out of circulation for fear of serious physical harm, much as we do in the mental-health system, should cease. Sir Louis' thesis is argued at all times with passion and backed-up with extremely digestible statistics.

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