

Editorial

NEWS OF Russian prisons, or work with young offenders in Scotland, of a new institution in Suffolk, sermons given to prisoners in Germany . . . these give something of an international air to our third issue, and for them to reach you has meant correspondence with New York, The Hague, London and elsewhere.

Dr. Ilse Bry, Chairman of the Mental Health Book Review Index, writing from New York says "Our old assumption that it takes less time to travel a shorter distance than a long one no longer holds good. It has become most deceptive with respect to mail. Actually, air mail from England is now faster than the mails between the boroughs of New York", and one's imagination is intrigued by the implication of this fact of modern communications.

Words can fly across the world at astonishing speed—at a price; there may be delays and there may be distortion. Valuable as face to face contact must be, distance still makes this hard to establish and difficulties of a technical nature make even the personal contact of telephone conversation a costly and sometimes distorted business. Print, therefore, has many advantages over the more immediate urgency of verbal communication. Admittedly there may be long delays. It takes time for contributors to write articles, time for the Editorial Board to consider them, time to set up the type and there are necessary waiting periods for correction and revision before words become print. But for every written word there is some likelihood of permanence and with care (and a bit of luck) what you read to-day may be available in 2061 so that just as you now read what happened in Brixton in 1862 so someone in the future may well see, with perhaps some antiquarian interest, what happened at Blundeston in 1961.

Communication is the essence of prison work. The lawmakers communicate the wishes of the public to the workers in the prison, who in turn must communicate with the lawbreakers. How often do we hear the cry "Nobody tells me anything". Prison administrators complain that legislators do not make clear their full intention, prison officers say new policies are introduced and nobody told them, prisoners say that the very purpose of their sentence was not fully explained to them. The public also complain.

A lot of this may be true, but communication should be a two-way process and quite often we are not told about something because we have not shown much anxiety about hearing it.

In the outside world, where public relations is a relatively new profession, we are assaulted by a barrage of missiles of communication through television, radio, film and Press (perhaps in that order of strength) but this can be a one way affair if we so wish. We can look, listen or linger over the words, and though we may be interested, even intrigued, we are not necessarily converted. But the prison world is one of potentially closer relationships—some private and some public where the written or spoken word is the only instrument.

This issue attempts to give you carefully prepared words for future talk.

EDITOR