

Cambridge Opinion 38

on "Prisons"

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THIS IS A BOOK which should be read by everyone interested in penal work. It is an attempt to bring together a wide range of opinions and experience within this common frame of reference. For less than a packet of 20 cigarettes one is able to obtain, in concentrated form, expressions of thought, rarely original, but all pertinent and thought provoking. From the editorial, which must be read, to the final article, there is something to interest nearly everyone. Some ideas, now obviously ageing are restated, and a few fairly recent concepts make their appearance in this readily available format.

In a symposium such as this, undoubtedly the problem confronting the editor is not so much what to put in, as what to leave out. However, I feel the book would have been more complete had it included an article on Law Reform in relation to penal matters. (Some of Lord Gardiner's recent work might have been considered).

Although religion is considered an old hat in some quarters, it is probably the oldest discipline in human relationships, and ought not to be ignored in a book which is attempting to present a rounded picture. In the preamble, the editorial states the purpose of the symposium is to pose the questions "What happens in prison and why?" "What sort of people does it happen to?" "How does the experience of imprisonment affect them?" Having regard to the boundaries imposed by limited space and an apparent subjectivity in material selection, the symposium is undoubtedly a biased success.

All the articles quickly get into their stride and if some appear to me to be cold and unfeeling, none are tedious. All are interesting. Colin Ward introduces the subject with a fair, often penetrating but, for me, rather depressing view of the inmate world. Like many workers of his kind, Ward seems to catch nine-tenths of his subject

with his roving clinical eye. Unfortunately for us in the Prison Service, we seem to be unable to show him that remaining one-tenth which enables us to persevere and to extract much more than a mere modicum of satisfaction from it all. One left this article feeling glum and unaided in a positive sense. Next, Donald Garrity talks about prison organisation and penal goals in a very professional way. He highlights the alienation that exists between formal authority figures and those subjected to them. He indicates the goal confusion and role confusion, now evident with the prison scene. Garrity discusses some of the implications of these issues and produces an interesting and worthwhile discussion. It seems a pity that he fails to make the highly relevant point that these are complications not necessarily of the penal service, but of any hierarchical structure. Following the first two articles, which are primarily research based features, Pauline Morris writes about the work of research, and this article is undoubtedly needed. Research workers experience considerable difficulties when attempting to examine penal institutions, and penal institutions appear to have equal difficulty examining research workers and the product of their labours. It is a pity that an article such as this is necessary, but perhaps it will serve the purpose of provoking thought about the problems indicated by Pauline Morris, both

from the Prison Service and the people who undertake research projects. The next article is headed "Resocialisation—a New Approach." It is written by Gordon Trasler. As an academic exercise this undoubtedly is a skilful resumé of the complexity of treatment problems. Whilst many of Trasler's tenets will not be acceptable to those working in the field, it is right that concepts such as these should be exposed for consideration. In the following article the symposium, which until now had taken the form of written articles, changes its style and takes the form of a biographical pen picture of an actual case history. The biography introduces us to Kenneth Stack, who subsequently proves to be a very familiar figure. The article proves to be an intensely interesting, but fairly typical, portrayal, which serves to highlight the enormous problems which face penal workers. Problems which are considerably exaggerated when they are confronted (as in this case) with the task of developing considerable innate talent, in opposition to chronic criminality.

Inevitably, I suppose, prison education was bound to fall within the orbit of this symposium and I approached Godfrey Heaven's article with some forebodings. Happily, my apprehensions were totally unnecessary. This lively, often humorous and intensely humane appreciation of the implications involved in organising an

educational system, within a traditional penal organisation, should be essential reading for all tutor organisers.

The symposium next presents in narrative form an interview between the editor and Mr. Fred Castell, General Secretary of the Prison Officers' Association. This is a discussion about the prison officer and the many problems inherent in the enactment of his role in the Prison Service today. Mr. Fred Castell clearly indicates his very genuine concern for the position of the prison officer. But the skilfully directed interview, traps Mr. Castell, into unwittingly betraying the ambivalence at present experienced by prison officers, in relation to their present-day roles. And it also points to the contradiction which appears to be evident, within the Resolution 8 which called for a restatement of the prison officers' professional status. In the next article "Where the Shoe Pinches," David Garland interviews five ex-prisoners and discusses with them defects in the present system. Most prison staffs will recognise these people and the criticisms which they make. The most pertinent issue is the one which concerns the inability of a prisoner to express himself as a person within the physical and psychological confines of a penal institution. But despite this obvious truth, the people concerned don't really seem to understand the problem. How could they? Surely much of the present day conserva-

tism displayed in the Prison Service stems from a genuine concern about the possible deleterious effect upon the inmate population as a whole if individual prisoners were encouraged to express themselves as they really are. In the preceding article Mr. Fred Castell says (quite rightly in my opinion) "There are some really wicked people in prison." Of course we need to define what we mean by wicked, we need also to adequately classify our population, so that we can determine just who such people might be. But the public and the Prison Service need to be assured, that modern permissive methods of dealing with these people are truly effective. Such assurance is not forthcoming from this article.

After-Care? After What? After Whom? Having regard to the intense amount of interest generated around this problem in recent months, this article is exceedingly well timed. Timothy Cook brings a focus of clarity to this subject which in my view is much needed. Some of the broad assumptions about after-care are brought into close scrutiny, and there seems little doubt that the questions Mr. Cook asks must be resolved before we can properly and constructively think in terms of an efficient after-care service—read it!

Following the discussion on after-care, Richard Hauser holds a polemical inquiry asking the question, "What are prisons for?" Here is a man who undoubtedly

knows where he is going. He knows the way that prisons should be organised. He has clarified certain fundamental issues which are still challenging and troubling many people; and his clearly defined philosophy, if arrogant, has at least the merit of a clear objective. Refreshingly Mr. Hauser regards prison officers as something rather better than morons, and gives them the credit for talents which we in the Prison Service know they possess. Hauser will anger many people. His waving away of the concept of guilt will strike at the core of many people's beliefs. His concept of social shame might well be seen as a highly dangerous advocacy. One also feels that Hauser is obsessively involved in his work and theories to the extent that he is committed to making his ideas work. If one gets this impression, I think it is then reasonable to ask the question, "Can he really see, or is his view blinkered?"

The symposium winds up on a splendidly academic note. In the pursuit of pushing an ideal towards its ultimate, James Scott provides us with an interesting but, I think, totally impractical proposition. But don't discount these concepts easily. The things which Scott says seem to me to be a logical conclusion of the therapeutic community principle. The implications at this end of the continuum are enormous and should be given the consideration which the Suffolk project undoubtedly deserves. Per-

haps it is only in considering extremes, such as this, that we may be able to move to a position which is more in keeping with modern penal concepts and which at the same time provide us with a practical working proposition.

Presumably this type of literature is ultimately intended to assist people working in the penal field. The focus of attention, highlighted by the beam of informed opinion, must thrust into the hard light of objectivity much that is lamentable about the present state of penal affairs. It may be inevitable, but it is certainly unfortunate, that many of the contributors in their approach to the problem display a singular lack of "feeling" for their subject. I am aware that this is a particularly unscientific word, but make no apology for its use. Most of us working in the penal field will know what I mean and, within the book, Godfrey Heaven, Fred Castell and the ex-prisoners, display the empathy which I believe is missing from the approach of others.

As a consequence, the impact of some of these articles upon the people who work with prisoners will be considerably reduced. A pity, for surely this is where one must begin. It may well be that all learning is painful, but some of the contributors here do not appear to understand their own message. Their delicate appreciation of prisoners' problems does not appear to extend to those of

the staff. Intellectual attack will provoke an equally violent defence, and if this subject is not approached with warmth and understanding, then outside pressure groups cannot really blame the Prison Service for ignoring them.

Recommendations from the Royal Commission may have considerable impact, but in the last analysis it is the prison staffs who have to implement them. Unless they are to achieve a truly empa-

thetic appreciation of their future roles, then the enormous amount of valuable work undertaken by "outsiders" will continue to be as dust before the wind. Unpleasant whilst it is blowing; Nasty if a grain gets in one's eye; but soon over and all is as before.

Defeatist? Cynical? A depressing historical fact!

Cambridge Opinion is obtainable from G. N. MEADON, Caius and Gonville College, Cambridge at 5s. 0d. inc. postage.

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