

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

May 9, 2018

Send Our Prison Officials Overseas

In the April 2018 issue of Prison Legal News I read about Attorney Donald Specter of the Prison Law Office in Berkely, CA. He founded the U.S.-European Criminal Justice Innovation Program and is funding it by donating the fees he has earned winning prison litigation.

The program pays for correctional officials from the U.S. to go to Europe (particularly Scandinavian countries) to tour their prisons so they can see what a just and humane prison system looks like. In those countries they don't simply lock people up and throw away the key. They take the time and put forth the effort to help those who commit crimes to change. Their focus is on helping and healing prisoners so they can be released and return to society as productive members. Treating prisoners like human beings would be a good first step.

But in Europe it goes further than that. They realize that the more you mistreat and abuse someone, the more likely it is that they will reoffend and return to prison. Their recidivism rate is a fraction of that in the U.S. And their prisoners serve less time and have better living conditions. In the U.S., it's a race to the bottom - who can deprive prisoners of more things, treat them more harshly and incarcerate them longer - without violating their constitutional rights. The current standards for what constitutes constitutionally permissible treatment has been eroded over the last 30 years by a federal judiciary controlled by radical right-wing activist judges. As I commented in a previous blog, the only reason this sad state of affairs exists is because slavery is still allowed in the U.S. (as punishment for the commission of a crime).

I applaud Attorney Specter and I pray that Wisconsin DOC officials will have an opportunity to travel to Europe to see how prisons should be run.

Further information is available at these websites:

motherjones.com
abajournal.com
correctionsone.com
bismarktribune.com
drexel.com