

# THE ABOLITIONIST

The magazine of Radical Alternatives to Prison  
Incorporating *Prison Briefing*

Number 14 (1983 no. 2).

## GENDER, RACE



WOMEN IN PRISON  
DRUNKENNESS  
YOUNG OFFENDERS  
LIFE SENTENCES

RACISM IN PRISONS  
PROBATION OR PRISON?  
MAGISTRATES' COURTS

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# RAP

Radical Alternatives to Prison,  
BCM Box 4842, London WC1N 3XX.

1. RAP is a pressure group working towards the abolition of imprisonment. We do not believe that imprisonment is a rational, humane or effective way of dealing with harmful behaviour or human conflict. We believe that it functions in a repressive and discriminatory manner which serves the interests of the dominant class in an unequal society — whether capitalist or 'socialist'.

Most people in prison are there for crimes which are a response to the frustrations of their social and economic position. Capitalism creates its own 'crime problem', and no amount of tinkering with the penal system will solve it.

We recognise that there will be no possibility of abolition without fundamental changes in the social order. We also recognise, while working towards abolition, that it may never be fully attained. There may always be some people whose behaviour poses such a threat to others that their confinement is justified; we cannot tell. There are some such people in prison now but they are, without doubt, a very small minority of the prison population.

2. A capitalist state cannot do without imprisonment, but it can make do with very much less of it than ours does, as other countries, notably the Netherlands, have shown. RAP supports measures to reduce the prison population by means of:

- an end to prison building;
- legislation to cut maximum sentences;
- decriminalisation of certain offences, such as soliciting and possession of cannabis;
- an end to the imprisonment of minor property offenders, and of fine and maintenance defaulters.

3. The introduction of 'alternatives' like community service orders and intermediate treatment has not stopped the prison population from rising, but has increased the scope for interference by the State in people's lives. We do not deny that some good things have been done in the name of alternatives within the penal system, but we hold no brief for them. What we do support are 'radical alternatives' which are, as far as possible, non-coercive, non-stigmatising and independent of the State.

4. Many prison reforms amount to a sugar coating on a toxic pill. But while prisons remain, some features of our present system can and should be done away with, in particular:

- secrecy and censorship;
- compulsory work;
- the use of drugs to control prisoners;
- solitary confinement (by whatever name);
- the system of security classification.

These demands are largely satisfied by the Special Unit at Barlinnie Prison, which has shown what can be achieved by a less authoritarian and restrictive approach.

5. Many of RAP's medium-term goals are shared by other groups who do not share our political outlook. But RAP's fundamental purpose is, through research and propaganda, to educate the public about the true nature, as we see it, of imprisonment and the criminal law; to challenge the prevailing attitudes to crime and delinquency; and to counter the ideology of law-and-order which helps to legitimate an increasingly powerful State machine.

The main themes of this issue are the ways in which sexism and racism impinge on the penal system; but there is another theme which, as we go to press, has become urgently topical: the treatment of life-sentence prisoners. According to the *Guardian* (18.7.83), 'A plan for mandatory minimum 20-year sentences for murderers, with the possible exception of those convicted of crimes of passion, is likely to be announced by the Home Secretary after the Conservative Party conference in October'. (This evidently means 20 years' 'real time', the equivalent of a 60 year sentence with the possibility of parole.) 'Other stronger penalties for convicted murderers believed to be still under consideration include a tougher prison regime.'

One of RAP's main concerns in recent years has been to document the crushing effects of very long periods of imprisonment under the existing, very 'tough', regime, and to support the humane alternative pioneered by the staff and prisoners at the Barlinnie Special Unit. This issue of *The Abolitionist* includes an interview with Peter Adams, released last year after 'only' 17 years of a life sentence.

If the *Guardian* is right, RAP's highest priority in the coming months must clearly be to campaign against these brutal measures. If you are willing to help in this campaign, please contact us at BCM Box 4842, London WC1N 3XX.

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# Women in Prison

A conversation between Chris Ryder-Tchaikovsky and Jill Box-Granger

Jill: How was the idea for Women in Prison born?

Chris: Six months ago I heard that yet another woman had died in Holloway. I didn't know who it was. I was working on the Violence Against Women working party at the GLC Womens Committee and, quickly without thinking, I thought it would be a good idea for both Islington Womens Committee and the GLC Womens Committee to write to the Governor of Holloway to ask her for a visit. I thought better of that because if they got a visit it would be the normal visit; they'd only see what they wanted them to see. Valerie Wise, Chair of the Womens Committee, and Hilary Crowhurst, the head of the Womens Committee Support Unit asked for a report on prisons and what the problems were as I saw them — which I prepared. They then started talking about the need for a campaign group and I thought we should start a referral, research and campaign group specifically for women in prison, because they seemed so under-represented and so under-helped.

So it started from the GLC Womens Committee in a way? And how did you draw other people in?

It just happened, really. Other women were interested. I came by, calling on women working in the field, for instance Alcoholics Recovery Project (ARP) and the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP); through contacts and academics, Victoria Greenwood and Fiona Mclean<sup>1</sup> were particularly helpful, and other women generally interested in the prison issue. Not only through the campaigning field but also through the academic field I came to hear of other people and it sort of escalated. We're not a big group. There's only six of us and there are three ex-prisoners and three non-ex-prisoners and that's the balance that we want to keep. We don't ever want more non-ex-prisoners than ex-prisoners. I think that's important. If it was possible we'd like to have it all ex-prisoners but I think it's also quite a good thing to have the balance. Lennie Speer I came to through contact with friends at Holloway; through Lennie I came to Bernie who I found was making the programme<sup>2</sup>; and there are other ex-con friends of mine that I've spoken with — one of them who's coming here this morning.<sup>3</sup>

So the six women are the actual working core?

Well, so far there's really a working core of four because Bernie has been involved with a programme for community groups but we're hoping that we can draw Bernie in later — well, I think she's been drawn in already!—Mainly its been a couple of non-ex-prisoner women and myself. But of course we haven't got a bean yet. We got a £50 donation which was great and that was a start. What we've done is to get campaign leaflets, headed paper which is important if we're going to try and raise funds. And when we hear about the grant<sup>4</sup> we can open our office, our referral centre and drop-in centre and we should get going properly.

Do you envisage W.I.P. being an entirely all women group?

Oh, absolutely — no question about it. Unless we need a Management Committee, which I hope we don't. But if we don't get the GLC grant we've got to think about fund-raising, think about charitable status, which we don't want. But then we might be approaching men with the understanding that they are completely silent, amorphous people who are only there for the prestige of being there. I approached Longford but I'd rather it was all women and hopefully Harriet Harman and Jo Richardson could become our people.

For those people for whom it's not automatically obvious why W.I.P. should be women only, why do you think its practically important that it should be so? I know it's a drag but in this case it won't be entirely apparent to some readers of the Abolitionist. Sorry!

Speaking personally, I can't work with men. It's as simple as that. I can't work with male, delicate egos. I believe that women relate in a very different way to women, and I believe they relate in a very different way if men are even present. So that's one reason. The other reason I think that there are specific disparities between men and women in prison, and women have been overlooked. Support from men? It's a personal thing. I just prefer working with women. The women I know prefer working with women and I think a women only working environment is the best working environment. I actually get very irritated with men knocking separatism. If men don't understand why we want to be separatist there's something wrong with the men. I mean, for hundreds of years they've had their own separate groups which have been closed to women. Now women just feel the same way. We want our space and we want to relate to each other without men present, because of the differences they bring to the group.

So what do you think this means for your relationships with other groups in the field of penal reform, particularly WIP's relationship with PROP?

I was very pleased to meet with Geoff Coggan at PROP, who made it very clear that it was long overdue that there was a women prisoners' group. There were also other things which impressed me — because a thing that does worry me is internecine competition and fights between groups — small groups working in the field. It seems actually counter-productive if you don't get on — and the thing that impressed me about PROP is that they have opened all their resources to us and have suggested lots of ways of getting information that they've got and have been very helpful. But that's how it should be. They should leave us alone to work in our field, give us what help they can but not expect to work alongside with us — as we don't expect to work alongside with them. It's also important for the women in prison that they know that it's just women on the outside working for them, and of course it's important that it is largely ex-prisoners that are bringing their experience of prison back to do something about it. Because one of the things with prisoners, it's constantly said — the mythology that prisoners don't give a damn for each other or give a damn for anything — and we're the living proof that that's not true. . . . In the reform field and the campaigning field women just have been completely overlooked and so if any men feel that we're cutting them out at this stage, well, it was up to them. To go back to PROP, they produced a book on deaths in prison<sup>5</sup>. I went to see PROP

1. Fiona Mclean is the General Services Officer of the GLC Womens Committee.

2. Bernie Shannon has just completed making a programme on the A5 Unit at Holloway Prison for the BBC Community Access Programme.

3. Chris, a friend of Chris Ryder arrived later to join the discussion.

4. W.I.P. have applied to the GLC Womens Committee for a grant for a referral, research and drop-in centre for their organisation. See later in this article.

5. Geoff Coggan and Martin Walker, *Frightened for my Life*, Fontana, 1982.

some two years ago and they completely overlooked the women who had died in prison. Well, the invisibility of women is something we're all very aware of and something I believe that we can only change through working as women ourselves.

*Would you see W.I.P. as supporting PROP campaigns? Which, generally I suppose, have been more designed with men's prisons in mind?*

Yes, there's a lot of across the board issues. The actual prison conditions, the actual sentencing patterns, (although women, as we know, are sentenced to longer sentences and more often than men) are that women get bail less often than men. Again, because of the stereotypical notion of women that they are the home-makers — a prerequisite for bail, there's the stable home-maker — she is in the dock (the stable homemaker) and obviously she hasn't got a stable home, so she can't get bail. That sort of anomaly is thrown up. Yes, of course we would campaign alongside PROP on prison issues but we don't want to take up specific campaigns. I think that's important to say. The main thrust of our campaign is to free prisons from the direct control of the Home Office and we don't want to be fudged from that. We want to open prisons up.

*So in developing policy, that policy<sup>6</sup> developed through consultation amongst the core six or did you get some ideas and feed that back out to people in the GLC Women's Committee, etc?*

When I came out of prison in 1974 I thought these were the issues then. Then after more discussions, for example, the ambiguity of calling for standard medical services rather than calling for it to come under the NHS was something of a mistake on our part. But I think with discussions with Victoria Greenwood and amongst ourselves. For example, when I met with Longford — for the sake of a cardboard, amorphous figure for our management committee — he brought up the fact that life prisoners don't have a time, because there's no chronology on their sentence (because they're given 'life'), so they don't have a specific time when their sentence can be reviewed. Obviously, I didn't know about that before, so that's now gone into our campaign leaflet. I didn't know that FARE<sup>7</sup> and ARP were campaigning for detoxification centres but not for drunkenness offenders to be removed from the Criminal Justice Act. That's very important and we could've made a terrible gaffe. So before we got that campaign leaflet together we of course consulted with as many people as possible. But as it's only as definitive as the people in the field that I've been talking and discussing with. And if drunkenness offenders — and I think this is a very important point — are freed from the auspices of the Criminal Justice Act that actually means that the police on the street, the onus isn't on them to pick up drunk people which means that drunks will die on the street. So we have to keep them within the remit of the Criminal Justice Act but advocate detoxification centres. That's now obviously the campaign. The campaign is all of only three months old and everything is open to discussion and change. We're not inflexible. We couldn't be — we wouldn't want to be.

## RACE

*Two things about your list of demands. One of the main things I wanted to ask you about is that in this leaflet the issue of racism in prisons isn't raised. Is that an oversight, a deliberate omission, or are you not sure what policies should be pursued?*

When we wrote that leaflet we had no figures. We didn't know how many ethnic minority women are in prison. We now know that 34% of prisoners in Holloway are ethnic minority women and something over 40% across the country. Now those figures haven't been verified and I also worry about divisions — particularly in the women's movement. I also worry very much about fragmentation which is that women are united as, I believe, because we are a gender class — which is something that I've been arguing at the GLC Women's Committee for a long time. That we are a gender class and

### Women In Prison campaigning for:

1. Alternatives to custodial sentences.
2. Public accountability of British prisons.
3. Suspension of the Official Secrets Act restrictions on the British penal system.
4. Abolition of censorship.
5. Non-discriminatory sentencing practices for women.
6. Medical services for prisoners brought under the control of the National Health Service.
7. Improved child-care facilities in prisons.
8. Frequent visits for families in suitable surroundings.
9. Improved living conditions for women in prison.
10. A mandatory income entitlement to meet the basic needs of women prisoners.
11. Dismantling of the punitive disciplinary structure and an increase in welfare, educational and training schemes in prisons.
12. Introduction of external recruitment and a review of the existing methods of recruitment and training of prison discipline staff.
13. Unrestricted access to the Board of Visitors to include representatives from community and women's organisations; unrestricted access for the Board to all penal establishments.
14. Replacement of the parole system with the introduction of half remission on all sentences.
15. Non-discretionary right to call witnesses and full legal representation for women at Visiting (internal) Court proceedings.
16. Women, after serving seven years of a life sentence, to have access to a sentence review panel.
17. Alternatives to the processing of drunkenness offenders through the criminal justice system.
18. Access to Home Office information on internal enquiries regarding the deaths and mistreatment of women in prison.
19. Preparation of a case against violations of human rights within the British penal system.

that we are discriminated against because of our gender. And I'm very worried of the divide and rule tactics of all governments and all ideologies as well. That you are more discriminated against if you are a black woman, that you are more discriminated against if you are a lesbian, and you are more discriminated against, and I believe most discriminated against, if you are a woman with a disability.

To take the specific group and campaign around that specific group — I have doubts about. And so you can say, I suppose, that it's a deliberate oversight. I also think that to look at racial minorities, as I say, within gender wholes, is a very difficult question and I want to give it a lot more thought. So that's the reason. The counter-productivity of women dividing themselves up into feminist women, non-feminist women, black women, Zionist women, Palestinian women. I actually think that we're not learning anything if we do that. As Woolf said, as women we have no country, and then we go on and get in the women's liberation newsletter endless arguments and rows about patriarchal power groupings in the world. I believe they're nothing to do with women. So what I should say is that women should unite as one gender, women should look at it and perceive it as one gender. But I may need to think that through.

6. See the demands of the WIP campaign above.

7. Federation of Alcoholic Rehabilitation Establishments.

**WOMEN ONLY MEET AT HOLLOWAY PRISON, PARKHURST ROAD, LONDON N7, from 6.00 to 7.00pm on the FIRST DAY OF EVERY MONTH. PLEASE COME AND SHOW OUR SOLIDARITY WITH THE WOMEN IN HOLLOWAY.**

*I'd like to ask about the demand regarding the 'non discriminatory sentencing principles for women'. The reason why I ask you about it is that on one of the prisons programmes that came up recently a woman was interviewed who said that some women only got two years instead of six years because the Judge said it was basically because she was a woman. She said [the interviewee] that some feminist groups were demanding equal sentences. I wanted to know if that's what this demand in your leaflet means?*

Again, it's very difficult. Because we wouldn't say that women should have equal sentences with men because we don't believe that women should be getting anything like the appalling sentences they're getting. It's a bit like the children in prison issue. It's very tricky and needs lots of debate I think. We can't really be calling for equal sentencing because we don't really believe in sentencing. At the same time, women are discriminated against. It's like all comparisons are odious, you can't actually compare men and women as I've said, at the bottom of the bucket with each other and say that this is worse because of that. So I hope that although I am personally separatist I'm not separatist to the extent that I would say men have to be given more sentences or women have to be given less sentences to bring them into line with men. I think that's invidious, I think that's rubbish. But again, it needs more debate. As I said, that campaigning leaflet was brought together in less than a couple of months and I would like it to be produced and I would like discussion around it if possible. Of course, we could go wrong. We're completely fallible.

*So what you mean by non-discriminatory sentencing is not that sentences should be upped to the equivalent of men's, where they fall below for reasons of gender — rather, what you're trying to do is to stop women being treated worse?*

Yes that's right. Again, it's very difficult. It's like the children in prison issue — it's very difficult to get a conclusion because you're actually within the framework and looking for alternatives to custody. You're actually saying that within that framework we would advocate something else relating to sentences. So you're in that framework but within that you're actually advocating other things. I actually find that very difficult by bringing that leaflet together — really difficult. Specific discrimination, for example, when women are remanded in custody for medical reports because women must be 'disturbed' if they commit crimes; whereas for men, criminality is 'normal' behaviour. This clearly is discrimination on grounds of gender and doesn't involve us in the more thorny issue of sentences — that sort of thing . . .

*I want to ask you about the future of Women in Prison and one of the things was whether one of your demands for alternatives to custody for women would involve you actually practically setting up projects in the future?*

Well, at this stage because we're so small and because that's too much to even think about, it's just campaigning. But it's more than that. It hinges as well on the referral centre which is a referral and drop-in centre for women coming from prison and borstal but mainly and also — and I think most importantly (and I think PROP has actually achieved this) — is to link up with what is going on in prisons now. I think that's an important thing and that's why we're visiting prisons and getting into prisons and we'd like to get our leaflets into prisons — only not yet. But the drop-in centre in practical terms, although we're non-reformist — and I think that's very important to say, because, as I said to you earlier and I'll say it again, we're not going to put sticking plasters over anything the Home Office does and certainly not with Home Office money either — if women came from prison to the drop-in centre that will open up the channels between the outside

and the inside — that is absolutely crucial. The campaigns, as I see it, begin with Harriet Harman or/and Jo Richardson having questions tabled in the House, which I know NACRO do already but very specific questions, particularly on the deaths of women in prisons. To hopefully get the referral centre as near to Holloway as we can so we can oversee that prison and so that we can be there and be seen to be there and oversee them. Mainly the campaign is to get prisons away from the Home Secretary. How best to do that, I don't know. Take the Home Secretary to the European Court, through publicity, through people understanding what it means to have autonomous states within boroughs, and what total control by the Home Office actually means to people's lives. That sort of education programme, knowledge programme so that people realise how wrong that in 1983 over 45,000 people are subjected to control in every detail of their lives. That's where it will start — opening the office and getting the referral/drop-in centre. That's why we've been meeting with women in housing, women in ARP, women in Rights of Women (ROW), women in ECP, for legal, housing, social security advice. At least it will be somewhere for women to come to when they're released and to have a cup of coffee with ex-cons sitting there to welcome them back out — because it's always such a rotten time and there's nothing there. There'll be a place for them to come to: that's of course why we wanted two women workers, because we want to keep it going from the release time in the morning right through and hopefully get a team of women — if anybody's interested in this — to actually meet women coming from prison to meet them as they come out. A very difficult job because you'd have to build up an actual network — but it's something we'd really like to do.

*Lastly, one of the big moves at the moment is for anyone who gets involved with offenders in some way is to also provide a campaigning lobby or some practical support on behalf of victims as well. Although the British Crime Survey<sup>9</sup> suggested that women aren't as frequent victims of crime as is often made out, but there's also all the hidden victimisation.<sup>10</sup> Is a 'concern' for victims, particularly victims of crime, to be any part of your work?*

Well, there is the Victim Support Schemes. There's also other supportive groups like Prisoners Wives and Families and Prisoner Wives. And the term victims, I feel very strongly that the victims are the people in prison as well. Of course there are victims from their crimes and there are people on the outside who will empathise and identify with these people via Victim Support Schemes. We want to talk about the women who have died in prison and have been the real victims. They've been murdered by prison. The term victim is ambiguous. I mean, who's the victim? Written on the wall of Holloway at the moment is 'Prison is the Crime' which I think is true. I've been saying all along to contextualise crime — not justify but to contextualise crime — and my experience of prisons and prisoners is that almost all are the victims. It's as simple as that and there are other schemes for victims of crime. And incidentally, we don't like the word 'offender'. I don't know who created or who made it but it has shifted the whole onus onto people offending against others and I would suggest that a lot of people in prison, the vast majority, have been offended against, not offended. So we want the term dropped. We certainly shall never use it . . .

8. WIP have applied to the GLC Womens Committee to fund two workers for their proposed referral and drop-in centre.

9. The British Crime Survey is a study of victimisation in England and Wales. HMSO, 1983.

10. 'Hidden victimisation' such as 'wife battering' which is invariably not treated as a criminal act.

# Racism in Prisons

Paul Gordon

*'One cannot deny that the presence of the ethnic minorities in our prisons occasionally poses problems.'*  
(Home Office minister, Patrick Mayhew, 1981)

Just what problems black prisoners posed, the Home Office has declined to say, but the official response to the presence of black people in prisons indicates that the problems are two-fold. On the one hand, there is the evidence of solidarity and political awareness among prisoners. On the other, there is the evidence of growing hostility to black prisoners within prisons, a hostility which threatens the stability of prison regimes.

Black prisoners played an important part in the major prison demonstrations of the 1970s, for example, Hull in 1976 and Gartree in 1978. PROP's account of the Hull demonstrations, for example, showed that there were a number of officers at the prison who were either members of sympathisers of the National Front, and that it was the black and Irish prisoners who suffered most once the prison officers regained control of the prison: prisoners were beaten, racially abused and one had the contents of a chamber pot thrown over him. At Gartree in 1978, prisoners took over three wings in protest at the forced drugging of a black prisoner, Michael Blake, and in the same year, black prisoners were among those who demonstrated over the appalling conditions in Wormwood Scrubs. Indeed, the subsequent report by the Prison Department, which was finally published in 1982, sought to blame the black prisoners, at least in part, for what had happened. The Regional Director of the South East Region of the Prison Department reported that along with the London gangsters and the IRA prisoners, the black prisoners were one of a number of 'rival factions' which 'vied for power' in D wing of the prison. Together, he said, the three groups had been 'instrumental in creating an atmosphere of unrest and instability in which prisoners were encouraged to challenge the authority of management and staff'. Generally, they had exploited the widespread dissatisfactions with the conditions in D wing.

But a different type of problem was posed by the manifestation of racism within the prisons themselves. The Prison Department began to maintain a register of 'racial incidents' in 1972 and each year recorded about five or six such events. Most of these apparently only involved a few prisoners but in 1977, the Home Office revealed that several months previously there had been serious fighting at Wormwood Scrubs between black and white prisoners, involving some 30 prisoners. Around the same time, the assistant governor at Rochester borstal was warning that with more than one quarter of one wing's inmates black 'it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a peaceful equilibrium between them and the rest of the wing population. The situation is further exacerbated by the presence of highly prejudiced trainees'. The Prison Department report on Wormwood Scrubs mentioned above also noted the existence of racism in the prison, recognising that the development of black prisoners as a cohesive political force had some connection with the growth of black political consciousness generally, but also had to do with self-protection and 'an attempt to secure a degree of institutional power'.

The response of the prison authorities was not, however, to try and combat this racist hostility. Just as governments in

the 1960s and 1970s had responded to public racism by immigration control — on the basis that strict immigration control meant fewer numbers and the fewer black people, the better race relations — so the prison authorities defined the problem as one of numbers. If there were fewer black prisoners in an institution, there would be fewer problems. The answer was therefore to disperse the black prison population.

For some time the figure of 30 per cent had been bandied around as being the maximum proportion of black prisoners which was desirable in any one borstal or prison and in 1981 the Home Office announced that it was to start classifying the ethnic origins of people received into custody. The department was said to be anxious not to let the black population get above 30 per cent in any one institution. Already the Director General had been forced to admit for the first time in 1981 that blacks were disproportionately represented in penal establishments with 50 per cent in Ashford Remand Centre, and about 30 per cent in Rochester, Dover and Blantyre House young offenders institutions.

But the prison authorities were not just avoiding the problem by making it a question of numbers. There is also evidence to suggest that racism was used as a means of control inside prisons and that racist activity and sympathies among prison staff were being ignored.

## RACIST PRISON STAFF

Allegations of racism among prison staff are not new. As early as 1970, Tom Clayton spent some time at Pentonville researching his book, *Men in Prison*. He claimed that when Enoch Powell made one of his racist speeches he had 'no more fervent supporters than on the Pentonville landings'. More recently, groups such as the National Front have claimed extensive support among prison staff. In 1976, for example, Brian Baldwin at Strangeways claimed that the Front had 70 members among the 300 staff, saying 'They almost recruit themselves. The National Front has a particular appeal for prison officers.' Similar claims were made by NF Directorate member and Lancashire organiser, Martin Goucher. He said that the strongest branches were at Walton in Liverpool, Risley Remand Centre, Strangeways and Wandsworth.

The response of the prison authorities was to do nothing. The governor of Strangeways denied that there was an NF group among the staff and said that in any case prison officers were free to belong to any political organisation (except the proscribed IRA). 'Stern action' would only be taken if 'allegiances to any such organisation interfered with the duties of a prison officer, and his political beliefs interfered with his duties'. The Home Secretary at the time, Merlyn Rees, was hardly more encouraging, saying that there were no grounds for not employing NF members or supporters or for placing restrictions on them. He refused to investigate the claims which had been made saying that there was no evidence. He conveniently ignored the advice of one MP who told him that the only way to obtain evidence was to seek it out.

The evidence, despite Rees, continued to emerge. In 1977, one year after Rees' statement, a prison visitor at Pentonville

spotted five officers from the prison taking part in a NF march and in the same year, the Church of England chaplain at Brixton, Terry Spong (who once said he was proud to be white and British), resigned after press reports of his boasting of his NF membership at the NF conference. In 1978 the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*, which has continually exposed fascism in British prisons, reported that the NF had formed a group in Princetown near Dartmoor Prison and claimed that the majority of the group members were prison officers. In 1980, a journalist on the *Western Independent*, examining allegations of racial attacks on prisoners in Dartmoor, interviewed NF chairman, John Tyndall, about NF activity in the prison service. Tyndall told him, 'We do have a larger than average number of supporters among prison officers. We are particularly strong at Strangeways, Pentonville and the Scrubs'. The following year, recently released prisoners from Wandsworth claimed that a number of officers were wearing Union Jack badges.

Again the response of those involved in the prisons was complacent. The Deputy General Secretary of the Prison Officers' Association, Peter Rushworth, said that it was possible that some members were in the NF 'given that they are drawn from a broad cross-section of society. But the Prison Officers' Association is not politically affiliated and matters of religion and politics are members' own affairs.'

It would seem obvious that any member or supporter of an organisation which openly advocates the compulsory repatriation of black people and whose leaders have been convicted for racial violence and incitement would not be able to carry out their duties impartially. Indeed, that this is true, has been shown by the claims of black prisoners themselves who have said that in prisons where support for the NF is strong, black prisoners are frequently assaulted or abused. One black prisoner gave a graphic description of what it was like to be in a prison where there were a number of NF officers:

From the time I was placed in the main prison I was a constant target for assault, abuse and harassment. My life became so bad that I suffered a nervous breakdown... There is a ritual in Manchester where all the black prisoners are forced to go down a walkway which is bordered by white lines. If you walk on the white line you are immediately clubbed down by the surrounding National Front members. The next stage of this set-up is when you are taken to a room, where you are ordered to strip off and bend down so they can all look up your arse, one by one, then pass comments and laugh in your face. I was to go through this many times, you were at their mercy and there was nothing you could do.

Other prisoners have said that the black prisoners were given the dirty jobs or the most badly paid, such as sewing or repairing mailbags, or packing polythene bags. Prisoners released from Wandsworth in 1981 also made allegations of violence towards black prisoners, but said that far more common were 'niggly little things like "get your hands out of your pockets" or "button up your uniform".'

This kind of behaviour towards black prisoners contrasts sharply with the treatment of known fascist prisoners. A convicted racist murderer, Brian Hosie, who shot dead a West Indian in Glasgow in 1975 saying that his action was an 'over-enthusiastic programme of repatriating our Commonwealth citizens', was allowed to subscribe to *League Review*, the journal of the fascist League of St. George. In addition, Hosie was allowed to correspond freely with officials of the League and other known fascists. Former editor of the Young National Front paper, *Bulldog*, Joe Pearce, sent to prison for incitement to racial hatred in 1982, also claimed a relatively easy time in prison. On his release from Chelmsford, Pearce said that from the first day of his sentence, 'it was made clear to me by the prison officers that they did not consider me to be a criminal or even that I had committed a criminal offence in their eyes. A number of officers boasted to me of their NF membership and several others enquired as to how they could get hold of NF publications.'



Racism in prisons, however, runs much deeper than the existence of NF members or supporters in the prison service. As Geoff Coggan of PROP has written, 'If every National Front member to be dismissed tomorrow the racism would continue unabated. It is much more a matter of an inherently racist and brutal system attracting to their staff the creatures most suitable for carrying out these tasks.'

There is considerable evidence to support such a view, and even the Prison Department was moved to act, albeit in a limited way in 1982. In a memorandum to prison governors, the Department warned of the need for 'vigilance in ensuring that inappropriate racial comments were excluded' from reports submitted by prison staff to the Parole Board. The Department cited examples of what it called 'offensive and objectionable' remarks which included 'typical young prisoner and black boy to boot', 'a devious character, typical of his race' and 'all the Asian traits, all smiles, eager to please and as dishonest as possible when opportunity presents itself'.

## RACISM AND RASTAS

Of particular concern has been the treatment in prison of Rastafarians. In 1976, the Home Office issued a circular to prison governors excluding Rastafarians as a religious denomination and instructing governors to inform inmates on reception that this could not be accepted for registration. In addition, the Home Office permitted governors to cut the locks of Rasta prisoners saying that it had confirmed with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the UK that long hair was not a requirement of the religion. This showed a restrictive view of Rastafarianism and a failure to understand the adherence of many young blacks to the creed. Many Rastas do not follow the Orthodox Church, but this was ignored by the Home Office which claimed that it, and the Prison Department, were taking 'a sensitive and concerned approach'. Just how sensitive and concerned has been well-illustrated by a number of recent cases involving Rasta prisoners which occurred while the circular was in force.

Steve Thompson was sent to prison in February 1977 and he was in Gartree in 1978 when the riot occurred over the drugging of Michael Blake. He was told by prison officers that he would have to have his hair cut. He refused, and was held down and forcibly tranquillised. When he regained consciousness he found that his locks had been shorn. His protests themselves were seen by prison medical staff as evidence of some psychiatric disorder and Thompson was kept in solitary confinement for several months.

Five days before he was due to be released Thompson was told that he was being moved to the Special Hospital at Rampton where his release would be entirely at the discretion of the Home Secretary. Thompson claims that he was never given any explanation for the move and was simply committed after two doctors had diagnosed him schizophrenic. One of these doctors said subsequently that he had been misled by Home Office reports alleging that Thompson was violent. Thompson has always denied such allegations and neither the Home Office nor the prison authorities have since tried to substantiate them.

After a concerted campaign by Thompson's family and friends, supported by the Black Prisoners' Welfare Scheme, Thompson was released from Rampton in March 1981 and given an absolute discharge. No explanation was ever forthcoming.

In the same year, a Rasta woman was being abused and forcibly drugged in Holloway prison. Abenna Simba Tola was not allowed a wrap to cover her head or to keep her knees covered as she was required to do by her faith. Instead, she improvised with a pillowslip. When this was taken from her she covered her head with a pair of paper knickers only to be refused further knickers or a sanitary towel. She was then injected with Depixol, a long lasting tranquiliser, which had been previously used experimentally for control purposes on prisoners at Albany Prison.

The most tragic case, however, was that of Richard 'Cartoon' Campbell who died in Ashford Remand Centre in March 1980 at the age of 19. Campbell had been judged schizophrenic by the Remand Centre's psychiatrist and this was confirmed by an external psychiatrist on account of Campbell's many references to 'Jah' (the Rasta word for god), his repeated statements that he wanted to help the poor and starving in Africa and his 'socially inappropriate behaviour', which meant his lounging in a chair and looking out of the window while he was being examined.

Two days later, Campbell was transferred to a hospital where he was again examined by a psychiatrist. He found him quite normal but was prepared to keep him in for observation. He was not prepared, however, to have a prison officer in the hospital all the time since this would upset the other patients. The prison authorities would not agree and Campbell was returned to Ashford. He was then force-fed daily until the day he was due to appear in court. He was found dead in his cell early in the morning. At the inquest the jury, while returning a verdict of 'death by self-neglect', added a rider criticising the lack of adequate medical staff and facilities at Ashford. Campbell was the third person to have died there since 1973. All three had been black.

It was after such tragedies as these that the government decided to look again at the question of Rastas in prison. New instructions were issued to detention centres that Rastas should be allowed to retain their locks while the Home Office considered 'the desirability of allowing for the recognition of minority customs and beliefs'. There have however, since been reports of Rasta prisoners being forced to have their locks cut.

## THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE

Prison authorities, it seems, took little interest in the question of 'race' until the late 1970s and early 1980s. It had provided prison staff with some information about minority religions, diet and dress, and had issued the 1976 circular on Rastafarians mentioned above. It was only with the danger of racial violence and hostility and the emergence of increasing black consciousness inside the prisons, both of which threatened the stability of prison regimes, that the authorities began to take more notice. There was still, however, a clear unwillingness to tackle the problem seriously, or even to admit that a serious problem existed.

In 1980, for example, a Home Office seminar for governors on race relations concluded with the view that racism was not generally perceived as a serious issue in prisons. Nevertheless, the governors did say that the prison service had 'as great a problem as the other agencies of police and law enforcement'. Now, if this problem was not that of racism, what was it? Presumably, it was the simple presence of black people in the prison. The governor of Aylesbury Prison had been quoted in the *Guardian* in January 1982 saying that 'When two blacks meet, it is a social event, and they can pose a threat just by moving slowly, gesticulating more, making more noise, talking in patois.' The same prison's senior officer added that 'their biggest problem is doing what they're told. They want to do everything at their own pace, which is generally slower than the rest, and they object to being hurried up.' An officer at Wandsworth complained that, 'They can be a nuisance in the reception block, going in or out, because they hold things up, washing at great length, oiling their faces.' In other words, black prisoners posed a problem for the prison authorities by their very existence and presence in prison. And Home Office minister, Patrick Mayhew himself, told MPs in 1982 that 'One cannot deny that the presence of members of the ethnic minorities in our prisons occasionally poses problems. Staff must develop an understanding with all prisoners, not only as an aid to keeping control, but also as a means of exercising positive influence over them.'

The logic of such arguments about the presence of black people in prisons was, as we have seen, to implement a policy of dispersal and the classification of ethnic origins is a first step in such a policy. This will not only isolate prisoners even more from their family and friends, making it even more difficult for them to visit the prisoner; more importantly perhaps, such a policy not only avoids the question of racism but exacerbates it by focussing on black people as the problem.

In addition to deciding on a policy of dispersal, the prison authorities also decided in 1981 to imitate the police in the appointment of specialist officers concerned with 'race relations'. The job of these race relations liaison officers (there is one in each prison) is to assist, inform and enable other officers in their dealings with black people. Again, this avoids the issue of racism. It not only poses the question entirely as one of making information available rather than in dealing with the attitudes, practices and structures through which racism is perpetuated, but it also, as is the case with the police, relegates the responsibility of the prison authorities to treat all equally to one specialist officer. It therefore absolves other officers from their own responsibility to black prisoners.

Even these 'initiatives' were met with some cynicism and apathy by prison governors and staff. The Chief Inspector of Prisons reported in 1983 that not all governors 'had done enough to translate . . . general guidance into specific directions of the kind that are clearly necessary. And not all race relations officers were sufficiently aware of the importance of their job or, indeed, how it should be carried out.' Some governors had appointed very junior officers to the job indicating the lack of importance they attached to it. The Home Office was moved to say that it would be asking each governor to ensure that the person appointed was sufficiently senior for the post.

Finally, the prison authorities, again following the police, have indicated that attempts must be made to recruit more black prison officers. It is not known how many officers there are at present but they are certainly few. This is not surprising if the treatment of the first black officer at Pentonville is anything to go by. This officer arrived at the prison when Tom Clayton was there researching his book, *Men in Prison*. Clayton reported that the other officers were critical of the new recruit, complaining that the prison had enough 'social tensions without volunteering for another one'. Other officers claimed that once there was one black

officer, there would soon be enough 'to swamp the white officers'. Just to drive the point home, one letter to the officer from his wife was scrawled with the words 'Nigger' and 'Pig'.

## CONCLUSION

Prisons and the prison service reflect the society in which they operate and of which they are an integral part. As in society at large, the problem of racism is ignored. It is black people who are the problem and the problem therefore becomes one of numbers which have to be strictly controlled for better race relations. At the same time, racialism among staff is ignored or played down, and insofar as black people are recognised as having problems in prison these are always reduced to relatively minor problems of diet, religion, language and culture. The measures which are taken by the prison authorities are marginal and avoid the central question of racism which is institutionalised in the practices and policies of society.

The Director General of the prison service once spoke of an objective of the service being that of 'reflecting the spirit in which successive governments have made commitments to a multi-racial society'. Given that the reality of the British 'multi-racial society' is that of structural racism, persistent and widespread discrimination, and increasing harassment of black people by the forces of 'law and order', the prison service can be said to have achieved one of its two objectives.

This article is an abridged and amended version of chapter 6 of *White Law: Racism in the police, courts and prisons*, published in May by Pluto Press, price £3.95.

## ONE IN SIX WOMEN IN BROADMOOR SICK

A correspondent in the female block at Broadmoor has drawn attention to the large number of her fellow inmates with 'somewhat nasty ailments such as diabetes, sclerosis, stomach ulcers and so on'. Janet Cresswell estimates that at least one in six of her companions have serious physical illnesses and that this abnormal morbidity is due to bad conditions in Broadmoor, the effect of the drugs used, the medical ignorance of the nurses and wishful thinking by the doctors.

Broadmoor's 97 women patients are allowed little fresh air or exercise. Janet compares a Broadmoor nurse's work to that of museum attendants: 'watching over merchandise not permitted to leave the room in which they are housed'. When the sun shines many women cannot even take advantage of the little open air exercise they are permitted because those on the drug *chlorpromazine* (Largactil) have to keep out of the sun for fear of skin rashes.

Calling psychiatric prisons like Broadmoor 'Special Hospitals' deludes the public into thinking their inmates are in the right place to receive medical attention. Broadmoor's nurses, in fact, have very little medical training and 'for a long period [even] the Sisters in charge of the infirmary did not . . . have a general nursing (SRN) qualification'. Psychiatrists, of course, have to be trained doctors, but the doctors in Broadmoor tend to dismiss their patients' complaints as the delusions of mental disorder and as a result physical illnesses are not properly investigated let alone treated.

# Does our Penal System Make Sense?

by Martin Wright,  
Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform  
1971-81; author of *Making Good: Prisons, Punishment and Beyond*.  
An edited version of an address made to  
Norfolk ACRO, 21 October 1982.

In addressing an audience which includes many people who earn their living in the penal system, or devote much time to essential voluntary work as magistrates, members of prison boards, prison visitors and in other ways, it would be rash to assert that our penal system did not make sense. It does have a logic all its own. Offenders are brought to justice, to combat the continual rise in crime. They are punished in order to make them fear to re-offend, and in some cases their punishment is more severe than it might have been, in the hope of instilling fear into anyone else who might be considering committing a similar crime. The courts' sentences also have a symbolic function: the size of the fine, or the length of the prison sentence, shows the rest of society how serious the court considered each offence to be.

But then we come to a more ambivalent feature. Some feel that severity should be mitigated, whether out of compassion or for practical reasons such as rehabilitating offenders or reducing overcrowding: thus we have training and welfare in prison, aftercare on release, parole, or even the suspension of some or all of the sentence or its replacement with a non-custodial measure such as probation. From another standpoint, however, such measures are seen as not softening the hard edges of law enforcement but undermining it, and certainly they work in a quite separate dimension from the simple principle of deterrence and restraint which I outlined at the beginning. Speakers at the 1982 Conservative Party Conference, for example, called for maximum sentences with no remission or parole, for anyone convicted of violence, and for the introduction of minimum sentences. When one opponent of the motion said it was a fallacy that stiffer sentences alone could deter crime, and that many offences were committed in the heat of the moment, there were shouts of 'Rubbish!' So even within one debate within one political party, the penal system makes different kinds of sense to different people.

But the position is worse than that, in at least three ways: because of Home Office policy, because of courts' sentencing policy, and because of inherent contradictions in the theory they are trying to apply.

## 1. Resources in the wrong place

The Home Office is responsible for criminal policy and the allocation of resources. It is well aware, because its own research and its own prison governors have told it so, that at least a third of those in our prisons are by any standards minor offenders who are in no sense a threat to society and who need help rather than punishment if they are to have much chance of making a new start in life. All too often the decision process goes like this:

- this person has just been convicted of an offence such as petty theft or vagrancy;
- he needs help because he is homeless or alcoholic or illiterate, or lacks social skills, or has become mentally disordered through years of imprisonment;
- there is no suitable local project to help him, or if there is, it's full;
- we must do something with him, and prison is the only place that can't refuse him;
- but the prison is full, too;
- never mind, prisons have elastic walls.

So the prisons are overcrowded, the prison service grasps the leverage to make a case for some modern prisons, new prisons are built, old ones are not knocked down, the cost of the prison service goes up (currently it's about £440 million a year).

Hence the chances of getting more money out of the Treasury for more non-custodial projects are less than ever. The process is assisted by the media's exaggeration of the amount and seriousness of crime. So next time the court wants a non-custodial place there is still none available and the whole vicious cycle repeats itself.

## 2. Sentences: too many and too long

The second reason why the situation is worse than it seems lies in the courts. They are sending too many people like the ones I have described to prison (or fining them when they obviously have no money and then sending them to prison for not paying - what's the difference?). In 1981 they sent 21,000 people to prison for non-payment of a fine, 2,000 of them for drunkenness. Contrary to popular belief, only one in five of those sent to prison has been convicted of violence, robbery or sexual offences. Not only are too many offenders imprisoned, but they are imprisoned for too long. The average in magistrates' courts is 3.4 months, in crown courts 17.1 months: 11 months overall. This average has admittedly fallen recently, but both the number and percentage of convicted offenders have gone up. The courts are in the grip of penal inflation, and it is time to puncture their long-standing fallacies.

## 3. Fallacies in sentencing theory

### (a) 'If crime goes up, so must sentences'

One of these fallacies is that courts can't help sending more people to prison - it's the fault of the offenders for being so numerous. Not so: courts have wide discretion, and although admittedly they can't make sudden drastic changes without attracting unfavourable comment, they can very well push down the custodial borderline, as they were doing until 1975. As long as a substantial proportion of the prison population consists of petty offenders, courts are sending too many people to prison. Quite apart from the cost, quite apart from the inhuman conditions, this is a matter of principle: it is wrong to use the severest punishment in the country for minor offences.

### (b) 'Courts should ignore prison overcrowding'

A second fallacy is that courts should not be influenced by the shortage of prison accommodation: they should pass the 'right' sentence, and it is up to the Home Office to provide the wherewithal. There are three objections to this: (i) it is impossible. The Home Secretary has had to fight hard to get two more prisons a year; but to build our way out of a deficit of 6,000 places would take about 12 new prisons - and experience shows that they would soon be filled up, leaving the overcrowding as bad as before. At a low estimate, these prisons would cost £120 million to build and £60 million a year to run. To abolish overcrowding by using non-custodial methods would cost a fraction of that.

(ii) A prison sentence is not an abstract quantity of punishment, clinically weighed off in the rarefied atmosphere of the courtroom. It is inflicting conditions which have been

forthrightly condemned by prison officers and governors, the chief prison inspector, the director-general of prisons, and MPs of all parties. It is wrong to treat prisoners inhumanely, because that is as bad as (or worse than) what they are being punished for. Courts are no more entitled to ignore the conditions to which they are condemning people than German civil servants were entitled to ignore the conditions in forced labour camps to which they consigned people during the last world war. I hope those of you who have friends or colleagues who are magistrates will let them know that sentencing people to cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment does not have your support. (iii) The third objection is that there is no such thing as the 'right' sentence, and that is the next major fallacy.

### (c) 'Sentences are right'

There is no justification for saying that sentences need to be as long as they are to mark society's disapproval. In fact the length of prison sentences has no basis in fact or logic. No one, from the newest magistrate to the Lord Chief Justice, can justify the length of any prison sentence *except in relation to other sentences*. Everything is relative: there is no yardstick, or if there is it is made of elastic (like the prison walls). There is no reason why the seriousness of any offence should be equated with a certain number of days or years, any more than with feet, inches or kilograms.

### (d) 'Courts have power to control crime'

The fourth fallacy is the most fundamental. It is that the courts are society's major protection against crime, or that they could be if they possessed, and used, sufficiently Draconian powers of punishment (or, for that matter, sufficient resources for offenders' rehabilitation). It is natural for judges and magistrates to want to believe that all their hard work is effective - penal reformers suffer the same temptation.

(i) **Restraint.** One way in which courts are supposed to prevent crime is by removing people from circulation. This may work temporarily for a few professional criminals - though others are likely to emerge to fill the vacuum they have left - but for run-of-the-mill cases, a large number of horses have bolted, and it makes little difference if a small percentage of them are caught and shut in the stable.

(ii) **Deterrence.** The second main method of prevention is assumed to be deterrence. What people forget (including judges and magistrates) is that deterrence has side-effects. Some people enjoy taking risks. Some are embittered. Harsh punishment leaves many people determined to avoid it in future - not by refraining from crime but by resisting arrest. Even if an offender wants to give himself up, the threat of punishment may well deter him from doing so. Prisons prevent people from maturing, settling down, perhaps marrying, and finding a place for themselves in the law-abiding community. Above all, deterrent punishment makes people think of themselves, not of the harm they have caused their victims. If that is what society wants, then the penal system makes sense.

In short, courts literally don't know what they are doing: they do not know how to justify the length of their sentences, they do not know the effects, and they do not know what they are condemning people to because they have never experienced it for themselves: with the honourable exception of a few who have been imprisoned as prisoners of war or conscientious objectors, I doubt if any judge or magistrate has spent even one night in the conditions to which they sentence other people. If they did so, they might have a better idea of the likely effects.

*In the second part of his address, Martin Wright outlined his ideas for a system based on the logic of restitution rather than punishment. See his article 'Reparation' in Abolitionist no. 12.*

# Directly to Jail

## RATES OF IMPRISONMENT IN MAGISTRATES' COURTS: ENGLAND AND WALES 1981

### Radical Alternatives to Prison Bristol Group

Her Majesty's prisons in England and Wales are afflicted with a continuing crisis of overcrowding. The crisis is at its worst in the Victorian local prisons where thousands of men are crammed three in a cell for up to twenty-three hours a day in conditions that corrupt and degrade. The people chiefly responsible for this state of affairs are the local magistrates who sentence offenders to short terms of imprisonment. In 1981 - the last year for which figures are available - the magistrates of England and Wales sent proportionately more adult males to prison than in 1980: 9.39% compared to 8.45%. In doing so they defied repeated appeals from the Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary to send fewer people to prison.

Adult male offenders convicted of indictable offences and sentenced to immediate imprisonment in magistrates' courts (police force areas) in England and Wales (as a percentage of total sentences)

Area	%*	Area	%*
1 Dorset	13.23	23 South Wales	8.89
2 Lancashire	13.08	24 North Wales	8.87
3 London City	12.95	25 Cambridgeshire	8.74
4 Cleveland	12.41	26 Avon & Somerset	8.65
5 Sussex	12.40	27 Suffolk	8.53
6 Norfolk	12.15	28 West Mercia	8.50
7 Thames Valley	11.31	29 Durham	8.49
8 Greater Manchester	11.12	30 Kent	8.43
9 Devon & Cornwall	10.88	31 Leicestershire	7.89
10 North Yorkshire	10.74	32 Humberside	7.33
11 Cheshire	10.21	33 Northamptonshire	7.06
12 Surrey	10.05	34 Merseyside	7.00
13 West Midlands	9.94	35 Hertfordshire	6.91
14 West Yorkshire	9.73	36 Staffordshire	6.70
15 Derbyshire	9.71	37 Wiltshire	6.67
16 Essex	9.70	38 South Yorkshire	6.60
17 Metropolitan	9.63	39 Dyled-Powis	6.59
18 Nottinghamshire	9.62	40 Northumbria	6.43
19 Cumbria	9.56	41 Lincolnshire	6.39
20 Bedfordshire	9.46	42 Gwent	4.31
21 Gloucestershire	9.16	43 Warwickshire	4.14
22 Hampshire	8.95	National Average	9.39

\*Percentages calculated from Table S3.3(E) of the Criminal Statistics for 1981.

This national average conceals within it variations in rates of imprisonment so wide as to constitute an affront to all notions of fair play. Top of the table for the fourth year in succession is the county of Dorset which sent 13.23% of male adult offenders straight to prison in 1981 - compared to 4.14% in Warwickshire. Warwickshire is bottom of the table for the first time since RAP started to publish these tables in 1972, displacing Gwent who have been there for more than a decade.

The county rates themselves also conceal even wider variations between Petty Sessions Divisions (PSDs) or individual magistrates' courts. An analysis of all PSDs in England and Wales which sentenced 100 or more adult male offenders in 1981 makes it possible to name the ten most punitive benches in the country, and the ten least punitive.

Most punitive PSD	% imprisoned	Least punitive PSD	% imprisoned
1 Newbury, Berkshire	22.6	1 Blyth Valley, Northumberland	1.6
2 Preston, Lancashire	22.2	2 East Penwith, Cornwall	1.6
3 Weymouth, Dorset	22.0	3 Rugby, Warwickshire	2.2
4 Tower Bridge, London	20.7	4 Cwmbran, Gwent	2.6
5 Great Yarmouth, Norfolk	20.4	5 Houghton-le Springs, Tyne-and-Wear	2.8
6 Hawarden, Clywd	20.0	6 Barking, N. E., London	2.9
7 Oxford	19.2	7 Market Bosworth, Leicestershire	3.1
8 Brighton	19.1	8 Spelthorne, London-Middlesex	3.3
9 Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester	18.1	9 Tamworth, Staffordshire	3.4
10 West Derbyshire	17.7	10 Cynon Valley, Mid-Glamorgan	3.5

The contrast between these two lists is extraordinary, to say the least: for every man sent to prison in Blyth Valley the bench at Newbury in Berkshire sends no less than *fourteen*. Both of these benches dealt with roughly similar numbers in 1981 (164; Newbury: 129; Blyth Valley) but otherwise there are two obvious differences between the lists. The average number of cases dealt with by the most punitive benches is 490 the average for the least punitive is 197. It is not the case however that the proportion of prison sentences simply increases with numbers. Three of the top ten benches deal with small numbers, and the average rate of imprisonment for all courts dealing with more than 300 cases in each country area is 9.2 - i.e. less than half the rate of the 'top ten'. A second feature of the 'top ten' list is the inclusion of three holiday resorts - Weymouth, Great Yarmouth and Brighton.

It might appear that the complexion of crime at the seaside merited disproportionate severity on the part of the benches there; but scrutiny of other resorts does not bear out that conclusion either. They tend to be higher on average than other places of approximately the same size but nowhere near as high as Weymouth, Great Yarmouth or Brighton. Hove magistrates, for instance, sent 12.7% to prison, and Blackpool 13.9%. But Poole, another Dorset seaside place, sent 9.7%, and Cleethorpes, just up the coast from Yarmouth, sent only 3.5%. Southend sent 8.4% and Weston-super-Mare 6.2%.

Bristol RAP proposes two courses of action:

1. An immediate and searching inquiry into these injustices by representatives of the European Court of Human Rights.
2. Eventual removal from the magistrates' courts of the power to imprison people. Short sentences serve no useful purpose whatsoever and should be phased out. More serious offenders should be sent to the Crown Courts for sentence. Magistrates should concentrate on the development of locally based, non-custodial alternatives to prison such as community service, probation-run day-centres, and victim-offender conciliation schemes.

'A RARE TRIUMPH is being celebrated this week in the criminal justice system, the tenth anniversary of the introduction of community service as an alternative to prison.' - the verdict of *Times* correspondent Peter Evans (2.4.83). Evans points out that 'More than 20,000 offenders, the equivalent of the population of 30 medium sized prisons' are serving C.S.O.s - which, of course, accounts for the 30 medium sized prisons standing empty on April 1st.

# Young offenders

The main provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1982 for dealing with young offenders came into force in May. Margaret Kolthoff looks at some of the facts which government policy ignores.

Many organisations and individuals concerned with young offenders and the law have offered their comments on the Government's policy relating to custodial sentences. The White Paper Cmd 8045 entitled 'Young Offenders' (1980) on which the new Act is based, is not, as might have been expected, a discussion of this very complex problem as a whole, but rather an analysis of the laws and directives which allow the courts to sentence young people to various kinds of custody. Those of us who work for RAP would like to see the abolition of the present prison system altogether, and where better to start than with those 'prisons' specially devised for young people? It seems worthwhile therefore to present some of the arguments against sending young people to penal institutions which often go by default in the comments of those who are opposed to custodial sentences for young offenders and which are ignored by those who devise or carry out the rules.

When children reach a certain stage in their development, usually around puberty, but it may be earlier or later, their relationships with other children begin to change. Increasing independence from their parents is accompanied by greater reliance on the support of their peers. Later this changes into closer individual relationships with a sexual partner or a few chosen friends. The period of roughly 12 to 25 years is commonly marked by this close interdependence of a group of companions of roughly the same age. If the young person during this period is living at home with parents and brothers and sisters the group dependence will tend to be less important. But some people of this age may be suddenly thrust into a new living situation composed largely of peers of their own sex and their response may then be a fairly rapid adjustment to be as like their new companions as possible. At first this likeness may be in appearance and preferences, and deviants from the accepted pattern will quickly be brought into line, or excluded, by ridicule or bullying. Later the adoption of like behaviour and of internal values is likely to follow.

In day school children may move around until they find a congenial group, in boarding schools it is less easy. In some hierarchical and authoritarian careers such as the forces and the police it must be more difficult still. A custodial sentence immediately places the young offender out of reach of other groupings and forces him or her into close association with other young people with very similar troubles and ways of coping with them. In this situation they must become leaders or followers, self-preservation demands it, and the result is the opposite of that postulated in the minds of those who devise such schemes or enforce them. Their response to the recidivism which occurs is to put the blame on the victims of the system and recommend more of the same treatment.

Once the initial problem of joining the group have been coped with, the young person may well begin to feel a great sense of relief, even satisfaction. 'Outside' their behaviour has been much censured and many attempts have been made to make them feel guilty and blame-worthy. In this new environment 'inside' they find that in the eyes of their peers there is no blame attached to them for what they are — a thief; or for what they have done — perhaps attempted to burn down their school. Just the reverse. The very behaviour which 'outside' was the most blame-worthy, now 'inside' is very likely to be a source of prestige and status. Their position in society at large is being confirmed as that of an 'outcast' and that has its own compensations.

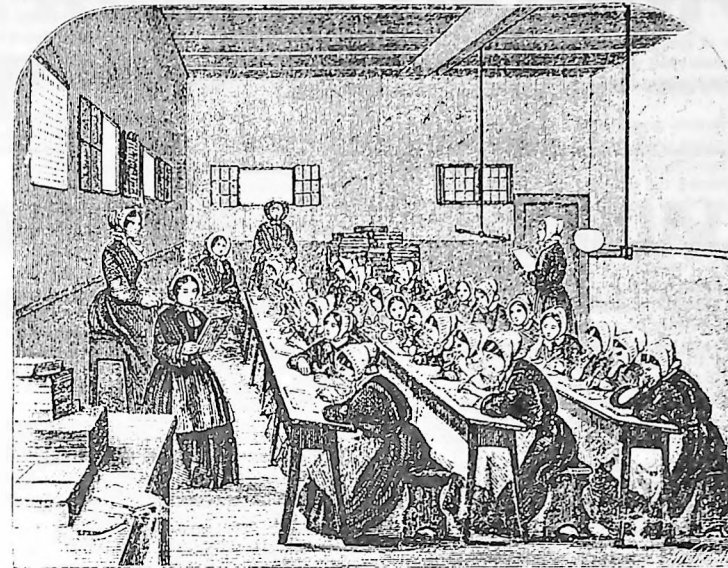
To follow this argument a little further one may ask, 'What happens next?' On release, these young people once more find themselves viewed with suspicion and no doubt they will hear: 'Oh, you're back are you. Hope you've learned your lesson.' It must be rare for them to receive a genuinely warm

welcome, so what more natural than for them to seek out any of those supportive friends they have lately been with, if they can reach them. Elaborate plans may have been made to bring this about, the delinquent group is re-established and a return to the 'treatment' which failed will soon follow. Some do not return so readily and one would like to see some research focussing on them. Perhaps they were the ones who did receive a warm welcome and were rescued from the status of 'outcast' before too late.

## PREVENTION

There are three ways in which I should like to see RAP using its influence and pressing for change. The first is a gradually increasing campaign to discover and put into action schemes aimed at prevention of juvenile delinquency especially in the field of Primary Education. The second is the encouragement of a different approach to non-cooperative families with many problems by the Social Services and thirdly a Government recognition that many promising new approaches to this problem are shelved simply because of the prejudiced hostility so intimidatingly expressed of certain groups and individuals.

To take prevention first. How much attention is being paid to the final summing-up in Dr Donald West's study of what makes a delinquent, *Delinquency, Its Roots, Careers and Prospects*. Dr West, now Director of the Cambridge Institute of Criminology has been watching a group of boys in an inner London district from the age of 8 to 24 and can now pick out certain key factors in their background which together foretell a high risk of delinquency. Some of these are remediable, such as poverty. Others, like having a parent with one or two earlier criminal convictions are not. But one of the most significant pointers, being judged at the age of 10 by teachers as 'very troublesome', should suggest the possibility of preventive action. Obviously this will require an acceptance by Education Authorities that something more is needed than 'a special reading teacher'. Dr West argues for 'a search for things to give these troublesome children credit for' and that requires changing attitudes in the Head Teacher's Study as well as in the Staff Room. It requires more opportunities for in-service courses for teachers to learn new ways of helping children to acquire social skills and self-confidence, and self respect through socially approved activities rather than from socially undesirable ones. In fact we need a new emphasis in our Primary Schools in big cities on what has come to be known in the Secondary School as 'pastoral care'. Success in learning educational skills is a very important aspect of getting out of the 'very troublesome' category. Better still never to get into it. But learning social values and acceptable social behaviour should be seen as an essential part of it and learning in this context means practice, a lot of it, and not just exhortation. The process of creating 'outcasts' starts very early in school. Teachers very soon find out which children are immune to punishment and scolding, and they need guidance and encouragement to give it up at that point and try a different tack. Unfortunately the present Government's emphasis on individual self help and financial success as a prime mark of social virtue does not lend itself to the alternate social values of sharing and co-operation nor to the practical sign of this in an increase in child benefit which would ensure that no child should be brought up in real poverty. Dr West says 'The high concentration of serious delinquents of the future among children exposed to a characteristic constellation of social deprivation points inexorably to the need to include anti-poverty measures in any coherent policy of delinquency prevention'. Money is now being provided for Intermediate Treatment schemes and this is very welcome. But the children in IT will in many cases have already travelled along the delinquent road. What would be even more welcome would be the



GIRLS' SCHOOL AT TOFHILL FIELDS PRISON.

announcement of a new fund to assist LEAs in providing all manner of resources for a new effort in the Primary Schools to help children to keep out of trouble in the first place. This should include a large development of out-of-school-hours activity centres for young children. It is important to stress that there is no suggestion in such preventive schemes as outlined that the possible future delinquents should be 'picked out' for special treatment. The attitudes and new skills of the teachers would be for the benefit of all children in the school according to need and so would the out of school activity centre.

## FAMILIES

Social workers would probably agree that their individual family visit approach is often not very welcome or successful when there is a question of the delinquency of one or more of the children. Searching around for projects which have shown some success in helping non-cooperative families with social problems, one might point to the aims and practice of the Family Service Units which continue to develop their own methods of family support. 'They set up house in a needy area and gradually create a centre of care and concern in a neighbourhood. Gradually the needs emerge and resources of great variety are collected and developed by the families themselves. The core of the FSU contribution is the offering of themselves as a continuing group based in similar accommodation to that of their neighbours but with ideas and free time to devote to furthering any schemes for the improvement of those neighbours' lives. If the question is, 'How to make friends and influence people?' perhaps the introduction of an FSU might be a hopeful step.

## PREJUDICE

As the White Paper 'Young Offenders' concentrates almost entirely on custodial sentencing policy, its effect must be to endorse and sustain the prejudices of those who believe that punishment is the right way for those in authority to respond to 'bad' behaviour. To quote 'Young Offenders' para 3, "It would not be appropriate here to set out the arguments in favour of non-custodial sentencing which have been put forward in recent years, it is enough to say that, as it has

recently made clear' refers to the report on "The Reduction of Pressure on the Prison System" Cmd 7948, 1980. This is not the way to overcome prejudice. That is a matter of careful but persistent efforts to change the attitudes of those who believe that 'locking-up' and 'short sharp knocks' will overcome the growth of juvenile crime, and are valid methods of control of young offenders. Facts about the outcome of such treatment do not of course convince the prejudiced but they do have their effect on those who are influenced by the prejudiced and can be used as building blocks for change. Such an attempt was made in The Children and Young Persons Act of 1969. The main purpose behind the various clauses was to make the whole justice system into "an agency of the last resort". Due to a change of Government and a reversion to a more punitive ideology, none of the provisions mentioned save for the care-order system, has been put into effect.

'Even the care-order system is to be modified by introducing into it periods of mandatory custodial detention at the direction of the court. Borstals and detention centres remain and house more juveniles than ever before.' (West, p.144/5) This is the depressing result very often to be expected when matters of 'law and order' are being discussed. But there are changes which we could and should make and we must continue to urge their trial. There are many other ideas and suggestions in Dr West's book which deserve more attention.

In conclusion [writes Dr West] a few final words of caution! The Cambridge study focused on commonplace delinquents, that is, obtrusively troublesome youngsters who make up such a large part of the Prison Dept. statistics, and whose activities attract the most public comment. Their criminal activities, even when persisting into adult years, remain rash, impulsive and crude. Their deviant life styles and marginal employments suggest continued failure to integrate into mainstream society... The policies favoured in this book are far from novel... The only strong reason for believing that they could make a useful contribution is that so often in the past they have been mooted without being put into practice with sufficient determination or with adequate testing of their worth. Unless and until authorities are willing to invest and facilitate proper scientific evaluation of outcome... policy decisions will continue to be made on the basis of tradition, expediency and popular prejudice and the measures advocated here will have little chance of implementation.

## Prison Suicides

Public concern at the case of Jim Heather-Hayes, reported in the last *Abolitionist*, has prompted the Inspectorate of Prisons to undertake a review of suicide precautions in prisons.

The Inspectorate invited various organisations to submit evidence, and their submissions seem to show a consensus that improving general prison conditions is more important than specific precautions in reducing the suicide rate. PROP's submission is printed in full in *Prison Briefing*.

INQUEST quotes the statistical study by D.O. Topp in support of its argument that "imprisonment in itself is a major cause of prison suicides". Topp found that most suicides occur in the first few months of custody, and that the suicide rate among prisoners serving 18 months or more was more than eight times the rate for prisoners serving shorter sentences. Topp's findings have largely been confirmed by the Inspectorate's own preliminary research, which also shows that the suicide rate in prisons has risen over the last 25 years: from three per 10,000 daily average population between 1957 and 1961, to five per 10,000 in 1979 and 1980.

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) say they 'do not believe that either the suicide rate or the arrangements for preventing suicide attempts can be considered independently of the size of the prison population, the strains on prison staff, and the nature of the prison regimes.' They 'believe that the principle focus should be on general prevention', which 'might also be expected to have a positive impact on prison regimes as a whole.' NACRO asks: "Are staff sufficiently aware that factors related to suicide generally - social isolation, a sudden worsening of circumstances, disgrace - are endemic to imprisonment?"

The Prison Governors' Branch of the Society of Civil and Public Servants says that "Mental instability experienced by prisoners can result from long periods on remand, with its uncertainties about the trial date and outcome", as well as uncertainty about parole (*Times*, 9.6.83). The governors also point out that addicts can become unstable when suddenly deprived of drugs. INQUEST makes a similar point about the abrupt withdrawal of prescribed drugs such as anti-depressants by some prison doctors.

INQUEST, NACRO and the PRT, as well as PROP, all stress the importance of prisoners' outside contacts. Both NACRO and the PRT suggest that prisoners should have access to telephones, and that the Samaritans should play a larger role in prisons. NACRO acknowledges that "Measures to counteract suicide risk, such as increased social contact, improvement in circumstances and enhanced self esteem, are difficult to achieve within the prison regime", but suggests that "The Governor should have extensive discretion to allow home leave or other privileges where they could serve to deal with a situation before it reaches the stage of suicidal risk."

The PRT 'do not feel that the question of the external investigation of deaths in closed institutions can pass without comment... there may be a role for the Chief Inspector himself and we feel that greater use should be made of Public Inquiries'. This concern is shared by PROP and, of course, INQUEST.

INQUEST and the PRT also share a concern about the imprisonment of the mentally ill and particularly about remands for medical reports. The PRT is 'less than sanguine about the effects' of the clause in the Mental Health (Amendment) Act under which offenders can be remanded to psychiatric hospitals, and suggests that the Inspectorate should monitor the new arrangements when they come into force.

INQUEST's submission is more detailed than those of the other organisations, as might be expected given the specialised nature of its work. Its remarks about self-inflicted wounds

being stitched up without anaesthetic, and the allegation that some officers jam alarm bells with cardboard so as to pass an undisturbed night, received wide publicity. INQUEST's recommendations, which largely stem from recent cases, including several that were reported in the last *Abolitionist* and in earlier issues of *Prison Briefing*, are as follows:—

- 1 Figures should be published showing the number of suicides in (a) segregation or punishment cells; (b) ordinary single cells; and (c) shared cells or dormitories.
- 2 General reform of the penal system by (a) reducing the number of prisoners; (b) reducing the isolation of prisoners from outside society; and (c) breaking down barriers between prisoners and staff, would probably be the most effective ways to reduce the suicide rate.
- 3 Prisoners may find it easier to turn for help to a person who is seen to be independent of the prison authorities. A more independent position for priests, doctors etc. could therefore be advantageous. Prison visitors and voluntary associates also have an important part to play.
- 4 No person should be remanded in custody for social enquiry and medical reports unless a social worker or medical practitioner certifies that this is necessary.
- 5 The Standing Orders and instructions relating to suicide should be published, or at least made available to coroners and to properly interested persons or their representatives at inquests on possible suicides.
- 6 The existing Standing Orders and instructions relating to suicide should be strictly interpreted and enforced. Any governor who considers that because of overcrowding or other factors it is impossible to apply the prescribed precautions should be required to consult headquarters before permitting any change of procedure, and the inmates affected should if possible (without undue disruption to social and family contacts) be transferred to an establishment where they can be properly cared for.
- 7 An inmate whose file carries an 'F' marking should, on reception, be kept under observation for a prescribed period - say two weeks - before the medical officer decides whether to continue precautions.
- 8 Prison staff, probation officers, etc., should be reminded of the importance of prompt exchange of information concerning suicide risks. Any relevant information should be placed before governors and Boards of Visitors prior to disciplinary hearings.
- 9 Where an inmate has been receiving medication for a psychiatric condition, the medication should not be abruptly withdrawn unless another form of treatment is available.
- 10 Great care must be taken to guard against victimisation of prisoners, whether by staff or by other inmates, and whether or not involving overt violence. Particular care is required in selecting cellmates for prisoners who may be vulnerable to such victimisation.
- 11 Inmates who attempt or threaten suicide should be treated with sympathy. The practice of stitching up self-inflicted injuries without anaesthetic should cease forthwith.
- 12 Checks on inmates who may be potentially suicidal should be thorough enough to detect any unauthorised item that could be used for self-destruction.
- 13 Any officer who, except in accordance with instructions, deliberately prevents an alarm bell from sounding should be severely disciplined.
- 14 An inmate's fitness for adjudication should be more carefully assessed than is sometimes the case at present.
- 15 The Inspectorate should pay particular attention to the adequacy of precautions at Ashford, Cardiff, Canterbury and Holloway.

**THE CORONERS' SOCIETY** 'feels that with recent controversial cases they have been placed in the firing line by left-wing pressure groups, which are eager to secure rulings against police and prison officers', according to its Secretary, Dr John Burton (*Times*, 31.3.83). He was commenting, strangely enough, on the High Court decision to quash the first inquest on 'God's banker', Roberto Calvi. If coroners do find themselves in the firing line, could it be because they're trying to shield the people the shots are aimed at?

# PRISON BRIEFING

No. 5

**PROP** the national prisoners' movement

## CHAOS IN THE PRISONS

### HOME OFFICE PLAYS MUSICAL CHAIRS WITH PRISONERS

Because of its failure to take resolute action to reduce the grotesque proportions of our prison population the Government now has problems on its hands which go far beyond the "normal" pattern of prison riots and disturbances.

For many months complaints have been flooding in from unconvicted prisoners and their families and lawyers about the growing use of police cells for those remanded in custody by the courts. That unconvicted prisoners, who have long been accustomed to the worst conditions throughout the entire prison system, should now be protesting at this alternative accommodation is an indication of just how grim things are.

Police cells are intended for the brief holding of arrested persons and frequently have no adequate washing, toilet, exercise or visiting facilities. Lawyers attempting to prepare defence cases for prisoners have, in some instances, even been obliged to conduct their interviews through closed cell doors.

Anxious to head off trouble, not merely from prisoners but from the growing body of opinion outraged by such blatant disregard to fundamental human rights, and fearing yet more condemnation by the European Court, the Home Office's Prison Department held a series of urgent meetings in April to see how better to spread the misery around. (Regrettably some penal reformers have lent respectability to this thoroughly regressive policy by advocating a more equitable sharing of overcrowding throughout the prison system instead of recognising and emphasising that we already have, by comparative European standards, far more prison space than we ought to need and that it is the sentence length of existing and new prisoners which must be tackled).

On 5 May, answering questions on the prison population, Whitelaw stated: "I have plans to make other places available where we can move people within London prisons to prisons outside." At that time 412 unconvicted prisoners were being held in police and court cells because of prison overcrowding - the situation being particularly serious in the London area.

#### WHY BLUNDESTON PRISONERS WERE SHIPPED OUT

At the time of the start of the Albany riot on 21 May the figure had risen to 437 and many unconvicted London prisoners were being shuttled between the London courts and police cells as far away as Stroud, Southampton, Leamington Spa and Hastings. On 6 June, 50 prisoners were uprooted from Blundeston prison in Norfolk and transferred to Highpoint prison in Suffolk, in order - so they were told - to make room for Albany prisoners shipped out during and after the riot. In fact the disposition had already been

made and had nothing at all to do with Albany but was for the purpose of making accommodation in Blundeston available for transfers from the hardpressed London prisons.

#### HOME OFFICE DIVIDE AND RULE

The Home Office makes a habit of sowing discord between prisoners. Thus the 1979 Wormwood Scrubs disturbances which culminated in the MUFTI squad assault were blamed on small groups of prisoners - "London gangsters", "black prisoners", "the IRA" - implying always that the main body of prisoners wants nothing more than to get on with their sentences but are being made to suffer by the activities of a few "troublemakers".

One woman prisoner who had taken part in an ATV documentary on drugging in women's prisons was set up in this fashion when she found herself back in prison on a further sentence. A special point was made during her time in Holloway, pending transfer to Styal, to refuse drugs to prisoners seeking them and then to tell those same prisoners that they had only this "troublemaker", to blame.

Recently the blaming of the Albany riot on "the IRA" has been the subject of banner headlines. The dispersal prison population is far too sophisticated to be taken in by such rubbish but it has had its effect on public opinion and also, unfortunately, on some prisoners' families who, in conversations with PROP, have expressed concern at the company in which their husbands, sons, wives or daughters are being held. Patiently we advise them that they are worrying about the wrong things: it wasn't other prisoners who killed Barry Prosser or who let Richard 'Cartoon' Campbell die, or who outraged a young Rastawoman in Holloway barstal. And it is not Albany prisoners generally, still less the IRA, who are responsible for the wholesale chaos in which the UK prison system currently finds itself.

#### SOLIDARITY SHOULD EMBRACE ALL PRISONERS

The facts of the Highpoint disturbances are described on another page. We are interested here in the effect of the clash of prison cultures. Some Blundeston prisoners clearly saw their transfer as a downgrading. To the extent that their customary conditions and privileges were being eroded the objection is valid - and it understandably and properly led to mass protests.

But in some reports to PROP there was an element of contempt by some ex Blundeston prisoners for the existing prison population at Highpoint for their acceptance of conditions which would never have been tolerated for one moment at Blundeston. It is of course a fact that the worst jail conditions for convicted prisoners are in the short term prisons but it is thoroughly divisive and playing into the Home Office's hands to see this as reflecting on some mys-



tical qualities which short term prisoners don't possess. It should be obvious that levels of tolerance for short term imprisonment will always be different from those in the top security jails. Getting out takes priority over getting privileges. The contrast is even more marked in remand prisons where the worst conditions of all apply but where even those prisoners who are facing potentially long sentences will, in the interests of the overriding priority of winning their court cases, put up with nonsense which would see the same prisoners, later at Albany or some other long term prison, hurling a prison officer over a landing.

#### THE HOME OFFICE'S DILEMMA - - - - -

The musical chairs scenario of which the London-Blundeston-Highpoint transfers were a part was already well under way when the Albany and Wormwood Scrubs riots speeded up the tempo and seriously restricted the Home Office's options. Irish prisoners are now scattered from one end of the country to the other. (See also page 18 ) Albany prisoners generally are also spread around, even, for example, in the short term prison of Pentonville. And interestingly, in view of the reasons given for moving Blundeston men to Highpoint, some of these same prisoners were transferred after the Highpoint disturbance - to Albany!

Meanwhile the numbers of untried prisoners in police and

court cells continued to rise. A Parliamentary answer to a question from Alf Dubs (Hansard 30 June) revealed that during the week ending 12 June the numbers reached 476. On the following day the Law Society lodged a formal protest with the Home Secretary at this fundamental denial of basic and statutorily defined rights to prisoners who are not only still presumed to be innocent in the eyes of the law, but many of whom will eventually be judged so.

#### - - - - - IS THE PRISONERS' OPPORTUNITY

The Home Office is now in such a mess that more transfers between unlike prisons may occur. Stronger prisoners - stronger, that is, not in some physical or moral way but stronger because of their own situation and priorities - will have unusual opportunities for advancing the cause of prisoners' solidarity by using their own situational muscle to improve the lot of those in a weaker position than themselves.

There is a positive side to what happened at Highpoint which shows that privileges have been won for everyone. This, surely, is the aspect of Highpoint which should be built upon. Divisiveness is in the Home Office's interests; unity and solidarity is absolutely essential to prisoners' - and will become increasingly so as this repressive government, smarting after the hanging debate, gets into its stride.

## THE DAY THAT HIGHPOINT BLEW OFF

### A first hand account from the prison

Blundeston, the prison I was in before, is a long term jail which houses men serving, in the majority, sentences from 5 years to life - nearly all in single cells. The essence of a long term prisoner's ability to settle down in jail is his allocation and legal right to a single cell where privacy is established and he can serve his time in his own way, alone if necessary, where he can study a course, learn what he missed in his youth or concentrate on his appeal.

In the aftermath of the Albany riot there was a massive balls-up of administration by the Home Office who have blindly sought to ease the situation by uprooting many hundreds of other inmates from their settled positions in various other jails, causing vast discontent and anger amongst previously settled prisoners. At short notice 72 Blundeston men were told that they would be going to Highpoint semi-open prison in order to make room for Albany men (see this issue, pages 15/16).

#### WHAT WE WERE TOLD ABOUT THE MOVE . . . . .

It is important to note just what we were told about the proposed transfer. We were assured that we would be much better off at Highpoint where we would be located in a newly built prison called Highpoint North, which had single cells, a new gym, new kitchens and the latest amenities. It was a semi-open prison, which means one fence and no barbed wire or heavy gates and there would be plenty of open air work on farms, gardens, etc; also ample leisure and sports facilities. Thus assured, we packed our things and were taken in coaches to Highpoint, anticipating that despite the unsettling move it would turn out to be a change for the better.

#### . . . . . AND SHOCK AT THE REALITY

The arrival at Highpoint was a jarring shock. The first sight was of barbed wire and heavy steel gates. The second shock was being locked up eight or nine into a small room

in the reception area for nearly six hours without a drink and without possessions, books or papers. The small rooms were in fact punishment cells now doing duty as temporary containing rooms. The third and most disturbing event was being allocated to "4 up" rooms all over the prison, which has five "houses" or blocks. It was totally unacceptable and harsh to go into these multi-occupied rooms with bunk beds, noise and the utter confusion that reigns over Highpoint.

The rooms were squalid and dank with peeling paint and damp patches on the ceilings and long dead insects squashed all over the walls. Privacy was nil, with record players going full blast, radios competing with them tuned in to different stations and the jail's radio system permanently broadcasting BBC Radio 2 through tannoy loudspeakers when whenever one left the rooms and wherever one went. The other ear shattering device was when the tannoy broadcast was intermittently interrupted from 7 am to 11 pm to relay jail announcements, always preceded by its own introductory "ice cream" music. For the Blundeston men, used to a quiet nick and privacy, this was all too much.

#### FOOTBALL WITH A BUNDLE OF RAGS

The much acclaimed sports facilities at Highpoint turned out to be a football made up from old rags, simply because the staff refused to allow them to have a proper ball. On a muddy section of field mature men tried to play five-a-side with a ball of rags while another group played football with a tiny tennis ball.

There is nowhere where one can read or write and study, except the bog where I am writing this. There is one proper TV room with an old black and white set with blurred pictures and indistinct sound. In the two dining rooms which double as alternative TV rooms after 6 pm the sets are of the type you see for sale for £5 on pavement flea markets,

#### PETTY DISCIPLINE

The petty rules are stifling. Bed packs have to be made up each day and lights turned out at bedtime - both practices outdated years ago in most prisons. No slippers or training shoes can be worn casually, there are no bedspreads, no curtains, no taking a slice of bread from the dining room to eat later. The food is chronic, chips hard and green, stews unsatisfying, lots of bread pudding.

In Blundeston it was unusual if more than five men were placed on report in one week. Here it is common for up to ten men to be nicked each day for petty offences which range from not making your bed up properly to failing to hear your name on the tannoy or being found with an extra blanket or pair of socks.

#### MONSTROUS WORKING CONDITIONS

There is no gym, only an old storeroom which is part of the main stores where a bit of weightlifting takes place. There is not enough work and I am still idle, like many others, three weeks after my arrival here. There is one workshop here for tailoring which is a monstrous breach of the Factory Act. Inside one hangar (the prison is on a disused airfield) has been built what looks like a larger version of the old wartime Anderson shelter - a block within a block. It has no windows or vents and not a glimmer of natural light. Men are squeezed in there at 8 am and stagger out, four hours later, blinking into the sunlight. How on earth has such a place existed for so long?

#### A MADHOUSE OF APATHY AND BOREDOM

Inmates not working or after working hours drift around with nowhere to go and little to do. Apathy is visible on every side. Some stay out in the open until cold, wet or boredom drive them back to their rooms. The competing noise from record players and radios then drive them out again. For the mature prisoner, or even the younger prisoner who likes a bit of peace and quiet, Highpoint is like a madhouse.

Some of us tried through the main governor, who was never available, or through the chaplain or the chief officer to get a football. We were told that, despite the large areas of debris and mud, there was no space that could be allotted for proper ballgames and no staff available to supervise them. It quickly became obvious that what we had been promised at Blundeston was a load of eyewash. There would be no single cells for us, no new part of the prison, no gym, no privacy. We had been conned and we were very angry.

#### THE DAY THAT HIGHPOINT "BLEW"

On Monday 6 June, just a few weeks after our transfer, the nick blew its top in the first riot in the history of Highpoint. Blundeston inmates spread around the various blocks went berserk. Windows were smashed, sinks ripped out, radiators damaged. Alarm bells sounded all over the complex. The rampage was swift and costly. It began at about 7 pm and by 10 o'clock an SOS had gone out to other jails for their MUFTI squads. (PROP - they were sent from Blundeston, Chelmsford, Gaynes Hall, Hallesley Bay, Norwich, Warren Hill and Wellingborough.)

During the night at least four coachloads of squads had arrived complete with big sticks and riot gear. But by this time the prison was quiet - restless and brooding but quiet as we discussed what we should do and prepared defensive weapons in case the MUFTI squads stormed the blocks. All these prisoners, normally placid and well behaved, had reached the end of their tether.

At the crack of dawn on 7 June hundreds of strange warders assembled near the gates. Coaches stood parked outside with more warders and police cars could be seen around the perimeter fence. The great "ghosting" began. This is the term used when inmates are pounced on at dawn and immediately transferred to other jails. Groups of warders moved in and weeded out about thirty inmates, mostly Blundeston men, and escorted them with their kit to the reception area. The whole nick watched as parties of MUFTI squads escorted the various men to the loading area. It took over eight hours before they were finally handcuffed in pairs and coached off with police escorts to Camp Hill, Parkhurst, Durham, Scrubs and Norwich (PROP - and Albany!). During the next few days another dozen went.

#### THE NEW FOOTBALL

A week after it was all over, lo and behold, a brand new football arrived! Next day, without asking permission, some of us began to clear a large area of overgrown and brick strewn land near one of the blocks. The prison gardener wheeled his lawnmower over and cut the grass and weeds. A hesitant physical training officer was persuaded to mark out a football pitch, all through our own unsupervised and frowned upon labours. Now the place seethes with activity during association periods with teams queuing up all the time for their turn at five-a-side football.

There are enough volunteers amongst us to change the place from senility to activity and to make the whole prison useable the same way if only we could get the official go-ahead. Although it is the marvel of the inmates the new pitch is far from perfect though it could be made so with a bit of help from the authorities. Still it is far better than what we had before - nothing.

Movements of inmates have continued ever since the disturbance, in as well as out, with intakes from Bedford, Canterbury, Norwich and the Scrubs. The hired coaches are doing a thriving trade!

#### TO CHURCH IN HANDCUFFS

Conditions here generally remain intolerable. It must be the only prison in the country, or most other countries as well, where inmates are handcuffed to go to church on Sunday. The prisoners from Highpoint North have to come over to this side if they want to go to church, so for the short trip out of their prison, a few hundred yards away, they are handcuffed and driven in the nick coach to our part and dumped outside the chapel. It's all another Highpoint mystery, seeing that all Highpoint North inmates are in the lowest possible security category.

#### THE DAY THE FOOD GOT BETTER

On 25 June an inmate called Kelly went around gathering names for a petition of protest about the food. He had collected about one hundred before the staff got wind of it and carted him and his petition off to the punishment block. He was last seen being put handcuffed into the prison van and driven away.

As with the riot and the football, there was an immediate result. The authorities had clearly been shaken by the petition. The cook, thoroughly alarmed at this gesture of contempt for his product, turned out a sizeable and not-too-bad dinner. More amazing still, the elusive governor put in an appearance in the dining halls, smiling and nodding to inmates and asking if their dinner was alright. Unfortunately it didn't last and the cook is now glaring at the inmates as usual and the quality and quantity of the food is back to where it was.

The position as it stands now (beginning of July) is that

many of us have our personal possessions packed in case of a "ghosting". There is a perpetual state of tension and one is on edge all the time.

(This graphic account, written over a period of some weeks, has been condensed to avoid repetition and, in certain instances, to ensure anonymity.)

## ALBANY PROTEST

### THE LIST OF GRIEVANCES

Because of possible legal consequences arising from prison officers' behaviour towards protesting prisoners we are not at this stage going into details about the events at Albany in May or at Wormwood Scrubs in June.

The Albany protest, culminating in a dramatic rooftop demonstration, was in the direct line of protests which started at Long Lartin in June 1981 and have since involved thousands of prisoners at Parkhurst, Albany, Gartree, Long Lartin, Wormwood Scrubs and elsewhere. The Albany prisoners' full list of grievances is as follows:

The major grievances of the Irish Political prisoners are:

1. The repatriation issue: the policy of successive British Governments to refuse to place these prisoners in prisons close to their homes, families and friends.
2. The policy of alienating these prisoners from society in general and their families and friends in particular by the use of special visiting conditions.

The major grievances of long term prisoners generally are:

1. The lack of parity in conditions with other prisons in the UK, e.g. with conditions in northern Ireland regarding clothing, visits, association and recreation, food parcels, canteen facilities, compassionate parole.
2. The failure to introduce throughout the UK half remission of sentences, as has applied in prisons throughout northern Ireland since 1976.

3. The lack of creative and progressive activity in both labour and recreation.
4. Meagre wages.
5. The failure to inform prisoners of reasons for refusal of parole.
6. Lack of means to ventilate complaints immediately.
7. The secretive nature of prison institutions.
8. The arbitrary nature of "penal justice", i.e. Governors' Adjudications, Boards of Visitors' Hearings, Rule 43 segregation and "ghostings".
9. The lack of independent medical facilities.
10. The use of drugs as means of control.
11. Refusal of free access to prisons by interested public representatives.
12. The apartheid quality of Category A and Special Category A.
13. The arbitrary process of secretive composition and the Category A Tribunal.
14. The poor quality and meagre quantity of prison food.
15. Failure of the British Government to join other countries in signing mutual treaties for the repatriation of prisoners.

## WHAT'S GOING ON IN HOLLOWAY?

### GOVERNOR IN CONFLICT WITH PROFESSIONAL STAFF

What is going on in Holloway? As the GUARDIAN reported in its excellent exposure article on 25 July, the seeds of this year's troubles can be traced back to a confidential report produced by Home Office inspectors in 1979. As a direct consequence of that report a new Governor, Miss Joy Kinsley, was installed a year ago with a brief, prepared in 1981, to develop the prison in new directions.

Since then she has been involved in one conflict after another with the more progressive elements within the prison, stamping down on social contacts between prison teachers and former prisoners and refusing entry to the prison by the chief education officer who had committed the grave indiscretion of helping an ex-inmate to gain admission to university. During his exclusion from the site Kinsley even gave instructions that he was not to be permitted to telephone his own staff.

Another petty minded restriction, forbidding relatives to attend confirmation services for prisoners, brought her into conflict with both the chaplain and the Bishop of Stepney. But these are only two of a constant stream of incidents involving disagreements with ancillary staff. Some of the conflicts started even before she took over the governorship,

when, as Assistant Regional Director responsible for young offenders throughout the south east region, she forced through the closure of Holloway's borstal unit and was resisted strongly by the prison's principal psychologist, senior probation officer and chief education officer.

Now, it seems, the conflicts have become so public and her attitude and decisions so widely condemned that the Home Office is taking its usual step of trying to distance itself from trouble.

### KINSLEY'S RECORD

The GUARDIAN scenario is not totally satisfactory. Is it really believable that all this has happened because, to quote the paper, a governor has got on "her high horse" and overstepped her authority? Kinsley has not suddenly got uppity or taken leave of her senses: she has always been like it. Nor was she, at the time of her appointment, an unknown quantity. As Governor of the remand centre at Pucklechurch she got up the nose of just about everybody except prison officers - presumably the qualities which earned her promotion to the Regional Director's Office at Tolworth Towers. There she was obviously in regular close contact with the Home Office bureaucracy which was to

(Cont'd on page 23)

# PREVENTION OF SUICIDES

## THE PREVENTION OF SUICIDES IN PRISONS

A memorandum in response to the invitation from H.M. Inspectorate of Prisons to submit observations relevant to the Inspectorate's review of arrangements for the prevention of suicides in prisons.

In submitting our observations and recommendations on the prevention of suicides in prisons, we will not attempt any statistical survey: the material is simply unavailable. The only systematic study of prison suicides in Britain (Topp/British Journal of Psychiatry, 1979) begs too many questions in making assumptions on coroners' open verdicts and counting certain of these towards a national total of suicides. As this is not how national statistics for suicide deaths are compiled, the Topp figures are of little use for comparative purposes though there is much of value in the study itself.

Furthermore, there are many factors generally recognised as bearing on the liability to suicide of individuals in the community at large. These include age, addiction to alcohol or other drugs, gregariousness, etc. A cross section of the prison population might not, and in the case of age groups certainly does not, coincide with that of the community. The difficulty, maybe the impossibility, of identifying a firm basis for comparison is obvious.

### SUICIDES AND "SUICIDES"

We therefore restrict ourselves to the observation that the suicide rate in prisons is unacceptably high, a view clearly shared by Mr Whitelaw when he invited Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons to review arrangements for the prevention of suicide - though the posing of the invitation in this way far too readily accepts "suicides" as suicides.

PROP believes that the high suicide rate conceals some deaths that have more sinister causes, a suspicion which is echoed by the returning of open verdicts by inquest juries. The cause of a prison death ought to be less, not more, obscure than that of deaths elsewhere. Observation and logging of a prisoner's movements, the recording of background and medical history, regulations defining the conditions under which he/she is kept, the orders and instructions to prison staff - all these should militate against uncertainty by coroners' juries.

Our belief that not all "suicides" are self inflicted is founded on more than suspicion or on prison rumour, although we accept that rumour is always rife in cases of prison death - an inevitable consequence of the secrecy surrounding such incidents. Many prisoners in C wing and the segregation block of Wormwood Scrubs prison in 1974 knew very well that Stephen Smith did not die of his own hand in August of that year. Several prison officers knew this as well and were overheard discussing the case. The present secretary of PROP compiled the dossier of evidence from scores of fellow prisoners which subsequently assisted the inquest in reaching its verdict. Knowing the truth and proving it in the face of reluctant or conspiring witnesses are very different matters, but the refusal of the jury to accept the suicide explanation offered by the prison authorities, and its returning of an open verdict, vindicated the efforts of many prisoners and the courage of one prison teacher who risked and lost her job by smuggling out this vital information.

### INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO INQUESTS

This is not the place to make the case for the reform of coroners' inquests, except where their deficiencies are compounded by the Prison Department's actions or inactions. In this context our view is that the abysmal ignorance of prison regulations and the realities of imprisonment which permeates so many inquest proceedings is a direct result of Prison Department - that is to say, Home Office - obstruction. It is not merely juries who are misled: coroners too are obliged to conduct their proceedings as if

they were investigating death in some alien world. Regrettably some coroners, far from even seeking to pierce the wall of secrecy surrounding prison conditions, clearly accept their part in the process of concealment.

Thus the Hammersmith coroner, investigating in 1982 the death of a young black prisoner, Everett Wilson, objected to the production of what he had the impudence to describe as "sponsored material" when Home Office documents were revealed in court by the barrister representing the prisoner's family. The documents concerned were the Prison Standing Orders relating to the duties of prison medical officers, Home Office Circular Instructions to prison governors on precautions against suicide, and another Circular Instruction, this time to the Probation Service, detailing the responsibility of probation officers for advising the prison authorities of prisoners known to them as suicide risks.

This is the sort of evidence which should be made available, as a matter of course and as a legal requirement, to all coroners' courts. Until this is done PROP will continue to disseminate as much of this material as it can lay its hands on, so that lawyers and others may be armed with the regulations relevant to their cases.

It might be said in defence of the Home Office that it would, if requested, supply this material to the courts. But neither a coroner nor the lawyers involved can apply for what they don't know exists. For the Home Office to withhold material simply because it hasn't been asked for is tantamount to the concealment of evidence. We trust that the Prison Inspectorate sees it as within its terms of reference to call for the publication of all prison regulations which have no specific security aspect and for the automatic production in court of documents relevant to the proceedings.

### PRESSURES SPECIFIC TO PRISONS

Having made the point that we don't accept all suicide verdicts as correct ones, we return to consider those deaths which have unquestionably occurred at the prisoners' own hands. It is inevitable that such deaths will be at a higher rate than outside: the pressures and strains of imprisonment are sufficient explanation for that. Nor need there be surprise that the suicide rate in the remand prisons is the highest of all, especially during the first days and weeks of imprisonment amidst alien surroundings, when sudden separation from family and friends and uncertainty as to the future combine to drive natural concerns and worries over the edge of despair.

Amongst prisoners generally the considerations are more complicated, though it needs to be recognised that some of the factors pressurising remand prisoners can be mirrored in the long term prisons, even many years into a sentence. A sudden transfer from one prison to another, perhaps hundreds of miles away, can throw not only the prisoner but the prisoner's family also into confusion. And whatever relationships have been built up within the prison - sometimes vital anchors to sanity - are ripped away with no thought for the prisoner's peace of mind. Likewise the painstaking attempts that the prisoner might have made to give some meaning to his/her confinement by pursuing some educational or vocational target can be turned to nothing by such uprooting.

But assuming for one moment that a prisoner is not subjected to particular strain of this sort or to the traumas that can result from, say, a parole knockback, family bereavement, harassment by staff (or other prisoners), and assuming too that the prison environment is as humane as can reasonably be expected, a long term prisoner can still have a propensity to suicide, just as he or she might have in the community. Under such circumstances we do not believe that a determined prisoner can, or indeed should, be prevented by repressive measures from committing suicide. A prisoner has little enough control over his or her life as it is.

#### LIFE AND DEATH

In considering precautions against suicide PROP believes that the fundamental issue is not so much one of death as of life - and quality of life. It needs to be approached from the positive standpoint of improving that quality of life rather than from the negative one of accepting and indeed accentuating the miseries of a prison existence whilst simultaneously introducing more and more constraints to deny the prisoner even this final control over his/her destiny.

If Mr Whitelaw is serious in his concern at the suicide figures it is certainly not shown by his policy for building new prisons and thus providing for an even larger prison population than we have at present. With the longest sentences, and thus the biggest prison population, of any EEC country, the search should be for means of drastically reducing that population, not increasing it to even more grotesque proportions.

New prison building is invariably presented as an attempt to ameliorate the appalling conditions in many of our overcrowded jails, but the current target of five new prisons by the end of the decade is overshadowed by official forecasts of a simultaneous increase of the prison population from its present 45,000 to over 50,000. Recent experience reinforces the view that new prison building merely attracts more prisoners from a judiciary ever-ready to fill, and overflow, every available space.

#### EVIDENCE IN THE INSPECTOR'S OWN REPORTS

The new Prison Inspectorate has made much in its reports of the squalid conditions and unacceptable levels of overcrowding in many of our jails. Unfortunately it has done so outside the context of recent prison history so that its structures

strictures have been taken up by an ignorant and lazy press concerned only with instant news and seemingly incapable of serious analysis. Thus every report of overcrowding is publicly presented as if some sudden crisis level has developed. In fact, in every case where a prison's use can be compared, like with like, with its use twelve years ago, nothing has developed at all! The annual prison report for 1970 indicates levels of overcrowding virtually identical

with those which the Prison Inspectorate is pointing to today. The only big difference, and it is never mentioned, is that 6,000 closed prison places have been added during that same period. All have been taken up by the judiciary so that we have had a constant degree of overcrowding against the background of a relentlessly increasing total population. We trust that the Inspectorate will hammer these facts home in future reports.

There is much else in the Inspectorate's published reports to give deep cause for concern at the environment in which this country holds its men and women prisoners. Of prison after prison, the Inspector catalogues instances where the most basic safety rules and regulations have been persistently flouted - alarm bells sited where they cannot be heard from within the prison officers' control room except when the door is left open, fire appliances unmaintained and untested, fire drills not carried out over periods of years and sometimes not within memory, evacuation routes unidentified, inflammable liquids dangerously stored. Scarcely a prison amongst the many inspected has escaped these strictures.

When such elementary safety regulations are openly flouted it is obvious that the welfare of prisoners has a low priority indeed. A prison system which has condoned such appalling negligence for year after year cannot expect to be believed when it attempts to present itself as a caring, watchful agency. It is not surprising that prisoners can be driven to despair by the indifference they encounter around them; nor that, having reached the limit of endurance, they face the same indifference towards averting the tragedies that the system itself has engendered.

Unfortunately the Inspectorate's severe criticism of the standards of fire and safety precautions in prisons has contrasted sharply with its bland and anodyne treatment of prison medical matters where there is the greatest need of all for detailed scrutiny and outspoken comment. Clearly the interlocking impediments of Home Office secrecy and the vested interests of the prison medical profession have been too much for the Inspectorate's team to pierce. PROP has several times remarked publicly on this deficiency: now our suspicions have been confirmed by the recent resignation from the Inspectorate of its medical adviser, Dr Benjamin Lee, on precisely this issue. Claiming that the whole system was riddled with defensiveness and "carefully designed obstructions to free comment", the doctor's resignation statement is a further sign of mounting concern within the medical profession at the attitudes and practices of the prison medical service. It follows, after only a few months, a hard hitting editorial in the journal 'World Medicine', under the heading "Perverted medicine".

The need for separation of prisoners' medical care from Home Office control is now paramount.

#### OBSERVANCE OF PRISON RULES AND REGULATIONS

The problem with discussing the observance and non-observance of existing rules is that an accusation that rules are disregarded may be construed as tacit acceptance that the rules are sensible ones in the first place. We make no such assumption, and the recasting of the regulations pertaining to medical care and to the identification and support of particularly vulnerable prisoners is implicit in our recommendations for the fundamental reform of the prison system.

In the meantime the authorities must be held answerable for the observance of their own rules and regulations on precautions against suicides. The evidence of the Home Office's Circular Instruction 39/1973 is that these are regarded in a very cavalier fashion. Paragraph 17 states that headquarters will "do everything possible to provide sup-

port for the establishment concerned in dealing with any allegations which may be made". It goes on to instruct governors that in submitting their report of a suicide to headquarters they should give their reasons "if it has not been possible to comply with relevant Standing Orders or instructions relating to suicide" and draw attention to "any special factors at the establishment such as overcrowding, an abnormally high concentration of disturbed inmates or staff shortages".

This instruction to governors to instruct headquarters of non-observance of regulations after the event typifies the ramshackle nature of prison management. A governor should have no discretion in such matters and the instruction ought to be that governors consult headquarters before departing from laid down procedures.

#### INADEQUACY OF PRISON STATISTICS

Before listing our own recommendations, we draw the Prison Inspectorate's attention to the inadequacy of the Prison Department's published statistics concerning suicides. Certain prison happenings, for example offences against discipline, are catalogued in great detail and published in tabulated form in the annual prison reports and statistics. Other statistics, such as the quantities of drugs administered by prison doctors, have had to be forced out of a reluctant Home Office by years of steady campaigning by pressure groups. Despite intentional confusion in their presentation, figures for drug dosages are now published each year, although prior to 1979 the Home Office pretended that the collation of such basic information was administratively impracticable. The Home Office's word on such matters must never be accepted at face value.

The statistics which PROP believes would be particularly informative regarding the cause of suicides (and "suicides") refer to the precise location of such occurrences. We suspect that a disproportionate number of suicides take place within prison segregation units. We would also like to know how many cases of suicide followed some sort of physical confrontation between prisoners and staff. The former is a matter for regular statistical publication. The latter is certainly information which should be made available, in the form of report or incident books and logs, to every inquest proceedings. We suspect very strongly that the regular collation of such information will establish a clear pattern of cause and effect.

#### FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTIONS OF HOME OFFICE POLICY

The Prison Department's internal Standing Orders and Circular Instructions demonstrate the Home Office's awareness

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Drastic reduction of the prison population to levels more in keeping with those of other European countries. (A reduction by one third, from 45,000 to 30,000, would be a modest move in this direction, still leaving us proportionately ahead of all EEC countries except West Germany.)
2. The closure of prisons on isolated sites such as the Isle of Wight, Dartmoor.
3. The local, or at any rate regional, allocation of prisoners so as to facilitate the maintenance of family and community links.
4. The establishment within the much reduced prison system of more purposeful regimes along the lines of the Barlinnie Special Unit in Scotland.
5. A far wider use of bail for those awaiting trial, bearing in mind that over 40% of those at present remanded in custody are subsequently found not guilty or given non-custodial sentences. A legal requirement that remands in custody be restricted to the most local prisons so that the existing, but often unrealisable, right of remand prisoners to receive daily visits can be readily taken up.

of obvious danger points where the possibility of a suicidal reaction to imprisonment should be taken especially seriously. One document (C.I. 39/1973 - which subsequent circular instructions make clear is still extant) defines these high risk points as "1. shortly after reception on remand; 2. after reception on conviction awaiting sentence; 3. after reception on sentence." Perversely, these are precisely the stages of imprisonment where a prisoner confronts the prison system at its most squalid and inhumane.

To keep human beings in the conditions of Brixton or Ashford remand prisons or in many of our local jails, and at the same time to attempt such compensatory precautions as observing them at 15 or 20 minute intervals, is NOT the way to prevent suicide. It is sympathetic support and counselling, and ease of contact with friends and relatives, that are important, not the imposition of surveillance methods that are stressful in themselves.

Special precautions, including observation, are of course indicated in certain cases, and will continue to be necessary even if prison conditions are radically improved. But the need for these precautions, based on individual assessments, raises different issues. Home Office documents, in stressing the prison doctor's responsibility for making such assessments, and by emphasising the importance of social workers and chaplains in this context, show that the authorities are aware that these are properly medical and social welfare issues, not disciplinary ones. But prison doctors, prison chaplains and prison welfare officers are correctly seen by most prisoners as part and parcel of the disciplinary structure of the prison.

The externalisation of all these specialist services and their reintegration with their counterparts in the community is a matter of urgency. Appropriate procedures can then be worked out by the new agencies in consultation with all the parties concerned, including prisoners' representatives.

If we are asked to make meaningful recommendations for the prevention of prison suicides in the absence of the structural changes which we regard as pre-conditions for any humane approach to the problems of imprisonment, PROP must answer that it is an impossible task.

Many of the problems are of the Home Office's own making and, unless it tackles these problems at source, it will attract and will deserve criticism whatever superficial precautions it takes or declines to take. It may seem unjust to attack the authorities for observing prisoners too closely on one occasion and for not being sensibly watchful on another. THE CONTRADICTION DOES NOT LIE IN THE HOME OFFICE'S CRITICISMS, BUT IN A PRISON SYSTEM WHICH, IN ITS EVERYDAY PRACTICES, CONTRADICTS EVEN ITS OWN STATED AIMS.

6. An end to the inappropriate imprisonment of the mentally ill, and to remands in custody for the purpose of social enquiry and medical reports which could as easily, and far more reliably, be carried out in a non-custodial setting.
7. Greater involvement of local authorities in the general overview of the prisons in their area, and the reconstitution of Prison Boards of Visitors on a community basis, independent of the Home Office and nominated by and answerable to their communities. (The recommendations for community control of prisons interlock with the requirements that prisoners are placed in prisons in their community and that prisons on isolated sites are closed down. There would be obvious contradictions in attempting to draft a programme for community control of prisons on, say, the Isle of Wight, where there is little in common between the local community and the prisoners in their midst. The only exceptions to local allocations would be (a) where prisoners felt that it would be in their own interests to move away and were prepared to accept the consequences, and (b) where, because of attitudes towards their offences, prisoners needed protection from other prisoners and could only be placed in a few prisons where their safety could be reasonably ensured. See also Recommendation 13.)
8. (a) Disbandment of the Prison Medical Service and the transfer of responsibility for the medical care of prisoners to outside doctors under the National Health Service, subject to the same statutory controls as in the community.  
(b) Disbandment of the Prison Chaplaincy and the transfer of pastoral care of prisoners to local churches, chapels, Humanist fellowships, Rastafarian brethren, etc.  
(c) Transfer of prison welfare to local social services. (If probation officers continue to be employed in this role, it should be under the direct control of the external Probation Service and not, as now, through a prison Chief Probation Officer who is in turn responsible to the Prison Governor.)  
(d) Integration of prison education under the Local Education Authority, making maximum use of liaison with local schools and colleges and defining the right of prisoners to education appropriate to their needs.  
(e) Transfer of responsibility for the enforcement of acceptable standards in prisons to the appropriate body charged with that responsibility in the community, eg fire, safety, health, food. The extension of all relevant codes of practice, eg heating, lighting, ventilation, sanitation, to embrace prison premises.
9. The publishing of all prison rules, orders, regulations and instructions which have no direct bearing on security. Such rules to be made available at all main public reference libraries in the community and in all prison libraries.
10. (a) Abolition for all prisoners in all prisons of all forms of censorship of the written or printed word, embracing the right of prisoners to obtain any book, newspaper or journal legitimately published in the community.  
(b) Provision of telephone call boxes for uncensored and private use by prisoners in all prisons.  
(c) Abolition of restrictions on categories of visitors permitted to visit prisoners. The provision of humane visiting conditions in all prisons.
11. Regular association to be made available on at least a daily basis to all prisoners on normal location (ie not on punishment or statutorily defined and limited segregation), with cell doors unlocked and prisoners free to circulate. (This in addition to normal association in exercise, work or study periods.)
12. Cell sharing for prisoners on normal location to be neither enforced nor denied.
13. Special provision to be made for prisoners whose offences require them to be separated from other prisoners, so as to ensure, if necessary by compensatory privileges, that their conditions are not inferior to those of the general prison population.

PROP's memorandum is complementary to its submission to the 1979 Inquiry into the United Kingdom Prison Services, under Mr Justice May. Both sets of recommendations should not be seen as all embracing but as pointers to the directions in which the penal system must move if there is serious intent to curb the destructiveness of prison sentences.

## PROP'S NEW BOOK

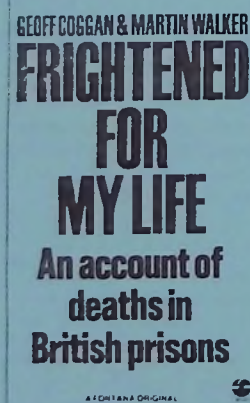
**FRIGHTENED FOR MY LIFE**, written in association with PROP and published as a Fontana Paperback at £1.95, provides an up to date and detailed study of deaths in British prisons, together with an analysis of the system which permits such things to happen. As well as drawing on transcripts of inquest proceedings it makes a typical PROP use of unpublished (and not intended to be published) internal prison documents.

It has been well reviewed by, amongst others, *New Society*, *West Indian World*, *Economist*, *Labour Herald*, *Birmingham Post*, *The Democrat*, *Tribune*, *The Scotsman*. But the two comments which could commend it most strongly to PROP supporters were as follows:

"We have suffered unreasonably for years from allegations and suggestions made by PROP. Our lawyers are now investigating the book - you can take it from us that we are not happy about the book." (Prison Officers Association).

"No comment." (Home Office).

FROM ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS: or by post (post free) from PROP, the National Prisoners Movement, BM-PROP, LONDON WC1N 3XX. Tel. No. 01 542 3744.



(Cont'd from page 18)

pick her as a suitable person to push through the required changes in the Holloway regime.

"HORSES FOR COURSES"

It is all very reminiscent of the situation after the 1976 Hull riot when the blame for dismantling the previous liberal regime was placed on Governor Kearns. Yet it is crystal clear that his appointment was preceded by a Home Office inspection of the prison which led to a reassessment of the type of regime to be operated. The liberal Governor Perrie was temperamentally unsuited to turn the screw in the direction required. He was accordingly replaced by, first, Cooper and then, when yet more turns were required, Kearns.

Prisons aren't some private domain of prison governors and a prison regime is not the product of some personal whim -

which is not to say that an individual governor cannot influence it for better or worse. But the guidelines are laid down by the Home Office and governors suitable for particular regimes are chosen on a "horses for courses" basis from a pool which covers most human characteristics from a firm but relatively benevolent pat/maternalism to the sort of person who can only be described as an outright bastard.

HOME OFFICE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE

It could be that the Home Office made a bad choice with Kinsley but, if so, it doesn't say much for its assessment of the qualities of senior staff. Nobody outside the Home Office who has known her is the least surprised at the way she has been behaving. Bad choice, or plans that have backfired - either way the Home Office emerges with no credit at all and should not be allowed to slide off the hook by its usual tactic of selectively leaking documents and diverting criticisms of policies into criticisms of personalities.

## MAILBAG:

# SIZING UP THE MACHO MEN

Letter to PROP 19/4/83.

## A serious issue for prisoners and for PROP

In watching the Channel 4 series on prisons recently, I was struck by the extent to which the case which PROP has been expounding steadily for many years has become, if not acceptable, at least arguable to the point of being taken seriously. This was especially so in the programme that highlighted the abuses which followed the Hull prison riot, the controversy over drugs, and the authorities' attempted concealment of the facts surrounding the MUFTI riot squads.

(PROP's) own contribution was excellent but even more striking was the degree to which its patiently argued case over many years has infiltrated the attitudes of others. This is a true sign of a successful pressure group. Keep up the good work!

However, the last programme was a serious let down and made me, a woman who accepts that our prison system is a disgrace and who supports the issue of prisoners' rights, almost want to give up with disgust at the pathetic macho posturing of a succession of ex-prisoners and prisoners. (One of the ex-prisoners), who in his own book had actually boasted that his hobby inside prison was making life a misery for sex offenders, was followed by interviews with other prisoners expressing similar sentiments.

Nobody needs to persuade me, as a woman, of the obscenity of attacks on women or children. Least of all do I want to be lectured by people themselves convicted of violent crime. Violence is NOT acceptable when employed against men, becoming unacceptable only when used on women and children. Violence is about power and intimidation and,

by definition, is used against physically weaker people.

The macho male personality lies at the root of personal violence. It is a cowardly trait, not a manly one, and it has obvious sexual undertones - a discomfiting thought for the violent prisoner and maybe the reason for his psychopathic hate of that category of violent offender who confirms this connection by having used his power in an overtly sexual manner.

The violent "normal" prisoner likes to think he is a cut above the violent sex offender. He isn't. He is the same breed and there exists no moral dividing line, only a series of gradations, between one sort of thug and another. The only valid division amongst prisoners is the one which separates the violent from the NON-violent offender. The rest is hypocrisy.

PROP needs to think out its attitude much more carefully on this issue if it is not to alienate people like me who are fundamentally on its side. You can forget the law and order lobby: they will not support you anyway. You cannot afford to forget the liberally minded people who are prepared to look dispassionately at the problems of violence, INCLUDING sexual violence, and to consider the negative effects of the prison system on all of them. If the case of the violent offender and his rehabilitation to society is to be argued in a serious manner, then you must not insult our intelligence by implying that if my father is battered that is OK, but if my daughter is battered it must be the work of some evil monster. Christine P.

The above letter, from a PROP supporter of several years' standing, raises issues which we believe we, and prisoners generally, ignore at our peril. It demonstrates very clearly how the painstaking work of promoting the arguments for prisoners' rights is crippled by those prisoners who deny the same rights to others.

Perhaps we have been insufficiently attentive to these issues but it is quite wrong to identify PROP with any of the statements made in the particular section of the television programme to which the letter refers. None of the ex-prisoners expressing opinions on this topic had or have anything to do with PROP. PROP does its best to act in what it believes are the best interests of all prisoners - and that specifically means every category of prisoner. But we can no more be held as answerable for individual prisoners' viewpoints than we could reasonably hold our correspondent responsible, as a woman, for the views of Margaret Thatcher.

PROP's declared policy on such matters has been expressed in unambiguous terms - at length in an article PROP, SEX OFFENDERS AND PRISONERS in the PROP JOURNAL Volume 2 Number 5, May 1978, and much more briefly but again unambiguously in the book FRIGHTENED FOR MY LIFE published as a Fontana paperback last September. We plead guilty only of not

having returned more frequently to the subject since 1978: we see now that this is wrong.

We believe and we have stated categorically that the heaping of abuse by prisoners on fellow prisoners is utterly wrong and provides no basis from which those same prisoners can take a principled stand against the abuses inflicted on prisoners by certain prison officers who, with their peaked caps modified Gestapo style, indulge their own macho posturing.

Furthermore, this persecution of and by prisoners undermines the arguments of everyone who is trying to rouse public opinion to the realities of an inhumane and often brutal prison system. At this point, the attacking prisoners will no doubt complain that in assaulting sex offenders they are in step with public opinion, not in opposition to it. That of course is correct - if they want to side with the same public opinion which would reintroduce corporal and capital punishment and would happily lock away ALL violent offenders and throw away the key.

At the same time we probably wouldn't go so far as our correspondent appears to do in discounting different motivations for violence and lumping them all together under one "macho" label. Politically motivated violence, for example, may spring from macho tendencies but equally it can embrace a selfless quality which is the very negation of machismo. Perhaps that is why such prisoners represent the most solid and dependable members of the prison community, the least likely to make moral judgements about those who share their incarceration, and the most steadfast in their refusal to collude with the authorities in divide-and-rule tactics.

The other point on which we might differ from our correspondent is where she describes the macho male personality as "a cowardly trait, not a manly one." Cowardly, yes. But she is surely wrong to deny its "manliness". The macho male is not some sort of deviant from "manliness": he is the most craven conformist to its stereotyping, accepting his socially defined role (and enjoying its power) without recognising that he is just as much the victim of social pressures as the woman who accepts the opposite subordinate role.

These issues are so important and have been raised by our correspondent in so challenging a way that we would like to see them taken up in a more thoroughgoing manner than as a brief reply to a letter. PRISON BRIEFING and THE ABOLITIONIST will welcome future contributions on the subject.

## FIRE PRECAUTIONS IN PRISONS

### CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE BY AUTHORITIES

When the new Prison Inspectorate was set up in response to the various recommendations made by the 1979 Inquiry (under Justice May) into the UK Prison Services, PROP's initial reaction was sceptical. The new body, though nominally divorced from the Prison Department, was still part of the Home Office and its staff included seconded prison governors who would eventually return to their old stamping grounds.

In no way can this be described as truly independent scrutiny and no amount of outspokenness on the part of the Inspectorate can remove the suspicion that behind this great facade of openness some of the most politically sensitive areas are being passed over. Recent developments (see page 20) have shown that this is certainly the case with regard to prison medicine.

Nevertheless, on many matters the new Inspectorate's reports have been refreshingly frank and direct - and nowhere more so than in relation to fire precautions. Scarcely a prison in those for which reports have so far been published - over twenty to date - has received a clean slate for its performance on fire safety. In many the situation exposed fully merits the use of that overworked word "scandalous". The following are direct quotations from the Inspector's reports on a number of prisons:

WELLINGBOROUGH BORSTAL (Inspected February 1981)

On E and F wings there are break-glass type fire alarms which register only on the ground floor of the wing concerned and not, as is the case of the other wings, in the centre and gate offices. We tested the alarm and found that the indicator panel did not function correctly and that the alarm could not be heard outside the office if the door was closed.

BRIXTON (Inspected March 1981)

Although the fire notices were appropriately distributed and

displayed there were no evacuation instructions and fire drills and practices had not been held.

GLOUCESTER (Inspected March 1981)

The storage of paints and some other inflammable materials was not satisfactory; for example paint was stored within the main works department stores. Also the necessary warning notices were not displayed. This represents a considerable fire hazard. . . . . As to alarms, smoke detectors were in place in the kitchen and library which were particularly vulnerable areas, but the break glass alarm system in use throughout the rest of the establishment did not work and had not done for some time. . . . . No fire drills had been held and only limited evacuation exercises had taken place. A prison's responsibility to its staff and inmates makes it essential to ensure that all know what action to take if a fire breaks out, and this can only be achieved satisfactorily through practice.

STAFFORD (Inspected October 1981)

Paint and other inflammable materials were being stored in a wooden building immediately adjacent to the Works Department offices. This building was unsuitable for its designated purpose, as had been pointed out by the Prison Department Inspectorate in 1975. . . . . There was an absence of fire notices and evacuation orders in many key points, and an interval of 4 years had elapsed since a fire drill or evacuation exercise.

STRANGWAYS (Inspected October 1981)

There had been no evacuation exercises, other than from the administration building a year before our inspection, and no drills or exercises involving inmates in recent years. . . . . The fuel tanks which stored oil for the boiler house, which together had a capacity of 60,000 gallons of fuel oil, had no bund walls to contain oil which might escape through seepage or damage to the tanks. We thought

this presented a particularly serious hazard.

WINSON GREEN (Inspected November 1981)

There was no system of fire alarm within the establishment, fire notices were insufficiently provided, maintenance of fire appliances had been neglected, the administration buildings did not have clearly defined escape routes, and there were no evacuation plans in existence. . . . . We pointed out to the Governor that he should provide a fire escape for the pre-release hostel, and training for all members of staff in the use of fire appliances. . . . . We formally recommend that the Governor should arrange for fire drills and evacuation exercises to be held in accordance with the provisions of Prison Department's Fire Precautions Manual.

NOTTINGHAM (Inspected March 1982)

The prison had no fire alarm system; there were few fire and evacuation notices: assembly points had not been properly designated; evacuation exercises had not been undertaken for some considerable time; and the servicing and maintenance records for fire appliances were unsatisfactory.

In defence of the Home Office it could be said that these are all defects that are being put right and that the thoroughness of the Inspectorate's reports is an indication of the determination to see that this is done.

That is a valid point to make - better late than never - though, with several reports referring to the failure to put into effect recommendations from yet earlier inspections, it by no means follows that matters will be put right.

But if every single defect and omission were to be remedied

## DREADS WIN THEIR LOCKS

### Latest Prison Department instructions on Rastas

The whole way in which the prison system is organised and operated is calculated to set prisoner against prisoner - white against black, English against Irish, long termers against short termers, low security categories against top security categories - and of course vice versa in every instance. Add to that the wide variations in sentencing and in appeal and parole results and it is easy to see the pressures on individual prisoners, or sometimes groups of prisoners, to regard themselves as unjustly treated by comparison with other prisoners.

Likewise the reasons for irksome security regulations imposed by management or for the provocative actions taken unilaterally by prison officers are invariably explained in terms of the behaviour of a minority of prisoners. In other words, don't blame prison officers for cutting association periods or refusing escorts for education classes or turning your cell into a tip during a cell-search: blame so-and-so on the next landing who is causing all this trouble for everybody else.

As one moves along the scale of experience such divide-and-rule tactics have less and less impact, which is why the most striking examples of prisoners' solidarity predominate in the seven top security dispersal prisons - Gartree, Long Lartin, Hull, Wormwood Scrubs D Wing, Wakefield, Parkhurst and Albany, most of which have presented impressive displays of unified action in support of prisoners' rights.

it would not alter the fact that in prison after prison there has been gross neglect of the most basic safety precautions. In any establishment housing large numbers of people this would be a very serious matter. How much more so, then, in the case of institutions where the main population is either incapacitated through illness or old age, as in hospitals or old people's homes, or caged, as in prisons.

Some of the worst instances relate to prisons which everyone knows are grossly overcrowded. How on earth could prisoners be evacuated under such circumstances? Just look at the report on Winsong Green - the prison where Barry Prosser was killed by prison staff in 1980. Anyone who felt that such a shocking case must have been a freak failure in the system must see now that it reflected general attitudes within the prison. The report of practically non-existent fire precautions and of a Governor who has to be reminded of his responsibilities demonstrate just how uncaring an institution it is.

The formal recommendation that the Governor should adhere to the provisions of the Prison Department's Fire Precautions Manual, was in fact made in most of the other cases too. Such a wholesale breaking of laid down regulations should have led to sackings, not appeals to do better. What is the Fire Manual for? Presumably, like Prison Standing Orders, it is there to be broken whenever the staff feel like it.

IT ALL UNDERLINES, YET AGAIN, THE URGENT NEED FOR PRISON REGULATIONS, OTHER THAN THOSE OF A PURELY SECURITY NATURE, TO BE PUBLISHED - AND FOR THE STATUTORY BODIES RESPONSIBLE FOR FIRE, HEALTH, FOOD AND SAFETY IN THE COMMUNITY TO BE BROUGHT INTO THE PRISONS WITH THE SAME INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT POWERS AS THEY HAVE ELSEWHERE.

### PROBLEMS IN EXPOSING RACISM

Nowhere are divide-and-rule tactics more insidious than in regard to racism - with the authorities having a double chance of scoring. Firstly by direct racist provocation and harassment of black prisoners. Secondly, when attempts are made to expose this racism, by the possible resentment caused amongst other prisoners - who are also provoked and harassed but without any equivalent expression of public concern.

Presumably this danger is what a reviewer of Paul Gordon's excellent new book "White Law" (Pluto Press 1983) had in mind when he criticised the book for citing the shearing of Rasta locks as an instance of racism. "It seems (he said) to have escaped the author, in his haste to charge racism, that this exercise is part of a general desocialising process which is carried out on all prisoners, black or white."

### PRISON HAIR STYLES

Frankly, the criticism is nonsense. The cutting of Rasta locks is not at all the same thing as the short back and sides which used to be inflicted on prisoners generally. In the case of the white prisoner the shearing was an attack on his individuality, just as the growing of long hair, often by prisoners who would not have thought of doing so anywhere else but in prison, was an expression of that individuality. But to the black prisoner the wearing of locks or, in an earlier decade, the Black Power symbol of the large

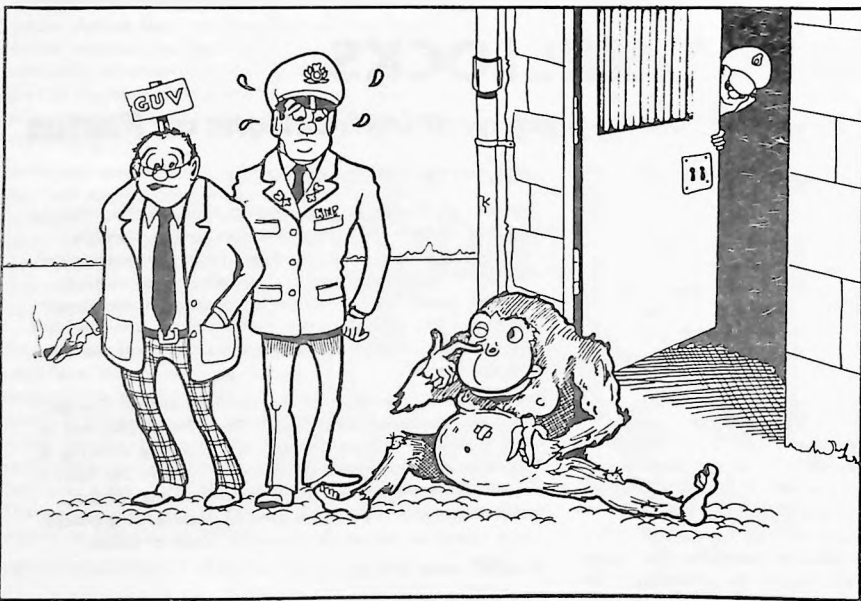
natural Afro style, was not an expression of individuality at all but of group consciousness. In attacking it, the prison authorities knew that they were confronting something a great deal more meaningful and potentially dangerous than individualism.

Tolerance towards the growing of long hair by white prisoners dates from the early seventies though close crops remained the rule in certain prisons - Wandsworth for example - for very much longer. This was not so much a victory for prisoners as a voluntary concession by the authorities who wisely withdrew the blanket imposition of an irritant which was needlessly making rebels where, in many cases, none existed.

#### HOW THE RASTAS WON THEIR LOCKS

The increasing tolerance towards Rasta locks has a quite different history and time scale. Even in 1976, long after many prisons were beginning to look like Woodstock, the Home Office issued internal instruction (CI 60/76): "... Governors may find that Rastafarians tend to wear their hair in plaits interwoven with coconut or other fibres, or in long ringlets. Both styles are known as dreadlocks or locks. In support of a request to be allowed to wear long hair an inmate may claim that he belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It has been confirmed with the resident priest of that church that long hair is not a requirement and Governors may, therefore, require hair to be cut."

In 1983 this has given way to internal instruction (CI 2/83) which at least implicitly recognises the existence of Ras Tafari - still not as a religion but at least as a movement in its own right (It is not listed along with Mormon, Hindu, Sikh, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, etc, but in a separate category with Vegan). The instruction details dietary requirements and then, under "dress", states unambiguously



'Don't worry Chief - he'll look better in his uniform!'

DECEMBER 1982 P.O.A. MAGAZINE

that "Rastafarians should be given opportunity to retain long hair ('dreadlocks')".

The extent to which Ras Tafari is accommodated has nothing to do with voluntary concessions by the Home Office. The reluctantly given and still limited recognition has been forced from them by the actions of black prisoners and the black community generally - not least by the courageous stand taken in 1980 by a young Rastawoman, Abena Simba Tola, over identical issues relating to women's dress in Holloway prison.

To state the facts of racist persecution in no way belittles the sufferings of prisoners generally nor denies the class nature of imprisonment. To recognise, expose and fight racism is an essential part of the class struggle.

#### PRISONERS' SOLIDARITY

Prisoners - again with the lead being given by the top security prisons - have been in the vanguard of those exposing racism. It was white prisoners who were beaten and obscenely assaulted after the Hull riot who drew attention to the racist character of the assaults carried out on black fellow prisoners, and it was English prisoners who emphasised the special treatment accorded to Irish fellow prisoners. Nobody imagined that by doing so they were in any way minimising or denying their own sufferings. They knew, better than any outsiders could know, that the racist prison officer is the worst sort of prison officer for any prisoner to have around and that racism is just one of the tools used to try and break the spirit of prisoners who stand up for themselves and each other.

#### STATE RACISM AND OFFICIAL COSMETICS

The authorities have never come clean on the subject of racism. Officially they denounce it, yet the very numbers of black prisoners in our jails (about 20% of the overall total) is living proof that state racism is deeply entrenched.

Against this is set the various cosmetic policies which have been exposed from time to time in PRISON BRIEFING (see No. 3, 1982), and of course the "drive" to recruit more black police and prison officers. What prison officers themselves think about that is perhaps best demonstrated by the following cartoon which appeared, twice this size, in the December issue of the POA (Prison Officers Association) Journal.

PROP's full London address is as follows: PROP (the National Prisoners' Movement), BM-PROP, London WC1N 3XX. The telephone number is 01 542 3744. Correspondence sent anywhere else is liable to be seriously delayed or lost altogether. Organisations such as ours, able to afford only short life accommodation, are subject to repeated changes of address. It is for that reason that we have decided to use a forwarding address which can remain in use over the years. It involves no delay in our receipt of letters.

# KNOCKBACK

After the resounding Parliamentary defeat of the hanging lobby on July 13th we shall doubtless be hearing still more strident calls for 'life to mean life', so it is all the more important to publicise the inhumanity and injustice of the present 'lifer' system. Peter Adams was released in 1982 after serving 17 years of a life sentence, and is now married to Shirley, whom he met in prison while she was a voluntary associate with The New Bridge. *Knockback* (Duckworth, 1982, £7.95 hb.) is their account of their relationship, and of the Home Office's efforts to destroy it. Tony Ward talked to them.

**Tony:** Was it a difficult book for you to write?

**Shirley:** Very difficult indeed. I think it was particularly difficult writing it immediately when in fact we'd just got together and really I suppose our natural instinct was just to kind of put our heads down and go away and do something quiet. Yes, it was very difficult having to kind of re-live the experience of that particularly moment, but I think if it was ever going to be done, it had to be done then or not at all. We both decided, jointly, that we *ought* to do it. If we hadn't done it then, I don't think we could have done it.

**Peter:** I think the difficulty really was trying to distil the experience and say the things that had some meaning, rather than just sort of describing something that happened: I mean, it didn't just happen to us, it happens to everybody - everybody who's in prison and everybody who visits prison. And this is why I think the book has created so much interest: that everybody who's visited somebody in prison can relate to what Shirley says - right? - and everybody who reads the book, irrespective of what crime or whatever they've been in for, they all know that what I've written is the truth, you know, that's the essence of the experience. And I don't think that anybody ought to walk away from an experience like that and just throw it away.

**Tony:** You were the first person sentenced for murder under the 1965 Act which abolished the death penalty, and with a fifteen year minimum; and at the beginning of your sentence you seem to have been treated particularly badly, because it was assumed that you were 'a dangerous man with nothing to lose'. Do you think that now there are so many more long-term lifers in the system, people understand better how to deal with them?

**Peter:** I don't think so. I think this will put the thing in perspective: that only eight per cent of all people who've been sentenced to life imprisonment since that Act was brought in in 1965, the Act which of course gave judges the power to stipulate a recommended minimum, in only eight per cent of all cases has that recommendation ever been made. And I might point out that there are some cases where that minimum has never been recommended: Myra Hindley, Ian Brady, quite a lot of the IRA bombers. The whole idea of giving the judge that power was that he could mark those cases which were really exceptional, where there was great public concern, if you like, about releasing people after a very short period of time. I think what happened is quite simple: that the Home Office believed their own publicity. What happened, I received a recommended minimum and obviously there was a great deal of press and television and what have you about this. The Prison Officers Association - and this is directed at their Secretary at the time - he then saw the opportunity to try and demonstrate how dangerous the job was of being a prison officer, therefore they should have more money. So he gave an interview, I think it was in the *Daily Express*, and said, 'Wow! What a terrible sentence this man's got,' you know, as if he was really worried about what sentence I had, 'and of course, this means that you've taken all hope away from this guy, and he's going to be attacking our officers, and probably killing them in the process of trying to escape.' The effect of that wasn't to stir up public concern about the quality of a life sentence. The reaction to that was the Home Office said 'Bloody Hell! What have we done?' So they issued an edict



to the prison authorities to make sure that I didn't get close to anybody, so therefore they locked me up in solitary. Now, for the next ten or twelve years, every time I tried to get an explanation about why I was being treated exceptionally, they quoted and said 'Well, you know, you've got a recommended minimum.' Which was crazy, you know. I mean nothing in my behaviour, or nothing in my particular case, warranted the treatment that I received. It was just a Home Office reaction to the Prison Officers' Association's mock alarm, if you like. I was held on category A longer than any man in the country. And never has there been a reasonable explanation, or any explanation, about why that was.

**Tony:** Going back to things being difficult to write... All those letters that you were sending to and fro, something like two thousand, wasn't it?

**Shirley:** A letter a day for five years.

**Tony:** These were all obviously going past the censor, although I think you only mention this fact once. How did you feel, writing that sort of intimate letter to be read by a censor?

**Shirley:** I suppose like everybody else who's in the same situation really. You have to switch off, by and large. And also you develop, to some extent, your own shorthand.

**Peter:** The thing is, we were very selective, in a sense, about what we wrote. We discussed quite a lot of things only on visits, when we could be sure that it was communicated just between us two, and less serious matters were reserved for the letters. And that's very interesting, because the prison officers

realised, of course, that this was happening, and as Shirley said, we developed our own sort of shorthand, and they became quite angry that they couldn't understand, in a sense, our letters, and I had to point out to them that that was only natural because they weren't written for them.

**Shirley:** And between any two people who are writing, or communicating, over a long period of time, they obviously, if there's any sort of relationship going between them, will develop their own shorthand. It's not just because someone's in prison, somebody's outside. Any two people in that situation, like any married couple, they'll develop a shorthand, and it's quite obvious that other people won't automatically understand everything they say. There would have been something wrong with our relationship if we hadn't developed that. That would have meant we were not actually very close.

**Peter:** There's another interesting angle, which is that it's a well known fact that there's a very high divorce rate among people who are prison officers. And there are quite a few logical relations for that. The very nature of their job isolates them from the rest of the community — I mean who has ever declared that they have a prison officer for a friend? And because they work long hours, because they've got as much overtime as they want, and their wives are left to their own devices, it's hardly surprising that they have this very high divorce rate. So here they are, the quality of their own life is very poor, and yet they're doing a job which enables them to look into somebody else's life, that is flourishing, a good strong relationship — quite a lot of resentment builds up. And not just Shirley, quite a lot of people I know who visit people in prison have felt this, that prison officers have been resentful that they regularly go and visit somebody who has been branded a criminal and is in prison for quite a long time.

**Tony:** It's fairly clear that one of the reasons that you were denied release was because of the relationship that you two had — or it seems that way from the book, anyway; and yet one would think, from all the conventional wisdom about parole, that your having a good relationship going, and a home to go to, would be a point in your favour. Have you any idea why this should have been disapproved of?

**Shirley:** I think it's naive to suppose that because you think it was a good thing, the Home Office would necessarily see it that way. I think it's a number of different reasons. I think one is control. They like to be in a very controlling situation with people who are in their charge, or their care. I think that applies to the welfare, and to the Home Office and to the prison in general. That is the feeling that I picked up over the years. And I think they very much resent anyone from outside that they see as in any way a threat to that kind of control; somebody that perhaps is in a position of getting their ear in places and doing things, and I think that they do object to that. They certainly don't like publicity of any kind, and it was inevitable, if Peter had come out and we were together, that there was probably going to be more publicity than if he came out and married somebody who was not in the media; that's one thing. I certainly made myself unpopular with them before Peter went to Leyhill, because I actually did say that the facts about what had happened about his parole review would be made public if he wasn't moved, I did say that, and I had myself unpopular before we'd met, in another case, with somebody, when I'd been forced to sign the Official Secrets Act. So I don't think there's anything that peculiar about it.

**Peter:** I think it's two or three things. The first thing I think is dependency. If a man is going to be released on parole, they want the man to be amenable to the control that they're going to exercise. They're also geared, because they're very negative in their approach to prisoners anyway, to releasing people who, by and large, having nothing to go out to, no job, no accommodation, no relationships, nothing. And they can only function on that level because that's what they're geared to, you know, they will find you a place in a hostel, they'll see what they can do about getting you a job, and all the rest of it. And if they've got somebody who's got a job, got accommodation, got a relationship, and got support, other than what they're going to offer through the probation service,

then the likelihood, as they see it, is that this person is not going to be very 'Yes sir, no sir' with his probation officer — right? — that's one thing. I think a deeper explanation is the fact that everybody is a victim, in a sense, of everybody else's expectations. The expectations are that if a man goes to prison and has stayed there for seventeen years, it isn't reasonable to assume that he's got anything at the end of the day, you know, I mean accommodation, relationships, anything. So if somebody has got those things, the positive things, then though they are the very things that the Parole Board say they require in order to release a man, at the same time they resent it, they don't like it. They don't like independence. And if you display any kind of independence at all in a prison, you force them to see you as an individual, and they can't cope with that. They only want to talk about a case, or the population, they don't want to talk about individuals.

**Tony:** What are the most important changes you'd make in the system, if you could?

**Peter:** I would say total abolition of the Parole Board, for a start.

**Shirley:** From my own standpoint, I would say the thing that I would do, immediately — I believe that the Parole Board should be answerable. I think they should have to give their reasons, and things should be done in the light of day, on the grounds that things should always be done in the light of day in a democracy. So that's what I think first of all. I think that if a few Home Secretaries, instead of going on saying the things they do, actually acted on them; for instance, if they reduced the prison population by increasing the other options open for the people that everybody says, so many percent of the prison population don't need to be there, like the addicts, the alcoholics, the so-called inadequates and all the rest of it; if the prison population was reduced in this way, perhaps we might end up with a system — perhaps — that might better be able to deal with those who had to be there. Beyond that, I don't think I have the right to say very much, because I've never, fortunately, been in prison.

**Peter:** There's another point that I think should be made. Most prison disturbances arise from prisoners demanding what they are allowed in the rules; they're not asking for anything extra. But when you are being denied something that the rule-book says you're entitled to, and the only recourse you have is a communication to the authorities that might take twelve months to get an answer, it's hardly surprising that people become frustrated. People in prison are like people anywhere else in the world. Eventually they will react if they're frustrated enough. And if you put a man in a situation where you've deprived him of the freedom to use himself and his energy in the way he wants to, and you control the contact he's got, you control the quality of his life, he hasn't got very much left; the only thing he's got left, in fact, is a voice of protest. And if you say, 'Look, here is the system; here is a way you can protest; you can see the governor, then you can petition the Home Secretary' — if that system is designed, as it is, to further frustrate the individual, at the end of the day he's going to say 'Fuck it', and he's going to do something. He might smash the cell up, he might hit a screw on the chin, he might hang himself — but he'll do something. Or he'll go the other way: he'll just turn into a zombie. And I've seen lots of people do that; they just can't handle it. . . . day in, day out, day in, day out . . . you actually feel that you're an alien; you feel that you're talking a completely different language than everybody else speaks. You're asking for something simple: 'Can I be allowed some drawing paper, because I want to develop what talent I've got for drawing?' 'Well, yes, you can have it, but you have to join the art class.' So you go to join the art class — and you're not allowed in it because you're category A. The whole system is geared to frustrating people. And I think — I said this seven or eight years ago — that this year, *this year*, there will be an Attica in this country, without a shadow of a doubt. This year is going to be *the year* for prison disturbances. People will be killed, there's no doubt about that: prison officers, inmates, maybe civilian people. And the Home Office are fools if they imagine that it's not going to happen.

# Habitual Drunken Offenders

## AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Roy Light

This Association is coming to the view that simple drunkenness, of itself, should not be dealt with under the criminal law. We are hopeful that the detention of drunken persons in police cells, and subsequently perhaps in prison for failure to pay a fine can be quickly discontinued.

(Norman Hird, Chief Superintendents' Association)

When discussing ways to reduce the prison population, the habitual drunken offender is included in a list containing 'categories of persons who should not be in prison', and this is absolutely right. However, this premise has almost become a unanimously agreed self-evident truism about which there appears little, if anything, further to be said. Indeed discussion is, of late, usually reserved for more novel and contentious issues and the drunkenness offender often warrants no more than a glib . . . 'and of course there should be detoxification centres for drunkenness offenders'. To which everyone agrees. The problem is not as simple, though, as to be solved by merely replacing prison with detoxification centres and the whole question of the habitual drunken offender within the criminal justice system needs to be reassessed lest its detail becomes lost in a consensus of opinion which still waits to be acted upon.

### 'HABITUAL'

The habitual drunken offender is at once both easy and impossible to define. Terms such as homeless, vagrant, skid row, derelict and so on are easy to use but do not provide identification of the habitual drunken offender. What exactly do we mean by this term so far as the criminal justice system is concerned? Every year some 125,000 cases of drunkenness are processed through the system; but how many of these are committed by habitual offenders? The police, when faced with a drunkenness offender, may exercise discretion and simply move the offender on or possibly issue a caution. Alternatively an arrest may be made and again police discretion will be exercised in deciding whether to charge the person. If charges are brought which result in a guilty finding then the offender will be sentenced. Most will be fined and most will pay. Those who do not pay will be imprisoned for fine-default. The habitual drunken offender is marked by the fact that he reaches this stage not once but repeatedly.

### THE LAW

Drunkenness per se is not a crime, but becomes unlawful when exhibited in a 'highway or other public place' (section 12, Licensing Act 1872). This is simple drunkenness (or drunk and incapable) and is not punishable with imprisonment. If other unlawful behaviour accompanies the drunkenness the offence becomes one of aggravated drunkenness, the most common form of which is drunk and disorderly (also covered by Section 12). Aggravated drunkenness may be punished with imprisonment.

Statutory recognition of the fact that prison is inappropriate for offences of public drunkenness came in 1967 with Section 91 of the Criminal Justice Act, which provided for the abolition of imprisonment for the offence of drunk and disorderly. However Section 91 was not to be brought into effect 'unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that sufficient suitable accommodation is available for the care and treatment of persons convicted of being drunk and disorderly'. This section was happily brought into force in 1978, although it is

difficult to see how the accommodation available at the time could ever be termed 'sufficient'.

Statutory recognition that the criminal justice system is inappropriate for offences of public drunkenness came in 1972 with Section 34 of the Criminal Justice Act. This gives the police power to take a drunkenness offender to a medical treatment centre or other facility for care and treatment instead of charging him with an offence of public drunkenness. The section was brought into force on the 1st April 1976 (a date which later experience has shown to be rather appropriate). The word 'medical' has since been deleted from Section 34 (see Criminal Law Act 1977) and this was stated to be done to avoid the misleading impression that Section 34 centres had to be situated in a specifically medical environment and 'to bring the law more into line with current thinking of multi-disciplinary treatment and care for problem drinkers'.

The law thus provides that the drunkenness offender can be taken out of the criminal justice system altogether or that if he is arrested and reaches the sentencing stage that he cannot be sentenced to a term of imprisonment. But the law has not enforced the provision of community care nor has it reckoned with a system of fines which ensures that the habitual drunken offender ends up in prison for non-payment.

The maximum fine for simple drunkenness is £25 (Section 31, Criminal Law Act 1977) and for drunk and disorderly is £50 (Section 91, Criminal Justice Act 1967). Should not the law have something to say about a system of fines which in certain cases amount to a suspended sentence of imprisonment which is guaranteed to be activated? Section 35 of the Magistrates Courts Act 1980 states that in deciding how much to fine a person the court must take several things into consideration including 'the means of the person on whom the fine is imposed'. An offender with no means should not be fined, but as Martin Wright has put it in *Making Good*:

. . . since courts persist in the practice of fining penniless people . . . offenders are imprisoned for non-payment.

### THE FACTS

In 1980 the criminal justice system took action in respect of 124,772 cases of offences of drunkenness which can be broken down as follows:

Dealt with by a police caution	Findings of guilty by the courts	Referred by police to an approved treatment centre
729 (0.5%)	122,259 (98%)	1,784 (1.5%)
For those found guilty by the courts the main measures used were:		
Absolute/conditional discharge	Probation/supervision	Fines
5,684	864	113,786

Ten sentences of immediate imprisonment were passed, but the major cause for concern is that non-payment of fines resulted in some 3,000 terms of imprisonment being served.

### THE FINANCIAL COST

The latest figure for the average cost of a week's imprisonment is £195. As most non-payment terms are seven to fourteen

days, the cost of 3,000 such terms amounts to almost £1 million. Also there is a subsistence allowance and the cost of a new outfit of clothes if the prisoner's are irreparable. Then there is the cost of the arrest and charging procedure which could be as much as £300 to £400 each time, and also the cost of the trial and the non-payment hearing which may be around £150 for the trial and £75 for the non-payment hearing: these costs are absolutely staggering and it is essential to consider them when discussing the costs involved in providing alternatives.

## THE SYSTEM IN OPERATION

### The Police

Habitual drunken offenders are seen by the police as a social nuisance, and one that they could well do without. Consequently the police will often use their wide discretion to break up 'drinking schools' and to move skid-row drunks on to less public locations rather than to arrest them. The police feel that they are too busy to deal with the drunks and with the paperwork that their arrest and charging generates. There are also problems of hygiene and of illness and of the possibility of the very time-consuming business of a death in custody. However the police may feel that not to make an arrest may result in even more work later on. Perhaps the person is in need of medical treatment or the police may fear that he may meet with an accident or be robbed or assaulted. The police will then take these factors into account when deciding how best to carry out their duty.

Sometimes arrests will be made to provide a training exercise for new recruits, but generally arrests are made after complaints by the public or because a 'cleaning-up operation' has been ordered for a particular area.

### Police Cell Deaths

The number of deaths in police cells for the past three years are as follows:

1980	63
1981	49
1982	55

A substantial proportion of those who die are drunkenness offenders; this is the most tragic aspect of the totally inappropriate nature of the criminal justice system for the drunkenness offender.

A cell death which involves violence or the suspicion of positive police action leading to the death attracts much publicity and public concern. The habitual drunkenness offender who dies in custody is not considered to be quite so newsworthy and the public attitude is almost one of indifference - 'I mean, have you seen the state that these people get themselves into? I'm surprised they don't die more often'. Similarly whilst most people have relatives and friends who are concerned for their welfare, the drunkenness offender usually does not. Great difficulty is often experienced in even finding a relative or friend to identify the body and if found they mainly accept the death as the inevitable last stage in the drunkard's miserable decline. So apart from some extra paperwork for the police such a death can pass more or less unnoticed.

Public concern at some very spectacular deaths (Blair Peach, Liddle Towers) led to the third report from the Home Affairs Committee, 'Deaths in Police Custody' (which incidentally did not include the above two named as they had died 'outside of police custody'). The committee found once they had started their investigations that most of the work which they needed to do was concerned with the drunkenness offender who made up by far the largest number of those who died in police custody. The report covers the ten year period from 1970 to 1979 when a total of 274 people died.

Guidelines are issued by the Home Office to all Chief Officers

of Police on the procedures to be adopted in the case of a prisoner who appears to be ill or drunk. A prisoner who is drunk must be visited and roused every half an hour whilst 'if there is the slightest suspicion that a detained prisoner is ill' a doctor must be called and the prisoner must be visited every quarter of an hour. The report was satisfied that these procedures 'can afford adequate protection to detained persons provided they are strictly adhered to', but that random checks should be carried out to see that the procedures are in fact observed.

That cell deaths occur proves that the procedures are not adequate. Unless, of course, they are not properly implemented, and if this is the case why is no action ever taken in respect of this failure of duty? An insight into police practice after a cell death was given in one of the recent BBC television *Police* programmes entitled 'A Death in Custody'. Firstly it was apparent that there was a dismal lack of knowledge of the procedures in the case of an ill or drunken offender and that the main concern of the senior officer was to get all the necessary paperwork in order. Officers who had made statements were called in by the senior officer and told that 'the only problem was the administrative nonsense'. He then went through the statements saying 'I want to make this watertight. I don't want any queries. Jolly bad luck isn't it?' As the officers then settled down to rewrite their statements, having had the relevant regulations spelt out to them, a last remark from the senior officer was 'I want the whole thing to be done right from a paper point of view'. No concern was shown for the man who died, the only concern seeming to be the avoidance of further problems which might have arisen had the paperwork not shown that all the correct procedures had been complied with.

The police are not trained in the care necessary when dealing with the drunkenness offender and cannot be expected to make accurate diagnosis as to whether a person is drunk or ill. The cells are not suitable places for attending to such prisoners, usually having no facilities or sanitation and often with inadequate lighting.

Whether or not the correct procedures were complied with in the televised situation it is impossible to say. But what is absolutely certain is that so long as the system for dealing with public drunkenness stays as it is people will continue to die unnecessarily.

### The Courts

Apart from a consideration of the sentence to be passed, magistrates give little attention to the drunkenness offender. And even as regards the sentence they invariably impose a fine, taking scant notice of the offender's means or lack of them. The habitual drunken offender is viewed as a hopeless case to be dealt with as speedily as possible. Most magistrates recognise the useless inappropriateness of the courts as regards such offenders, whilst court officials resent the waste of valuable administrative time.

### The Prisons

Habitual drunken offenders make up around 100 of the average daily prison population of England and Wales, which is not numerically significant in terms of prison numbers. The population of these inmates is, though, concentrated in half a dozen large metropolitan areas, with the largest proportion (some 40 per cent) in London. All such offenders from the London area are in Pentonville where they make up some ten to fifteen per cent of the population. The prison staff are unanimous in their opinion that these people should not be in prison. They pose severe administrative difficulties and present the staff with duties which they find unpleasant and even offensive. Prisons and prison staff are generally not trained or equipped to deal with such inmates. The smell and squalor of the reception area at Pentonville contrasts sharply with the



Cruickshank's "The Drunkard Children." (The artist was a member of Temperance League)

crisp, smart uniforms of the prison officers. Nobody now argues that prison serves any purpose in relation to the habitual drunken offender, except perhaps for that of social hygiene. Prison does though, of course, provide a way of finishing off the criminal justice process by wiping out the unpaid fine. Then the cycle of arrest, court, fine and prison can start all over again. A recent television documentary followed a 'Mr. Perks' out of the gates of Cardiff gaol for the umpteenth time and determined to keep off the drink. Within four hours of release he was, once more, a shambling, drunken wreck.

New prison places are being planned because of the overcrowding. Each new prison place represents a capital cost of about £40,000. The diversion of the habitual drunken offender from prison will stop the need to build some of these extra places.

### OPINIONS

That imprisonment is neither appropriate nor deserved for the habitual drunken offender has been repeatedly stated in one official publication after another. Some of the most authoritative of these include:

- the May Report
- the Third and Fourth Reports from the Home Affairs Committee
- the Fifteenth Report from the Expenditure Committee
- the Report of the Home Office Working Party on Habitual Drunken Offenders
- the All-Party Penal Affairs Group publications *Too Many Prisoners* and *Still Too Many Prisoners*
- the Report of the DHSS Advisory Committee on Alcoholism.

This incredible weight of official opinion is given further authority by the almost total agreement to be found in the recommendations.

Successive Home Secretaries and governments have accepted these findings and support has also come from academics,

pressure groups, the press and indeed, as far as I can make out, from absolutely everyone who has ever had anything to say on the matter.

### THE ALTERNATIVES

1. Unemployment, poverty and whatever other factors have led a person to become an habitual drunkard could be tackled. Society could be drastically overhauled in an attempt to remove such factors. This approach is not at present a practical proposition, would not receive general support and is beyond the scope of the criminal justice system to achieve.
2. The penal system could be tinkered about with in order to make it more appropriate to the needs of the drunkenness offender. Such an approach ignores the complete incompatibility of the system with the offender and could never be a satisfactory solution.
3. Compulsory treatment could be introduced aimed at 'curing' the offender of his 'illness', but is compulsion justified in what is after all a self-regarding activity? There is also disagreement as to how best to achieve a 'cure', whilst a purely medical model ignores social interaction in areas such as housing and welfare policies and employment prospects.
4. The habitual drunken offender could be taken out of the criminal justice system and a range of services and hostels set up as an alternative. These would provide necessary medical attention and offer social support. Opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of this approach, with the alternatives provisions being of three broad types:
  - (a) Detoxification Centres to provide a full service of treatment/support to overcome the drink problem.
  - (b) Shelters which offer a less elaborate service of overnight or immediate short-term accommodation.
  - (c) After-care hostels providing longer term rehabilitative/supportive accommodation and taking people from (a) and (b).



## Detoxification Centres

Open 24 hours a day, these centres provide an alternative to arrest and prosecution. They also offer appropriate social and medical care both for immediate health purposes and for longer term rehabilitation.

Two experimental detox. centres have been established, which the Secretary of State has approved for the purposes of Section 34 of the Criminal Justice Act 1972. The centres, which received 1,784 referrals from the police in 1980, are in Leeds and Manchester.

The centres were originally funded by the DHSS. St. Anne's centre in Leeds set up a detox. unit in 1976, which is now financed by a consortium involving Leeds City Council, Leeds Area Health Authority, the Home Office and West Yorkshire Police. The unit is staffed by six nurses, four social workers, six care staff, two part-time clerical assistants and a consultant psychiatrist on a sessional basis. There are 15 detox. beds and five for after-care purposes. The unit has laid down three functions:

1. Acute admissions of intoxicated men and women as an alternative to prosecution.
2. To dry them out (detoxicate) in a humane and therapeutic setting.
3. Assessment, intervention and treatment to attempt to rehabilitate them.

It is recognised that not all of these goals will be achieved in every case.

No drink whatsoever is allowed at the unit, which accepts people only on police referral. An excellent working relationship exists between the police and the centre as evidenced by the full use which is made of it and the police involvement in the funding.

Upon admission to the unit at St. Anne's a client is taken to the holding room to sober up. Rather than use drugs the staff prefer to 'talk down' a person. Most clients eventually fall asleep in the holding room. Clients are free to leave at any time and around 35 per cent discharge themselves immediately they have sobered up. The remainder go into the detox. unit proper where they will go through a ten-day treatment programme. This involves 'drying out', group and individual therapy and social work support. At the end of the programme assistance is given in finding a suitable discharge destination, which may be the after-care unit at St. Anne's. A six-week social work follow-up is also conducted.

Evaluation projects, initial research findings and interested opinion all suggest that the centres have been highly successful. The Leeds centre has been used more than the one at Manchester and this is mainly because it is much more conveniently sited in relation to the area where most of the city's drunkenness offenders are to be found.

Experience and information gained from the operation of the two shelters is invaluable to the planning, structuring and establishment of additional centres.

## Wet Shelters

Not places for soft-line Tory MPs, but a cheaper alternative to the detox. centres. The Home Office proposal is to persuade those who run night shelters for the homeless to set aside part of their accommodation for the reception of drunkenness offenders referred by the police.

A pilot scheme was set up at the Trinity Centre in Birmingham in 1981. It has 12 beds which are available for simple drunkenness offenders who are brought in by the police. The centre offers tea, a wash and brush up and a change of clothes if required. There is a simple counselling service and medical supervision is available at all times. The length of stay varies considerably, although a person is free to leave at any time. Help with finding suitable accommodation and information on

community based alcohol counselling programmes is available if required.

The wet shelter is intended to provide a much more basic (and therefore cheaper) service than the detox. centre, but still to divert the offender from the criminal justice system. The need for economy underlying this concept must not however be allowed to override the need to provide adequate facilities, staffing and medical assessment.

The Trinity wet shelter was set up as a two-year experiment in July 1981 and we therefore await further information with interest. Signs are of great success compared with the penal system (especially as regards the saving of lives by efficient and early diagnoses and treatment when required). However there is some debate as to whether the wet shelter is merely a cheap alternative to the detox. centre, lacking as it does the resources and facilities necessary to make a serious attempt at rehabilitation of the drunkard.

## Other Alternatives

Detox. centres and wet shelters are services intended solely for the habitual drunken offender. There exist other facilities which serve the homeless and those with drink problems which could be developed and expanded as regards drunkenness offenders. Space forbids more than a brief mention of four of these:

### Hostels

Introduced by voluntary organisations to put a roof over the heads of society's outcasts. Hostels now range from those providing simple dormitory accommodation to those which maintain a highly structured, therapeutic community.

### Day Centres

Most large cities provide their homeless population with some kind of day care facility. Usually situated in a disused church building or warehouse, they are limited to providing basic shelter and food. Some have washing facilities, medical care, counselling and information services.

### Day Resource Centre

Generally provided for those of fixed address who need help and support in relation to their alcohol problems. This is provided in the form of advice and counselling.

### Shop Front Offices

Set up in urban areas to enable homeless alcoholics to obtain entry to the local network of services. No appointments are required and any alcoholic, either sober or drunk, can make use of the service.

## PROGRESS

On the 12th June 1970 the Report of the Working Party on Habitual Drunken Offenders was signed; it recommended decriminalisation and a range of alternatives including detox. centres. Thirteen years later what progress has been made towards implementing its proposals?

On a theoretical level progress could hardly have been better, but on a practical level (with one or two exceptions) it could hardly have been worse.

The law has been changed to allow implementation of the proposals and a massive body of opinion has grown up in support. All of this has not however been translated into practice.

## Detoxification Centres

The Home Office transferred responsibility for services for people with alcohol problems to the DHSS in 1972. The DHSS funded the centre at Leeds which opened in 1976 and the one in Manchester which opened in 1977. An application by St. Thomas's Hospital in South London for funding for a third detox. centre was turned down in 1979. The DHSS no longer fund the Leeds and Manchester Centres and have made

it clear that they will not finance the establishment of any additional detox. centres. A third detox. centre does exist at Tower Hamlets in London which is run by the Salvation Army. This centre does not, though, accept referrals from the police and is not therefore a direct alternative to the criminal justice process.

The insistence of central government seems to be that detox. centres should be funded locally and whilst it appears that the two which already exist may be able to survive, the possibility of any additional centres seems remote.

## Wet Shelters

The Home Secretary stated on the 30th April 1980

We are making public funds available to enable voluntary organisations to make a start in providing simple overnight shelter for people who would otherwise be charged with offences of drunkenness

The Home Secretary further described these facilities at the NACRO conference on 'The Reduction of Pressure on the Prison Service' on 15th July 1980 thus:

The intention is that the new provision should be made in existing hostels for homeless men, and that it will therefore benefit from some of the back-up staff resources already available at the hostels.

The most recent official statement appears to have been made in the Government reply to the Fourth Report of the Home Affairs Committee which was presented to Parliament in December 1981.

The scheme is experimental and the Home Office will be monitoring the effectiveness of the first centres both in terms of diverting offenders from the criminal justice system and providing adequate facilities at reasonable cost.

There is still only one wet shelter and the fact that London with its large population of people needing such facilities has not a single one is not only a disgrace but also a grave dereliction of public duty.

## After-Care Hostels

There appears to be no evidence of any official intention whatsoever to make even an attempt at any such provisions. Once again it appears that the government is prepared to neglect its duty and rely on voluntary organisations to do what they can unaided.

We have the necessary legal provisions, the support of all concerned, the benefits of financial economy and basic humanity and also successful working examples of the alternatives. What we do not have is political initiative, financial responsibility and co-ordinated commitment by all officially concerned TO DO SOMETHING.

## FAILURE

It is difficult to look over the last 13 years without experiencing a sense of failure. Why has so little been achieved? Here are some possibilities:

1. Fear of failure of the medical model which would force recognition of the social one.
2. Vagrant alcoholics are regarded by most as the dregs of society. Public attitudes included in the 1971 Home Office Working Paper were 'indifference', 'apathy', 'disregard', 'contempt', 'disgust' and in a few cases 'pity' and 'sympathy'.
3. The number of people committed to help is minimal. Although most will readily agree that drunks should be taken out of the criminal justice system, not many will devote the effort, hard work and organisation needed to get things done. Although someone managed to clear the vagrants out of central London on Royal Wedding Day.
4. The difficulty of precise definition of the habitual drunken offender and the ever changing diagnosis of the problem.
5. The willingness of even some of those in the 'caring

professions' to write off some (especially the older) of these people as being beyond help. Such workers can always produce or point to one of their most difficult clients to support this contention.

6. The twin difficulties of moral overtones being introduced and the allegation that 'these people will not help themselves'.
7. Lack of coordination and understanding between the various interested bodies. For example a 'shop front' opened in Camberwell in May 1970 which antedated the report which was to recommend that 'a small shop front be established, as an experiment, in one of the main "skid row" areas of London' (Home Office 1971, page 120).
8. On our scale of social values the vagrant alcoholic is one of the last people to be helped and as people further up the scale receive less and less than the ones at the bottom are even more unlikely to be considered.
9. There are no votes in it.

## 'OUT OF COURT'

A coordinated effort is needed to bring all the information together, to plan and to organise, and to spearhead publicity and political pressure. On September 23rd 1981 an organisation was launched to do this, called 'Out of Court'. Its sole aim is to campaign for alternatives for drunkenness offenders. It deserves every support.

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- House of Commons, Standing Committee A, 1982. The Criminal Justice Bill, New Clause 50 - Prohibition of Imprisonment of Drunkenness Offenders for Fine Default, pages 642 to 666.

## ADDRESSES

*Birmingham Committee for Night Shelter*  
Trinity Centre, Camp Hill, Bordesley, Birmingham.

*Detox. Centre*  
St. Marks House, 186 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 9DX

*Out of Court*  
c/o The Federation of Alcoholic Rehabilitation Establishments  
2 Grosvenor Crescent, London SW1X 7EE.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE LANE told a meeting of the National Association of Prison Visitors: 'We must start trying to get back a little way towards what your critics call Victorian morality.' While not wishing for a return to pre-welfare state days, his Lordship said there was no doubt any potential criminal would think a long time before consigning his wife and children to the workhouse. (*Times*, 19.5.83)

COMMONS SENSE: 'At long last we have a Government who have had the courage to take on the job and to build prisons. That must be right and be seen to be right.' Mr Whitelaw, *Commons Hansard*, 5.5.83, col.387.



Rice &  
Rainbows

## The Creative & Supportive Trust

The Creative and Supportive Trust is a charitable institution set up, in the first instance, to offer workshop space, materials and equipment to craftspeople and artists who lack the private means to provide these for themselves. Unlike the usual Adult Education classes CAST encourages the production of items in quantity. In addition to providing this release for creative talent which might otherwise be frustrated, CAST offers a measure of social support through its workshop in Camden, North London. Because the project survives by selling its produce, a high standard of workmanship is improved and thus there is the requisite standard are helped to improve and thus there is an educational component to the scheme.

The project is largely the idea of Lennie Speer, a former inmate of Holloway Prison. This connection leads CAST to give a measure of priority to ex-prison inmates but we look also towards single parents, the chronic unemployed and the disabled as potential beneficiaries.

All 'workers' are self-employed and they are paid a pre-agreed price for the items they make. CAST then sells these items through its trading company 'Rice and Rainbows'. Any 'profit' after costs have been met and the workers paid, goes to the development of the project. CAST is applying for independent charitable status but in the meantime we enjoy the umbrella support of the Community Development Trust

(Registered Charity No.256108). Various charitable trusts have assisted in the setting up of the project.

Initially, the range of crafts was limited to hand-made garments, mainly knitwear. We now have silk-screen and pottery facilities, and eventually furniture restoration, glass-painting, jewellery-making and other crafts will probably be added. Sales are made via craft fairs, markets, retail outlets, mail order, social events and to callers (who are most welcome) at the project.

Accommodation is in a 'short-life' property. Our aim is to progress to a proper complex of workrooms and studios with the possibility of an integral restaurant/shop very much in mind.

Prices are a compromise between the desire to give the workers the maximum reward and an estimate of the market price. It is certainly no part of CAST policy to exploit its workforce.

The address of the project is 34, Stratford Villas, London NW1, the telephone number 01-485 0367. Potential callers at the project are advised to telephone to ascertain the current hours of opening.

### THE GREAT WORLD OF LONDON



WASH-HOUSE AT THE BRIXTON PRISON.

**PRISON EDUCATION** is the subject of the First Report from the Committee on Education, Science and the Arts. Its main recommendation is for a new Prison Regimes Act, the opening section of which is an attempt to introduce some meaning into the May Report's 'positive custody' nonsense:

The purpose of the detention of convicted prisoners shall be to keep them in custody which is as secure as is necessary and yet positively promotes their self-respect, social responsibility and all

possible progress towards rehabilitation.

Yes, it really does say that the purpose of imprisonment is to promote the prisoner's self-respect. Educators, first educate yourselves. The next bit is somewhat more meaningful, however:

Sufficient work of a useful nature or education shall be provided to keep prisoners actively employed for a normal working day. Education doesn't have to be useful, so long as it keeps you busy.

# Probation or Prison?

Martin Wright

Last August John M. was sentenced to thirty months' imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> It was an unpleasant offence. He had been barred from a pub, drunkenly attacked the landlord with a knife, and injured another man in the ensuing scuffle. Fortunately the wounds were not serious, but they might have been. The case was like all too many others, apart from a detailed plea in mitigation with four witnesses, one of whom was Lord Longford.

Yet there were two remarkable things about this and many other ordinary cases. The first was that the people directly concerned took no part in the proceedings. John said 'Guilty' twice at the beginning, and was not asked to speak again; the two victims were not even present. Would not people find our criminal justice process less unsatisfactory if it were less impersonal?

Secondly, the court was given two almost totally different biographies of the same defendant. One emerged from a stereotyped dialogue between prosecuting counsel and a detective constable, which went roughly like this: 'Was the defendant born on 25 May 1943 in Scotland?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Has he during recent periods at liberty had work as a kitchen porter and a builder's labourer?' 'That is correct.' 'Was he convicted at the Central Criminal Court in 1972 of possession of a firearm and attempted robbery, for which he was sentenced to six years?' 'He was, sir.' And so on through a catalogue of offences which, until the present one, have been less serious: thefts, one burglary, drunk and disorderly, threatening and abusive behaviour. The sentences ranged from a conditional discharge to three years in prison. (Incidentally, what a waste of a policeman's time to make him spend a morning in court confirming facts which are not in dispute.)

The other John was described by the defence and character witnesses, with the real John sitting in the dock unable to amplify or contradict, like the disabled person whose friends asked 'Does he take sugar?' The court heard that during his six-year sentence John had been one of the six prisoners selected by the Prison Department for the experimental prisoner control unit at Wakefield (in which prisoners deemed 'subversive' by a secret committee were subjected to a minimum of six months' almost total solitude and silence: it was closed in 1975 after public protests by RAP, the Howard League, PROP and others). John emerged full of pent-up anger: he felt he had a duty *not* to keep out of trouble, for fear that he might be claimed as a success for, in his words, the evil of the control unit, and other prisoners might be subjected to it. But now, the court was told, he was much calmer, and prepared to try his best to be a success for a *non-custodial* measure. After one recent sentence John lived for nine months with a young couple, Andy and Jo, whose baby daughter he adores; John had also befriended Jo's grandmother, visiting her in hospital just before her death. ('Not unusual,' said the judge drily.) This came to an end when John was remanded in custody for six months for an offence of which he was acquitted.

Since being thrown out of work by a pit closure when he was about 17, John has spent most of his life in prisons. Counsel described how he was released in March this year to a depressing hostel which was in financial difficulties ('worse than prison,' John had said). Several residents were mentally ill; two had recently attempted suicide. He tried to find somewhere better, but on £13.95 a week it was hard to save up the deposit, even with a couple of handouts. So he gave up, drank the handouts, and the offence followed.

Could the probation and after-care service<sup>2</sup> have helped John to keep out of prison? If they had started earlier during his last sentence, they might have found him a more suitable place to live. Many homeless prisoners are simply told to report on the morning of their release, and most accommodation that is available at a few hours' notice is pretty ropey. John had not succeeded in getting a local newspaper in prison so as to write for lodgings. As he did not 'present himself' as a lonely, isolated person, the probation officer had not tried to find a volunteer who could support him: to be fair, he was discouraged by John's 'helligerent attitude'. On the current charge, probation's Day Training Centre might seem ideal to help someone like John, but couldn't take him because local residents had demanded that no one with a violent record be accepted there. But if he were not sent to prison a job had been lined up, not by probation but by New Bridge (founded by Lord Longford).

Should the judge have acted differently? If the probation service had a project for violent offenders, and strongly recommended it; if the defence had given less attention to John's own problems and stressed that enabling him to make a new start was the best long-term protection for the public: if Lord Longford's presence had not ensured that the case would be reported;<sup>3</sup> then perhaps the judge might have stuck his neck out. As it was, he said: 'You must learn to live in society or take the consequences. Only you can give yourself the opportunity.' So he sent John back to the place which, for most of the last 20 years, has given him no opportunity to learn to live in society.

1. John is due to be released on 23 December 1983. Any offers of accommodation?
2. Its name has been changed back to plain 'Probation Service' in the Criminal Justice Act 1982. This is not intended to show any lack of commitment to after-care. But it is obvious that a probation service numbering five and a half thousand cannot provide adequate after-care for the 80,000 leaving prison each year, in addition to assisting about 50,000 probationers. It is a vicious circle, after-care uses considerable probation resources, which makes probation officers collectively less keen to argue strongly to courts for borderline cases to be kept out of prison -- so these are often sent to prison, and in due course add to the after-care caseload. Besides measures to reform sentencing policy, advocated by everyone from Mr Whitelaw to Geoff Coggan, part of the solution could be to find more people like Andy and Jo who are willing to assist and befriend people who are isolated and vulnerable (often because they have followed Mr. Tebbitt's advice and uprooted themselves in search of work).
3. The *Daily Mail* printed such a slanted and misleading report that Lord Longford extracted an apology and a donation to New Bridge.

**CRIMINAL INJURIES:** Relatives of people who die as a result of violent crime will be able to claim a fixed sum of £3,500 from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, the Home Secretary announced. But 'common law' husbands and wives will get nothing. At the same time, the minimum amount for claims was raised from £250 to £400.

The guidelines used by the Board in assessing compensation make curious reading. Examples:

Rape (leading to no serious physical or psychological damage).	£2,250
Male scar (unmarried man aged 20) - Scar running approximately from the join of the lobe of the left ear and face across the cheek to the left corner of the mouth.	£4,000
Female scar (unmarried woman aged 20) - Scar running approximately from left corner of the mouth diagonally downwards, ending just underneath the jaw bone.	£6,500



# BOOKS

## Invisible Women

Pat Carlen,  
*Women's Imprisonment: a study in social control*  
Routledge and Kegan Paul, £4.95, pbk.

Apart from the occasional lapse into sociologese this book is a clear and interesting discussion of women and the penal system. It is a general discussion, although it focusses on Cornton Vale, 'the one and only custodial complex for female offenders' in Scotland. Custodial complex is an accurate term for a prison neither overcrowded nor brutalising in any Dickensian or 20th century male prison sense but in many ways a 'model' prison — clean and spacious with sophisticated high tech. and surveillance.

Pat Carlen has adopted a kaleidoscopic approach, interviewing as many people as possible involved in the prison process. She interviewed twenty 'case studies', women serving short sentences at Cornton Vale (the book concentrates on the short sentence population who make up the bulk of imprisoned women). An incongruous note is struck by their pseudonyms: Melissa Malcolm? Lisa Lobell? Vivienne Vincent? Very Cinzano . . . . Sherriffs, JP's, prison officers and social workers were also interviewed. Certain questions underpinned her researches; why are women sent to Cornton Vale? What does this say about the 'meaning' of Scotland's female prison population? What is the experience of prison in such a modern, spacious and sanitary institution? Is Cornton Vale the prototype for the prison of the future and if so, what lessons can we draw from a study of it?

I found no (specific) answer to the last question in the book, but a careful discussion of the other problems. And, as I think she intended, Pat Carlen produces a much wider analysis of the 'meaning' of prison than the focus on Cornton Vale might imply. She is clearly impatient of statistics, facts and figures as a substitute for genuine explanation. As a person who has always clung to statistics for safety I admire her approach, her attempt to produce a quite complex, but ultimately convincing, analysis of why women are sent to prison, how they experience and are experienced there, and what this says about women and our treatment out in the world. Those most likely to be imprisoned, Pat Carlen argues, are those who have stepped outside domestic discipline. Women who have not conformed in their relationships with men and family but particularly women who are mothers. 'When the sherriffs I interviewed are faced with a sentencing dilemma in a case where the offender is female, they mainly decide their sentence on the basis of their assessment of the women as mothers.' And knowledge of a woman's domestic circumstances are also high on the list of special factors sherriffs consider when deciding on a prison sentence. Pat Carlen places such courtroom criteria in a much wider context — the Scottish life of kirk (church) and family and the role of women within it. She shows how women are disciplined in a multitude of ways by patriarchy and yet, contradictorily, expected to take heavy and enduring responsibility for work, home and family.

The contradictory expectations and pressures on women is the essence of her argument. Nowhere does she illustrate this more clearly than in her consideration of life in prison itself. In her words, women are defined as being both 'within and without sociability, femininity and adulthood'. The emphasis on domestic life in the prison, on 'womanly' tasks and attitudes, stresses a femininity which is denied by other aspects of the regime. Women are degraded by the lack of sanitary facilities in some parts of the prison, restriction of access to the doctor, ugly and ill-fitting prison clothes, limitation on their use of make-up and restrictions on hair, clothes and body washing. Prison also denies women full adult status — they are turned into 'wee lassies', dependent on prison officers who often cast themselves in the role of

mother. The hierarchical organisation of the prison extends to the relationship between prison officers and their superiors; everything must go up through a designated superior. This is a feature common to all prisons but, as Pat Carlen points out, 'the general features of the hierarchical discipline combine with the domestic work programme, with the denial to prisoners of sociability and adult womanhood and with the organisation of women into small family units, to ensure a mental and bodily surveillance which denudes the prisoners' daily life of all dignity and independence'.

Pat Carlen's overall argument is that women's imprisonment in Scotland (and by implication in Great Britain as a whole) is women's imprisonment denied. She illustrates this not only by reference to women's experience while in prison but also by the ways in which medical and statutory authorities label women as 'alcoholics' and 'mentally disordered' thereby placing them beyond help. It is a problem of recognition, of visibility, a concept familiar to women. It has always struck me how visible men are, wherever in life, whether criminals, trade unionists or politicians. References to the 'prison population' are invariably references to the male prison population as official reports bear out time and time again. Many male prisoners are active, as the recent Albany rooftop demonstration showed, hence highly visible *despite* their incarceration. Women prisoners are not; they never have been. Even in prison reform and pressure groups the 'problem' of women in prison gets only selective airing. Pat Carlen notes the frequent reference by prison staff and others to the fact that Cornton Vale is not a 'real prison'. She quotes a sherriff, on the women who come before him in the courts: 'Physically we don't actually see them in the courts because *physically* we don't see them as a danger. Women don't constitute a social problem.'

Hence the ironic opening sentence of this book: 'The imprisonment of women in Scotland is not a problem.'

Melissa Behn

## On the Short List

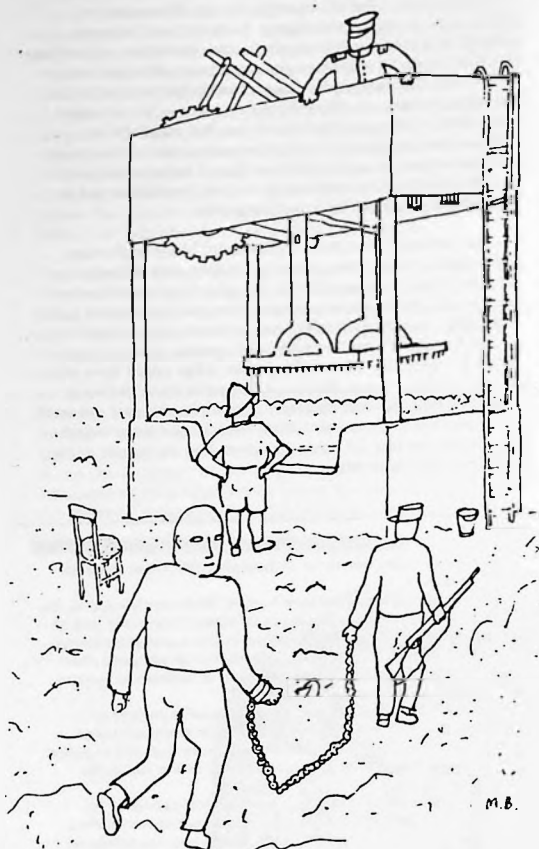
Mick Ryan  
*The Politics of Penal Reform*  
Longman, 1983

This slim paperback contains: a history of penal reform from 1945-82; analyses of the roles of the Home Office, Parliament, political parties and 'public opinion' in the formation of penal policy; and an outline of the reforms favoured by the author. Perhaps it struck the publishers as appropriate that these subjects should be crammed into such an inadequate space that in most cases only the most superficial treatment is possible. It is a pity they could not have been more generous, for what Ryan does manage to say is very much on the right lines.

The most interesting part of the historical section of the book, at least for a youngster like me, is the sadly topical account of the struggle to abolish the death penalty. I did not know, for instance, that one of the main weapons used

*continued on next page.*

**Beyond formal justice.** 7-10 September. Conference organised by the International Sociological Association. To be held in Antwerp: Further details available from Brian Hipkin, Department of Sociology, City of London Polytechnic, Old Castle Street, London E1 (01-283 1030, ext 246).



... the condemned man looked so like a submissive dog that one might have thought he could be left to run free on the surrounding hills and would only need to be whistled for when the execution was due to begin."

Franz Kafka's spine-chilling tale, 'In the Penal Colony' is included in the recently published *Penguin Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka* (price £3.95).

**BIASED JUDGES** come in for strong criticism in a new book, *Advocacy at the Bar: A Beginner's Guide* by barrister Keith Evans, the head of a set of chambers in London. He says there is 'a general drift on the part of judges away from strict impartiality. It is a frightening trend and it is operating in this country like a silent rotting agent that is significantly weakening the foundations of our whole system . . . What seems to be the vast majority of them favour the prosecution and lean against the defence.'

## Urgent Need

*Homeless Young Offenders:*  
the report of a NACRO working party

Early last year, NACRO published the results of their research on homeless young offenders. This was devoted exclusively to the 16 to 20 year olds, partly because they appear to be the fastest growing group within the prison population and also because they appear to be the group mainly at risk of becoming homeless.

The NACRO report is very worthy and very wordy; some of its language is incomprehensible to me. Boiled down, it comes to this: Crime is more prevalent amongst young people aged 16 and 20 than any other age group. The reconviction rate amongst this group is higher for those who are homeless. There is no cohesion of policy to deal with these problems. Too much is left to voluntary bodies and their work is fragmented. Central and local authorities do provide some facilities but very few and there is a tendency to pass the buck from one organisation to another. There is a shortage of resources.

NACRO suggest that since no one agency can solve all the problems, the housing, social services, probation service and the relevant voluntary agencies should collaborate in the planning and provision of services. It is vital that policy should respond to the difficulties experienced by young people in obtaining permanent rented housing. Consideration should be given to appropriate housing and to young people's access to such housing.

What the report establishes is that the law already exists to do these things. The Health Services and Public Health Act, 1968, and the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, 1977, are there if only local authorities act. The report urges that housing, both furnished and unfurnished, should be available to everybody over 16. Social workers have advocated this for years, for all homeless persons. There is a need for hostels with caring staff; for bed-sitters and flats. This is necessary and it will help to prevent *some* crime, though the causes of crime go much deeper.

NACRO proposes that the local authorities should co-ordinate the services of all the relevant statutory and voluntary organisations. A tall order, and probably unworkable! They also demand that the DHSS should review its procedure under the 1980 amendments to the Supplementary Benefits Act regarding the use of the 'suitable alternative accommodation' clause to refuse claims for furniture grants; should find ways of reducing the delays that occur in getting urgent payments and visits from officers for deposits for rent and furniture, etc., and should make realistic payments to cover furniture and furnishings. Hear, hear! Claimants' Unions have been demanding these things for all claimants in urgent need.

Homelessness is a problem for people of all ages. This often leads to crime; but those between 16 and 20 are most vulnerable, and those in authority need to snap into action now.

Douglas Kepper

by the retentionists in the 1948 debates was the view of the recently-deceased reforming Prison Commissioner, Alexander Patterson, that long periods of imprisonment were so inhumane that hanging was to be preferred; a point which ought to trouble liberals today as they contemplate the plight, for example, of Frank Marritt.<sup>1</sup> When Ryan deals with more recent and familiar events the enforced superficiality sometimes becomes annoying — for instance, in the single uncritical paragraph devoted to the May Report.

In the chapters which look at present-day penal politics, Ryan deals with some subjects in reasonable depth, at the expense of omitting others, such as the POA and the Liberal Party, altogether. His treatment of RAP is quite generous, both in length and in content; and accurate, apart from one rather significant substitution of 'will' for 'may' ('RAP has now come to accept that there will always be some offenders who need to be imprisoned'). However, his coverage of both RAP and PROP might have been more valuable if he had dwelt less on their problems in the early '70s, and more on the positions they hold today.

In fact, these positions are not very different from Ryan's own (indeed, he was briefly a member of the RAP Policy Group). He regards the 'justice model' as 'the dominant progressive rhetoric', and largely endorses its critique of the present system, but acknowledges that the goal of a just penal system is 'ludicrous' in the context of an unequal society. For Ryan, as for RAP, 'abolition, through a series of negative or undermining reforms, is the final goal'. In the short term, this involves 'arguing for selected progressive demands which are now associated with the justice model; for example, the abolition of parole'; developing criteria which 'discriminate between those alternatives already on offer' and 'can act as organising principles for developing other and more genuinely radical alternatives' (Ryan does not, however, discuss the principles of restitution and conciliation); and 'devising ways to combat the newly-constructed and authoritarian law-and-order consensus'. Which is exactly what RAP is trying to do, though Ryan's need to distance himself from the subjects of his study prevents him from saying so.

Ryan does, however, differ from RAP and PROP in one important respect, and that is his endorsement of the proposal, put forward by King and Morgan in their evidence to the May committee, that the Home Office should 'spread the cruel weight of growing prison numbers more evenly' by overcrowding the long-term prisons as well as the local ones. This is puzzling, especially when one recalls Ryan's critical review of King and Morgan's evidence in *Abolitionist* no.4. Why does an advocate of 'negative and undermining reforms' favour what purports to be a means of making the present excessive prison population more manageable? Is it a Machiavellian ploy designed to make the supposed link between overcrowding and riots a reality?

Despite this lapse, *The Politics of Penal Reform* joins Fitzgerald and Sim's *British Prisons*, Coggan and Walker's *Frightened for my Life*, and Christie's *Limits to Pain*<sup>2</sup> (none of which, strangely, are in Ryan's 'Select Bibliography') on the short list of books currently available which, despite somewhat different political perspectives, present what is more or less a RAP/PROP point of view. That all four have appeared within the last two years could be a sign that that view is gaining ground. Together — plus *The Abolitionist* of course — they make an excellent introductory course in the politics of penal reform.

1. Ian Cameron, *An Account Paid in Full: the Frank Marritt Dossier* (Friends of Frank Marritt, 124c Elgin Ave, W9, E2, 1982).  
2. Mike Fitzgerald and Joe Sim, *British Prisons* (2nd Edn.: Basil Blackwell, 1979); Geoff Coggan and Martin Walker, *Frightened for my Life: an account of deaths in British Prisons* (Fontana, 1982); Nils Christie, *Limits to Pain* (Martin Robertson, 1981). All these books are discussed in *Abolitionist* no.12.

Tony Ward

## Not Ivan Denisovich

Bobby Sands  
*One Day in My Life*

Pluto Press, 1983, £2.95



On the back cover of Bobby Sands' *One Day in My Life* Sean McBride writes to the effect that 'this book will become a political document on a par with Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*'. It will not. The power and influence of Solzhenitsyn's book comes from its merit as a work of literature. Sands' book unfortunately has no discernable literary merit. It is derivative in its title and format, immature in its style, and irritatingly propagandistic in its content.

So keen is Sands to defame the colonialism of Britain and the Long Kesh concentration camp that he cannot bear to give his gaolers even a vestige of humanity, they are presented as monsters and he as their righteous counterpart suffering their unspeakable cruelties and yet remaining unbroken in spirit. Unfortunately this is not the stuff of good literature, nor even good propaganda. There is no strong sense of men's cruelty to men, only a pantomime of goodies versus baddies and as in all pantomimes the atrocities committed have no meaning in the real world.

This shallowness of insight coupled with some obvious instances of exaggeration does more to cheapen than to glorify the H Block prisoners' rights movement. This is particularly lamentable as their cause needs no apologists and requires no exaggeration — its justice is plain to see. To his credit Sands does not attempt to bolster the political prisoners' cause by stigmatising or deriding the 'normal' prisoners in Long Kesh (it will doubtless come as a surprise to some that Long Kesh even houses non-political prisoners), though his bitter caricature of some of the Loyalist trustees is an unfortunate piece of sectarian vitriol.

This is a book strictly for the converted who may use it in times of weakness to bolster their flagging acrimony. I don't believe it will alter one single person's opinion of the H Block protest. This is not to say it will not be popular, given the understandable war mentality in Northern Ireland many members of the republican community will purchase and even read the book. But if they do they will gain little insight into the real horrors of prison life — the unrelenting boredom and pointlessness of it all. Nor will they really understand the mind of Bobby Sands, a man powerful enough to starve himself unto death for a cause he believed in.

Brendan Major

# PUBLICATIONS



-- All prices include postage charge.

- Doug Wakefield — A Thousand Days in Solitary** (PROP publication, 1980). £1.40  
The story of Doug Wakefield, a life sentence prisoner, and his personal account of his ordeal of 1,000 days spent in solitary confinement.
- Outside Chance — The Story of the Newham Alternatives Project** (1980), Liz Dronfield. £2.25  
A report on a unique alternative to prison in the East End of London, founded by RAP in 1974.
- Parole Reviewed — a response to the Home Office's 'Review of Parole in England and Wales' (June 1981).** £0.75  
A RAP discussion document and policy statement.
- Out of Sight — RAP on Prisons, RAP/Christian Action,** autumn 1981 £0.70  
Includes articles on parole, the state of the prison system in 1981, prison cell deaths, prison medicine, dangerous offenders, sex offenders.
- The Prison Film, Mike Nellis and Chris Hale (1982)** £1.40  
A lively and fascinating analysis of the genre of the prison film. Published to coincide with RAP's 'Prison Film Month' at the National Film Theatre, February 1982.
- A Silent World — The case for accountability in the Prison System, RAP Policy Group (August 1982)** £0.30  
An analysis of the many ways in which our prison system is unaccountable to the public it is supposed to serve; and a policy statement and list of background reading for future consideration.
- Sentencing Rapists, Jill Box-Grainger (1982)** £1.30  
An analysis of 'who rapes whom, and why', the effectiveness of current sentencing practice to deal with rape, and a discussion of feminist analyses of rape and their suggestions about what should be done with convicted rapists. Also, recommendations for new principles and practice in the sentencing of rapists.

## THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME — 1984

Churchill Travelling Fellowships are for all UK citizens irrespective of age or occupation, and as no educational or professional qualifications are needed, they are of special interest to people who are not eligible for other types of grants. The object of the awards is to give men and women from all walks of life the chance to gain a better understanding of the lives and work of people overseas and to acquire knowledge and experience for the benefit of their work and the community. The only requirement is that candidates must be able to show that they can make effective use of the knowledge and experience they have obtained abroad.

Grants are offered in different categories each year: anyone whose trade, profession or interest falls within these categories may propose a project they wish to carry out in countries outside the UK and Northern Ireland. About 100 awards are made annually, and there are now over 1600 Churchill Fellows.

The categories for 1984 include **PENAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR ALTERNATIVES.**

The final selection will be made by interview in London in January 1984. Successful candidates will be expected to

## ABOLITIONISTS STILL AVAILABLE:

- Abolitionist No. 8** (spring 1981) £0.70  
Includes articles on sex offenders in prison, sex offenders and child victims, women's prisons and women in prison, deaths in prison, alternatives for drunken offenders and a review of the prostitution laws.
- Abolitionist No. 9** (autumn 1981) £0.70  
Includes articles on radical probation work, the medical treatment of sex offenders, victimology and a radical perspective.
- Abolitionist No. 10** (winter 1981) £0.80  
Includes articles on rape, segregation and restraints in prison, psychiatric secure units, alternatives to custody.
- Also, PROP (National Prisoners' Movement) 'Prison Briefing' no. 1.
- Abolitionist No. 11** (spring 1982) £0.80  
Includes articles on the inquiry into the Wormwood Scrubs Prison Disturbance, 1979; group therapy in prisons; prison medicine, prisons and hospitals; Scotland's political prisoners; the meaning of life (sentences).
- Abolitionist No. 12** (summer/autumn 1982) £0.80  
Includes articles on reparation and conciliation; drugs in prisons; prison deaths; the state of the prison reform lobby; the state of RAP.
- Abolitionist No. 13** (1983 no. 1) £0.80  
Includes articles on prison education; prison education: penal reform in crisis; Dutch penal policy; Barlinnie special unit; Matt Lygate; prison medicine; parole.

start their travels during that year, making their own plans and arrangements within the scope of the grants. The grant will cover return air fare and all travel and living expenses abroad for about eight weeks.

To apply send your name and address only on a postcard between August and mid October to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, 15 Queen's Gate Terrace, London SW7 5PR. You will receive an explanatory leaflet and a form to complete, which must reach the Trust Office by 1 November 1983. Applications received after this date will not be accepted and allowance must be made for postal delays.

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THE CHAPEL AT BRIXTON.

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