

The Prison Magazine

“ANON”

AS IT SEEMS TO BE the “done thing” for all communities and associations to have their own magazines, I suppose it was an evolutionary inevitability that the various branches of “The Dishonourable Association of Lags and Male-factors” should have their own journal; hence the appearance among us of various Prison Magazines.

Just what impact have these magazines had? Do they serve any useful purpose? Are they a step in the right direction? One's answers to these questions, as indeed to any question, must of necessity be influenced by one's point of view. It would probably be an interesting exercise on these particular questions, to compare the points of view of officialdom at its various levels with those of a cross-section of inmates at various levels (P.D's, C.T's, Long Term Ordinaries, Short Term Ordinaries, Stars, etc.). As one intimately connected with the publication of one of these magazines, let me give you my views.

Shortly after becoming a guest here on the personal recommendation of a certain Judge of Assize, there was an issue of our magazine and I was thus privileged to hear at first hand the reception accorded

to it by its reading public. Was it an enthusiastic reception? Not really; rather it was one of scepticism and mistrust. The men seemed to feel that the magazine was issued not so much in their interest as in the interests of officialdom who could point to it as evidence of their progressive outlook. My sympathies went out to the Editor in his valiant attempts to arouse interest and his plaintive requests for people to submit “copy.”

It was, therefore, with an enormous amount of trepidation that a few months ago I found myself occupying the Editorial Chair. The usual notices were posted asking for articles, and soon I waited for the “copy” to roll in. I waited in vain. Not a single item was submitted and this was anything but a happy omen.

Hoping to find some clue to the problem of whetting interest, I read through all the previous issues of our magazine, and the copies of the magazines of other establishments which were sent to us regularly. Then I sought the advice of the Assistant Governor who is chairman of our Entertainments and Amenities Committee, and the whole problem was discussed at a meeting of that committee.

From these deliberations it was obvious that the men had two main dislikes concerning the magazine:

- (a) They did not like the Editorial Staff trying to appear too learned and attempting to write over their heads.
- (b) They did not like articles "preaching" at them.

On the other hand interest was obvious in articles from people outside our walls, in competition features, and in the correspondence columns.

Bearing these points very much in mind, our next issue was published. It included articles from the Bishop of the Diocese, from a member of a nearby First Division Football Club, and from the Regional Office of the Ministry of Labour discussing the employment position and prospects in the area. These articles were all directed personally at the men here. We gave coverage to the work of the Messing Committee and the Entertainments and Amenities Committee as well as to internal and external sporting activities. A Quiz and Cross-word and sundry other articles made up the issue, and we waited to see what kind of reception it would receive.

To our delight it was well received. Men began asking when the next issue was due, and when eventually we appealed for articles for this issue they were forthcoming in really large numbers, including contributions from members of the staff who were becoming interested in our magazine. Subsequent issues

had the same result. Our magazine had "clicked" and was accepted. It has become an essential part of our life here.

So much for the "impact" of our magazine—now to the question as to whether it fulfills a useful function. The answer to this question must be "Yes." The magazine acts as a first class vehicle for passing on information: e.g. the notices regarding "remand time" earning remission, the new procedure for issuing letters, the inception of the Hostel Scheme.

It serves also to dissipate rumours. Articles directed personally at the men by people and associations from outside tend to break down the barriers which we are inclined to imagine are erected against us. It encourages constructive thought from those men who write articles or devise competitions for inclusion, and the correspondence columns afford men an opportunity of airing their views and entering into constructive discussion on matters affecting our daily life.

The third and last question we posed was, "Is it a step in the right direction?" Here again the answer must be "Yes." The mere fact that "authority" permits us to issue our own magazine and to air our own views, promotes a spirit of mutual respect. Particularly so as the men appreciate the fact that the control and running of their magazine is in the hands of their own representatives with the minimum of direction from the official side.