

Prison After-Care

B. J. HARTWELL

IN APRIL 1961 the Home Secretary asked his Advisory Council on the Treatment of Offenders "to review the arrangements for the organisation of statutory and voluntary after-care for persons discharged from prisons, borstals, detention centres and approved schools; to consider whether any changes are necessary or desirable; and to make recommendations." The Council set up a sub-committee to carry out the review. Written and/or oral evidence was received, among others, from the Prison Commission (as it then was), the Association of Prison Welfare Officers, the Prison Officers' Association, the National Association of Prison Visitors; and from Prison Governors, Prison Chaplains and Prison Medical Officers. Visits were paid by members of the sub-committee to prisons and other establishments from which offenders are discharged, and a pre-release group course was attended. A tape recording was made of the views expressed by a group of discharged prisoners in discussion with two research workers from the U.S.A. The sub-committee's report was adopted by the Council (with three dissentients) and submitted to the Home Secretary on

the 2nd October, 1963. On the 3rd December, 1963 the Home Secretary announced that the Government welcomed the Report on the Organisation of After-Care and accepted in principle its recommendations.

Briefly these were as follows. There should be a single, unified, system of after-care for all offenders, both compulsory and voluntary; the responsibility for which is jointly borne on the one hand by the entire staff of the penal institution, and on the other by a new probation and after-care service. While a man is confined, the conscious effort of every member of the staff should be to accomplish his rehabilitation. The particular responsibility of the social worker (as the report calls the prison welfare officer) would be to plan the prisoner's after-care on release in direct collaboration with the probation and after-care officer for the district to which the prisoner will go or return. On release, whether to voluntary or compulsory after-care, the probation and after-care officer would seek to achieve the prisoner's reintegration in society as a useful citizen. The probation and after-care officer would not be expected

to undertake this task unaided. There must be found in each community public-spirited fellow-citizens, sympathetic to after-care, who (with some training) would make suitable auxiliaries to support and assist the probation and after-care officer in individual cases. Further, there must be encouragement of new capital projects, like hostels for ex-prisoners (and others), which a community can sponsor. The Home Secretary would be the Minister of the Crown with overall responsibility to Parliament. He would have the assistance of two advisory bodies: a Central Council for Probation and After-Care, and a Probation and After-Care Training Board. The report makes clear that this new concept of after-care is of a decentralised service, focussed respectively upon the institution and the community, each served by professionally trained social workers in direct communication with each other from the moment that after-care begins.

When does after-care begin? Nowadays everyone seems to agree that after-care begins at sentence. Indeed at Surrey Quarter Sessions (and elsewhere) Woman's Voluntary Service, with the support of the Chairman of Quarter Sessions, and the co-operation of police and probation officers, operates a scheme under which the prisoner, or a member of his family in court, is asked whether a home visit by the W.V.S. would be welcome. Where the offer is

accepted, without delay (often on the same day that the man is sentenced), a visit is paid to his family, whose immediate needs are ascertained and satisfied. In the view of many, it is of prime importance to bring offenders' families within the orbit of after-care from the outset, thereby to meet the anxieties of the offender and the needs of the family, whose members often have to face the loss of their breadwinner.

Meanwhile the prison has received the offender and he is "at risk" for after-care. The process towards his rehabilitation has begun. The idea is not new. As long ago as 1894 the Gladstone Committee on Prisons said "that prison discipline and treatment should be more effectively designed to maintain, stimulate or awaken the higher susceptibilities of prisoners, to develop their moral instincts, to train them in orderly and industrious habits and, wherever possible, to turn them out of prison better men and women physically and morally than when they came in." The Prison Rules provide that "the purposes of training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to establish in them the will to lead a good and useful life on discharge, and to fit them to do so." Chiefly, as a result of historical accident, there is a fundamental distinction between prisoners who are subject to compulsory after-care and those who are entitled to voluntary after-care. Voluntary

after-care sprang from a humanitarian concern for the plight of the ex-prisoner, and manifested itself first through the efforts of individuals and later by the organisation of prisoners' aid societies based on local prisons. Compulsory after-care has always been applied to particular categories of offenders. Thus, of those discharged from prison (with which this article is concerned) prisoners discharged from corrective training and preventive detention and certain young prisoners and those serving life sentences are subject to compulsory after-care. Further categories are added by the Criminal Justice Act 1961. Compulsory after-care has the double object of rehabilitation and supervision, supported by the sanction of recall to a penal establishment if the ex-prisoner misbehaves. In 1953 the Maxwell Committee on Discharged Prisoners' Aid Societies recommended the appointment at local prisons of trained and qualified social case-workers to be known as prison welfare officers. There is now a social worker in every prison in England and Wales, and at some of the larger establishments there are several. Social workers are also employed at special local prisons and at some regional prisons. But until recently an adult male prisoner serving a long sentence, unless he himself raised any personal or domestic problems during his sentence, might remain little more than a document, so far

as his post-release after-care was concerned, until about three months before his release date. Yet a prisoner serving a long sentence needs the help of a social worker at the outset of his sentence and during its course as much as any other prisoner. His basic needs do not differ according to the kind of sentence he receives nor where it is served. He will want a home, a job and a friend whichever penal institution he leaves. The 1963 Report on the Organisation of After-Care therefore concluded "that the nature and quality of the after-care service provided should be fundamentally the same and should be available to all offenders irrespective of their particular type of sentence."

Wherever after-care work is undertaken, the primary responsibility for it should be in the hands of people with an appropriate social case-work training and outlook. In the case of those who work from the penal institutions themselves the question as to whether or not it should be an exclusive duty, or combined with some other function, needs to be determined experimentally according to several factors, including the size of the institution and the length of stay and characteristics of the inmates. What is vital is that in all establishments (including central prisons) the daily after-care functions should be vested in one or more individuals who are adequately equipped for this duty. What sort of person, then,

is required to fill the role of the social worker in prisons? The case-worker closest to the prisoner's after-care need is undoubtedly the probation officer, whose primary duty hitherto has been the after-care of persons permitted by the courts to retain their liberty provided they submitted to the supervision of a probation officer. In the classic phrase, the officer's duty is to "advise, assist and befriend the offender." Additionally the Probation Rules require probation officers to advise, assist and befriend, when requested, persons discharged from correctional establishments who are subject to compulsory after-care. In 1962, for instance, the probation service undertook the after-care of 82 per cent of the male prisoners discharged to compulsory after-care. Why not, then, appoint probation officers as social workers in prisons? In fact this is what often already happens. Increasing numbers of prison welfare officers appointed by the National Association of Discharged Prisoners' Aid Societies are coming from the probation service. Certainly it is desirable that the prison social worker should possess the same qualities and skills as a probation officer and should receive the same rate of remuneration. But there are fundamental objections to the probation service being responsible for prison social workers. One is psychological. It is said that if probation officers worked in prisons the probation service

inevitably would be linked in the mind of the public, and certainly of the prisoner, with the prison system, and this would prejudice the service's relationships with both. Another difficulty is administrative. Apart from London, probation officers are employed by local committees of justices and serve in an administrative county or large city or borough. From their complement sufficient prison social workers would have to be designated and assigned to the various prisons in the probation area. Even assuming there were officers suitable and willing to undertake this work for a period in a different setting, a straightforward interchange of personnel between local institution and probation area might not always be propitious; and if the exchange was between two institutions in different probation areas, would be complicated. Moreover, the fact that a probation officer came from a different service would tend to separate him from the staff of the establishment in which he worked. He would be a stranger within the gates and might not enjoy the same freedom of access to its inmates. For the sub-committee on the Organisation of After-Care the after-care during sentence was the paramount need of a concerted effort on the part of every member of the staff of the institution, and any factor that might weaken the cohesion of that effort ought to be avoided.

By whom, then, should the prison social worker be appointed? The Maxwell Committee discussed this question and concluded that, in order to keep alive the sense of interest and responsibility of the aid societies, the prison welfare officers should be those societies' agents and advisers and not members of the prison staff. It will be appreciated, however, that the Maxwell Committee was concerned solely with voluntary after-care administered through the aid societies and co-ordinated by their national association (N.A.D.P.A.S.). The latest enquiry covers the whole field of after-care, both voluntary and compulsory, and different considerations arise. The prison social worker now envisaged will fill a role in the institution complementary to that of his colleague in the community in the new probation and after-care service, irrespective of whether the sentence entails compulsory or voluntary after-care. To fulfil his mission effectively the prison social worker must be easy of access within the prison to any prisoner at any time. He is an integral part of the life and work of the prison and a full, yet inter-dependent member of the prison staff, to which he will contribute his skills as do other professional members of the team. So the 1963 Report recommends that the social worker in a prison should be appointed by the Home Secretary.

The social worker's relationships are threefold. First, and as soon as possible after admission, he

must gain the prisoner's confidence if he is to secure his co-operation in the plan of his rehabilitation. Secondly, the case-worker's relationships with other members of the prison staff must be close and so harmonious that they will turn to him whenever they see a prisoner in need of his help. His third relationship must be with those agencies in the community to whom he can turn on behalf of the prisoner for help during sentence, and with whom he is planning the prisoner's return to society on his release. I should like to examine each of these relationships in turn.

The social worker should have an unhurried initial interview with the prisoner as soon as possible after reception to relieve the anxiety that is inevitable when domestic ties are suddenly disrupted and to find out what urgently needs to be done. A business may be in jeopardy affecting innocent third parties, creditors may be pressing for payment, essential services may be disconnected, children may be bereft. In every case prompt intervention by the prison social worker, either directly or through his colleague in the probation and after-care service, can usually produce at least a moratorium and often a sympathetic and co-operative response.

But this is only the beginning of institutional after-care. No one imagines that the whole prison population will daily be clamouring for the attention of the social worker. Many prisoners will never

seek him. Not a few may begin by resenting his suspected interference. These may be a long time before their confidence is won and their co-operation secured, but the task must be essayed until achieved. Others will importune the social worker with grievances real or imaginary, and these must be patiently endured for some day one may be critical. I would judge that the essence of the relationship between prisoners and the social worker is accessibility. The very fact that it is generally known that in the social worker there is at hand a friend ready to listen and, where appropriate, to help, will engender on the prisoner's part, that confidence without which any plan of rehabilitation, however elaborate, is doomed from the start.

Various estimates have been proffered as to what is an appropriate case-load for a prison social worker and they are widely divergent. The Organisation of After-Care Report points out that case-loads will depend on the type of prison, its average population and rate of turnover; and claims that there is not yet enough experience on which to assess the maximum practical case-load, though it should be much smaller than at present. Even then, although he functions within the prison perimeter, the social worker cannot have ears and eyes in every cell or overlook every prisoner's letter and be alert to meet each problem and heartache as it arises. It is essential, therefore, that between

himself and other members of the prison staff there should exist the closest collaboration. I arrived at a prison—and an open one at that—on the same day as a letter from a prisoner's wife threatening to take her own life and those of their children. I was present at the consultation between the Governor and the prison welfare officer. There must be many communications, doubtless of a less dramatic character, containing elements calculated to arouse passion, or re-awaken heartache, or sow the seeds of vengeance, or quicken growing anxiety, that could perhaps be nipped in the bud, or at least assuaged, if there is a recognised channel of communication between the censoring officer and the social worker. As symptomatic of danger as the arrival of a disquieting letter may be the non-arrival of one eagerly awaited, with ensuing apprehension or melancholy. How is this situation to be conveyed to the social worker? The answer is through a sympathetic and perceptive landing officer who will see that the news, or lack of it, is made known to the social worker. Nor must this traffic all be one way. In his turn the social worker, if his relationships with the staff are fruitful, will know to whom to turn for help in a particular situation, whether to the Prison Chaplain, or the Medical Officer, to the prison visitor, to the principal officer, to the Governor or his Deputy. No doubt there are prisons where the staff relationship is already fully developed and happily

functioning. May it soon obtain in every penal establishment !

As soon as practicable (the 1963 Report urges), a plan should be prepared by the social worker for the prisoner's re-integration in society upon his release. Some planning will be simple; some protracted and difficult. Some plans will of necessity be indeterminate, but none should be haphazard. They can best be laid in consultation with the social worker in the community to which the prisoner will go on his release. Already he may be in touch with the prisoner's family and be paving the way for the return. On the part of some families this event may be awaited without enthusiasm. A prisoner's home may be hundreds of miles from his prison. Many a prisoner has no home and one has to be found. Few prisoners have jobs to resume or begin on discharge. Work must be found for them. Where a man has neither home nor work his domiciliary requirements will be dependent upon his place of employment. The so-called "white collar worker" often presents a singularly acute problem of re-integration in society. These men are as unfit as they are unsuited for manual work; possessed only of their professional skill, the door to which is fast shut for ever. Across their path lies the barrier of the fidelity bond. How are they to take up the threads of citizenship again unless there can be found a sponsor ? Beneficial thera-

peutic work is being done in particular prisons for the alcoholic and for the disfigured pervert but what hope has either of acceptance and adjustment unless there is someone to befriend him in freedom ? When the recommendations of the After-Care Report are implemented a new probation and after-care service will cover every acre of England and Wales, manned by professional social workers, supported by a cadre of selected auxiliaries, ready to operate the after-care plan which the prison social worker has prepared. There will be no central agency or bureau. The social worker in the prison will be dealing directly with his opposite number in the community. New lines of communication will need to be opened and maintained. The techniques of community social workers (where they are novel) will require to be understood, and a common language of rapport fashioned, in order that a bond of fellowship may be created between the two foci of after-care.

This pre-occupation with relationships, both inside the institution and between complementary social workers, cannot be overstressed; for unless they are smooth and efficient, after-care will not be fully effective. Some co-ordination will be necessary to avoid overlapping contacts by several members of the staff of the same institution. This object can best be achieved if the prison social worker normally deals with all

case-work communications with outside agencies. He should be kept informed of all others. Social workers in prisons and probation and after-care officers ultimately should share the same training, a subject that will, no doubt, receive early consideration by the Probation and After-Care Training Board, to whose appointment reference was earlier made. Some interim arrangements are inevitable.

The Government has already intimated that prison welfare officers and probation and after-care officers will be interchangeable, and full-time after-care officers will be considered for appointment to the probation and after-care service, if necessary after appropriate training. The Report recommends that any *ad hoc* training arrangements that might be introduced should eventually be superseded by permanent schemes for the combined training of probation officers and social workers in prisons. On his part the probation and after-care officer will require to know more about penal institutions and the social and psychological effects of lengthy incarceration, to say nothing of the special features of case-work among prisoners. Preparing the new after-care system will require not only reorientation courses but also opportunities for discussion and joint study among the various professional workers committed to the task. Already there are healthy signs of this kind of co-operation.

A recent gathering in the City of

Liverpool to discuss the 1963 Report was attended by a deputy prison governor, probation officers, after-care officers, prison welfare officers, magistrates and members of the University. Soon after the Report was published a conference was convened by N.A.D.P.A.S. at which officers and members of its Council, representatives of the aid societies, prison welfare officers, after-care officers, probation officers and the secretary of their national Association, together with a representative of the Scottish prison service discussed the Report. Meetings of probation committees are in train to consider the Report's implications for them; and for several of the aid societies, whose views the Home Secretary has indicated his readiness to receive.

I have dealt at some length with the social worker in prisons and I have been at pains to emphasise that he is only one, though a most important, member of a team in which each one of the prison staff has a part to play. The front line of the attack on institutional after-care in my view is manned by the prison officer. Witness after witness testified to his vital role in the work of rehabilitation, especially in prisons where an officer has particular responsibility for a small group of prisoners. The landing officer will be the first to detect the symptoms of anxiety, a deterioration in health or spirit, the transformation that a letter can effect, the overbearing influence of another prisoner, the need of solace

or of solitude. As time passes and opportunity offers he will learn about the prisoner's family, hobbies, hopes and fears. When he senses a need of other help than he can give his will be the chance to summon it, through his principal officer or directly from the social worker. What is true of the landing officer also obtains, in a wider circle of acquaintances, among his colleagues in other departments of the prison who are in daily contact with the prisoner at work or recreation. The difficulties that beset the endeavours of a prison officer are many. In some prisons a large section of the population is constantly changing. Officers themselves have escort and other duties which militate against the upbuilding of any enduring relationship between officer and prisoner. Overcrowding is not conducive to the exchange of confidences, and suspicion of favouritism must always be lurking close to the surface. There is a phobia about the very buildings that undermines morale. Nevertheless the prison officer occupies a key position in the tactics of institutional after-care which he must be encouraged to consolidate at all costs. Indeed, as the new vision of after-care takes shape, he must be given every opportunity of exploiting his especially favourable situation to reconnoitre, to render first-aid and to signal for reinforcements. I was gratified therefore to read that the over-riding theme at the annual conference of the Prison

Officers' Association last May was the need for a new look at the prison service, with prison officers taking a full share of rehabilitation responsibilities. The Association's chairman was reported as saying that the potential talent in the prison service has never been fully exploited. If the recommendations of the Report on the Organisation of After-Care are implemented not only will prison officers be given every encouragement to participate in after-care as members of the prison team, but they will be better equipped to do so. The Report envisages their training to understand prisoners as individuals with problems, and to develop a positive and helpful relationship with them; to acquaint prison officers of new methods and skills; and to enable them to reconcile their dual responsibilities of maintaining discipline and security on the one hand and co-operating in the rehabilitation of the prisoner on the other. Training courses for prison officers should give more prominence to the study of human behaviour, both individually and collectively, and familiarise them with the total conception of after-care in all its ramifications, and particularly the role of the prison social worker, with whom it is so important that the prison officer's link should be strongly forged.

Another member of the prison staff who can make a vital contribution to after-care is the Prison Chaplain. Would that he had more congenial surroundings for his

individual ministrations! In some institutions privacy is at a premium. Strange though it may seem, time too is in short supply. The length of interview that a prisoner has with his chaplain will depend on its purpose; but it should never take place in circumstances that either chaplain or prisoner is conscious of the need to hurry over it. Nor should the chaplain's primary function of caring for the spiritual welfare of those in his charge be interfered with by mundane matters that could very well be taken care of by someone else. The last thing I am advocating is that the chaplain should feel inhibited in his approach or appeal to the men, and it may well be that their periods of recreation provide that opportunity; but it seems wasteful that a man of his calling should become a sort of games officer or entertainments manager. The relationship between the Prison Chaplain and the social worker demands not only tact and goodwill but a sensitive appreciation of each other's roles. There could be confusion of counsel if chaplain and social worker were simultaneously acting on behalf of a prisoner in connection with the same matter. On the other hand, communications between a prisoner and his chaplain are confidential and what is divulged must be the sole responsibility of the chaplain. What is important is that there shall exist between the chaplain and the other members of the staff that sense of corporate responsi-

bility and team-work that will make a maximum contribution to the prisoner's rehabilitation. A note on a chaplain's desk from a landing officer, that prisoners X and Y were in need of a visit, and the officer would be glad if the padre could see them, spoke to me of an admirable relationship.

Apart from their daily concern with the health of the inmates, the Prison Medical Officers are engaged upon some notable after-care projects. I can do no more than mention in passing the psycho-therapeutic sessions for alcoholics at Pentonville and the link that has been established through the warden of St. Luke's House Rehabilitation Centre. The most striking effect of medical treatment upon behaviour can be witnessed at the plastic surgery unit at Wormwood Scrubs. A man's whole outlook upon life can be altered by the removal of some gross deformity or blemish. Here again, the keynote is fellowship in service. Through a wing-review board, comprising an Assistant Governor and his staff, the health and welfare of each prisoner is regularly reviewed, and his case can be referred to the Medical Officer, social worker or other specialist service.

A plea for more effective use of the prison visitor was made in the January 1964 issue of this Journal by a contributor knowledgeable and experienced in the subject. The Organisation of After-Care Report sees in the prison

visitor a potential auxiliary for community after-care. This article is confined to after-care in prison and I shall say no more concerning the prison visitor as presently understood than to echo Mr. Cave's plea for a review of the visitor's functions in the light of modern prison conditions, and to underline the importance of his point that a prison visitor should not hesitate to share with the social worker or other appropriate member of the staff any problem that seems beyond his scope. Because he comes like "a breath of fresh air into the prison" an anxiety that has been stifled, or a grievance that has been nursed, once it has been shared with, and by, the prison visitor, could be relieved or ventilated.

One cannot conclude an article on prison after-care without acknowledging several aspects of it, each deserving of extended mention. One is the prison hostel scheme that prepares a man for freedom by allowing him, towards the end of his sentence, to go out to work like any other wage-earner. Another is the home-leave allowance when discharge is imminent that enables a man to re-enter his home, to meet his community social worker, and to secure employment. I attended a pre-release course at Liverpool Prison and was as much struck by the range and commonsense of

the questions asked as of the scope and informality of the talks given by well-informed people drawn from industry and professional life, among them the Ministry of Labour Resettlement Officer. The Organisation of After-Care Report looks forward to a general extension to all discharges of the existing arrangement whereby assistance can be paid at the prison in cases where a man cannot reach the National Assistance Board office at his destination before it closes on the day of his release. The Report also recommends that the responsibility for providing clothing on release should in all cases rest with the prison authorities.

In sum: the keynote of prison regime should be the individual rehabilitation of each inmate and his preparation for responsible freedom. This should be the conscious aim of the whole of the institution's staff. After-care in prison ultimately depends on the effectiveness of the prison team. At its head stands the Governor with grave responsibilities for the security and well-being of all his establishment, both prisoners and staff. He is the leader of the team. To him others will look for inspiration and encouragement. Each in his several sphere must share the Governor's burden. Is it sentimental to say that a prison is a fellowship? Is it beyond hope that it could be a fellowship of the redeemed?