

# Who is to Blame?

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AFTER STUDYING various reports and findings of differing Advisory Councils under the heading of Penal Reform, I feel I should comment on how various changes of policies have affected the prison officer over the past years through the lack of communication or consultation with him.

The prison rules and administration of a decade or so ago left prison officers 'marking time' two yards distant from their charges and any form of fraternisation was looked on with suspicion. This invidious state of affairs left a feeling of frustration at first but after being moulded in with the machinery, officers resigned themselves to a system of monotony and boredom.

Prison officers being the direct administrators of the prison system and still at the moment placed near the bottom rung of the civil service ladder of hierarchy, can view literally with a worm's eye any effective or non-effective change of

policy that may be in the interests of prison reform.

Many changes took place during the 50's and 60's and officers nurtured in a total custodial role, treated the invasion of civilian specialists with a reactionary attitude and openly revealed their disgust through the medium of the Prison Officers' Association. In this the whole Service was united unfortunately for had this unanimity taken a positive line of co-operation through consultations from 'top to bottom,' it would have revealed much potential in the prison officer class in the terms of rehabilitation and training.

Later, tempted by the rewards of overtime working, ranks became divided and a feeling of apathy swept through the Service. Recruits were sadly lacking and I am convinced this was why a so-called investigation into the conditions of the Prison Service was set up by the Home Office, headed by Mr. Justice Wynn-Parry. The

P.O.A. submitted an excellent report to the investigating committee, the context of which in the opening pages formed the first basis of the new role of the Prison Officer. This, however, was wasted. A simple claim for increased wages and other kindred claims could have been submitted, and after the usual delays, accepted by the "official side." This surely was all the Home Office needed to increase the number of recruits.

Through so much delay in negotiation over the Wynn-Parry report, apathy changed to frustration. This did not improve with the still steady influx of civilian staff into the Service, who were supplied with everything they needed, including a ready-made five-day week! Later, senior uniformed officers, although reimbursed by Wynn-Parry monetarily, felt they were being squeezed and buffeted by the specialists. The custodial role to which they had been trained and promoted over a long period was slowly becoming something to be ashamed of.

Some left the Service unable to cope. Others ran to and fro trying to answer the bidding of their ever-increasing number of superiors. The remainder shrugged their shoulders, did as they were told, and sat tight whilst supervising the room-service for experts. Junior officers faced with the indifferent attitude of their seniors gave vent to their feelings in other directions.

"Jumping on the band-waggon" became the popular jeering phrase and was levelled at colleagues who, in endeavouring to fit themselves into the changing pattern, were favoured with less monotonous types of duty or a more lucrative job. These so-favoured officers merely dangled like puppets at the end of official strings and served no useful purpose either in rehabilitation or their own advancement. This was partly due to the reactionary element, who, being in the majority, stopped any movement to break away from a total custodial role, through the medium of the P.O.A. at branch meetings. Local officials of the Association were in an even worse dilemma. Torn between varying loyalties, these unfortunates tried to gather their members together in a united body and appealed to their executives.

The Executive Committee, involved with the ever-changing mandates of annual conference and still chasing old-fashioned conditions of service which were incompatible with the changing functions of prisons and Borstals, were completely out of touch—their advice being to "stick to the rules."

In major prisons, feuds and personal vendettas flared up between prison officer specialists and discipline grades, because of differing conditions and hours of work. When an attempt at continuity of duty for discipline officers was put into practice,

officers left with the less attractive duties complained bitterly and blamed their local representatives.

Most of the blame for this unhappy state of affairs should have been laid at the door of the Prison Commissioners. Sitting aloof in their complicated maze of Civil Service departments, they allowed principal civil servants to create a completely erroneous image of the practical working side of the Prison Service. The experience of older yet loyal staff was completely ignored and treated as a black spot from a 'flog 'em and hang 'em' prison era. Junior counter-parts, returning from Wakefield refresher courses, either accused seniors of being 'unbending' or remarked that it had been a short holiday.

In what shape was the finished product at the end of this twisting, turning, stopping, starting assembly belt — the incarcerated offender? The socially inadequate became even more so. The non-conformist to prison rules welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate. The mentally disturbed could not cope and eyed his escorting officer with suspicion as he was taken from one interview to another. The institutionalised 'old lag' took refuge with older officers in reminiscing of days long gone whilst smoking each other's 'roll-ups' in the sanctuary of some undiscovered dark corner.

One could hardly imagine that this chaos was the right step toward

therapeutic treatment or even as a deterrent. Could the prison officer be blamed or labelled unco-operative?

Two facts are self-evident. Before and just after entry into the Service as a basic grade officer, we are led to believe that practically all our background is investigated. We are examined, cross-examined and studied by many authorities who have to decide if we are of at least average intelligence, and are tolerant and trustworthy. Having been accepted, this latter qualification becomes a mockery. The set procedure of certain rules of administration and the conglomeration of official forms place no faith at all in our integrity.

We are also informed that the para-military manner of investigation into breaches of the set code of behaviour for prison officers was agreed with the P.O.A. for our own protection. Protection indeed! From whom? It is ironic that clerical officers blessed with an environmental allowance do not need protection. Publications criticising staff and the prison system were adjudged as being injurious to all serving in the Prison Department. This is not so: Mr. A. Bainton's contribution to the April issue of this "Journal" is a case in point. All ranks of the Prison Service in pursuing a firm system of rehabilitation and training should stop looking up and down, but should in fact look across from the Chairman to the lowest paid

officer. Each should recognise the other's qualities and use them to the full. The P.O.A.'s memorandum on the changing role of the prison officer is a good first step.

Prison officers who control men and women for 24 hours a day classify their wards by character, personal habits and social standing. In this respect, the officer's approach to each of his charges must of necessity differ greatly, but in order to maintain control and respect, he must share their confidences and favour one no more than another. Officers must be encouraged and allowed to make some decisions without the frustration of always going through the usual channels. There is nothing more discouraging to an officer when asked a question by a prisoner than to reply "I don't know—I will have to see Mr. So-and-So," or "I can't give you permission, you will have to see the P.O. or A.G." Obviously officers will make wrong decisions, everyone in authority does, but by making these he will learn and by giving wise decisions he will gain respect.

Specialists qualified in treatment or the study of criminals should be at the service of the officer. Qualities and experience would then be compatible with each other in the interests of treatment and training. The art of giving individual treatment coupled with the approach made by the prison officer to the many complex situa-

tions in which he finds himself is, in my opinion, invaluable to anyone who studies human behaviour in penal establishments. I sometimes wonder how many times a day a wise personal word or action of an officer changes an ugly situation into one of tranquillity. Sometimes it is even the expressive way of closing a cell door. These deeds go unsung—nobody wants it otherwise. But at times the action of an officer develops into a reverse situation. Instead of being consulted and the matter examined in a therapeutic way, he is sometimes adjudged as being tactless or slow-minded. Such defamation travels fast, resulting in the true facts of the case becoming garbled, leaving the officer very bitter and apathetic. No small wonder that publicity given to the Prison Service is practically all adverse. It is mostly contributed by ourselves.

I smile cynically when reading recruiting advertisements under the heading "Join these Men" showing pictures of uniformed officers gathered in a "Glee" Club. It is as ludicrous as the military posters advocating that "You are someone in the Army *today*." The basic function of both services has not changed and cannot, but the invitation to 'Come and be joyful' should be replaced by a CHALLENGE to join on the following lines:—

To pass initially an academic examination of a higher standard

than at present, or hold an equivalent certificate of education.

To be patient and tolerant, irrespective of the anti-social behaviour taking place around you each day.

To accept and perform many monotonous duties which are an integral part of the Penal System.

To help, guide, advise, train, control and discipline all men and women coming under your charge.

To accept all the responsibilities that go with the work and not be chary of making decisions.

To be prepared to carry out the duties assigned to you which are willed by the Courts of Law, even though such duties are alien to your nature.

These qualities may be idealistic, but at least they are aimed at attracting the right type of recruit.

To attract men and women into the Service by dangling the bait of multiple rates of overtime working, prospects of promotion, pensions etc., can only bring discontent to those who join solely for these conditions, and to those who join from a sense of vocation a feeling of apathy. For both it is simply not fair. I have been told that domestic and social security is deliberately built up for the prison officer so that the fear of its loss reduces his

liability to corruption. I refuse to believe this near-evil intention, but I can quite understand that the lack of trust in the prison officer would encourage such a misapprehension.

It is generally agreed that social and domestic environment plays a major part in whether one leads a good and useful life, particularly in the lease-lend society we are part of today. To guide and counsel the offender to this end can only be done on a personal basis, and who better to do this than the prison officer? It has been said that the officer is not academically "up to it." To support such a ridiculous statement one must assume that in order to raise a family in a changing society parents must hold a diploma or degree in Social Science to guide or support their offspring.

I would not go as far as to say that every prison officer in his work of reform could solve each and every problem that comes his way, but providing he is of average intelligence, possesses a fair command of English, and is given the right training after a period of practical prison experience, he would be the first and last mile post in modern Penal Reform.

In conclusion may I remind all intending Advisory Committees and Royal Commissions that the greatest Reformer of all time passed among, listened and spoke to all manner of men before delivering His sermons.