

# After Care and the Prison Officer

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*Much has been made of the new role of the Prison, Borstal and Detention Officer envisaged in the A.C.T.O. report on the "Organization of After-care." It seems worthwhile perhaps to look more closely at this "new role" as expressed, and as implied in the report.*

IN THE FIRST PLACE the principle is clearly established that After Care must begin immediately an offender enters a penal institution and that "it must be conceived as a continuing process throughout his sentence." The Report clearly postulates that the whole staff in an institution should direct its efforts to the "individual rehabilitation of each inmate." This in itself implies total revolution in the bulk of establishments. The Committee go on to point out that "in prisons the concept of teamwork by the whole staff directed to individual rehabilitation will take time to reach all individuals and levels." It could be argued from their consequent proposals that that there is not the time available to allow this

idea to "reach" all individuals and so it seems to overcome this difficulty by involving people who accept, as a basic premise, the idea of constructive, sympathetic rehabilitation. They recommend the appointment of social case-workers, changing the name (and perhaps the role) of welfare officers, in all prisons. The social worker is to be the lynch-pin of the rehabilitative effort in the prison. Where then does the prison officer fit in? In this 82-page report there is one small paragraph which deals with his place in the new regime. A great deal has been read into this but its conclusions seem to be definite and limited. This section concedes that prison officers "can and must play a vital part in the work of

rehabilitation." The officer learns a lot about the men; if he observes a personal difficulty he must enlist "the aid of the social worker." Officers' training should be varied to place more stress on group work and so forth. Perhaps one of the main reasons why the Committee have not envisaged a really extended role for the prison officer is that at last the staff element which continually points out that the existence of the 'local' and its concomitant problems effectively precludes any work of this kind has managed to convince somebody. The colossal difficulties under which prison officers work were outlined to the Committee, but there seems to have been no suggestion from people giving evidence as to how these difficulties could be overcome. It seems possible that the unfortunate impression was given that these difficulties were insuperable and that the function of the prison officer had therefore to be restricted. Hence the need for a new 'grade,' a new member of the staff, and a consequent limitation of the role of the prison officer. It must seem lamentable to forward-looking members of the Service that the claim was not made that the prison officer could and would overcome the obstacles between him and the more constructive work he wants. Those who in no way subscribe to the new role of the prison officer should be content. It is interesting to note incidentally that the A.G. in the

prison is never mentioned, not to say discussed.

Detention Centres, it is also recommended, should also have a social worker. This is becoming a reality. Of the new role of the prison officer, it is said, in this type of establishment, that he should be "specially alert."

Borstal is dealt with in more detail, and the discussion here centres around the question as to whether there is need for social workers in view of the presence of housemasters (Assistant Governors). The Committee claim that the training of A.G.s is mainly concerned with the "administration of Penal Institutions." Peter Nokes points out in P.S.J. No. 13 that this shows a surprising lack of awareness of the substance of the Staff Course. On the whole they conclude that there is only an occasional need for "specialist" social workers, and that the housemaster can fulfil the function of an after-care organizer. This will need training they point out. The effect that this will have on the work of the borstal officer (not mentioned) is purely speculative. One or two things are clear. Firstly, that if the borstal housemaster is to be more closely concerned with after-care, someone is going to have to help with the institutional routine administration which occupies most of his time at the moment. Principal Officers in some establishments help substantially with this, but this is by no means

universal. Secondly, if the housemasters are to be "after-care orientated," the staff in his house will have to be so too, and there must be less emphasis on sterile institutional training than is the custom now. The problem of sports teams and aniseed balls will rate low in the scale of priorities. Thirdly, how far the borstal officer is to be concerned in the preparation for after-care is very much dependent on the Governor in general and the housemaster in particular. It is possible that it will be in borstal, more than in prison, that these new concepts will take "time to reach all individuals and levels."

The Joint Working Party on the Role of the Prison Officer reported in April 1964, in an interim report, that they could not "enter into any commitment in respect of the future welfare structure." They were unable to do this because of the A.C.T.O. report and its implications. It is true that the J.W.P. were in support of advanced training for officers, but this is really marginal if the whole emphasis of "training" in penal institutions is going to be "training for release," which it will be if the spirit of the A.C.T.O. report is acted upon. Two conclusions seem to be drawn from this report.

The first is that the prison officer, whilst he will be encouraged to take part in rehabilitative programmes, will not, as a matter of statutory function, be involved *very* deeply in this pro-

gramme. This is partly because of the gloomy picture (and it is gloomy) painted by some staff members of their present limitations, and because of their apparent lack of determination to overcome these. It is also partly true that there are prison officers who do not wish to be involved in any way with the new 'role' and so create difficulties, which may have, in part, been effective in preventing these roles being evolved. They have, because of the highly authoritative (though perhaps not representative) nature of their arguments, in a sense left the A.C.T.O. with no alternative than to solve the problem in other ways.

The second factor is that the extent to which officers are involved in rehabilitation training is entirely dependent upon the opinions of the members of the staff who will have statutory responsibilities for after-care, that is the social worker (in prisons and D.C.s) and the A.G. (in borstal) and the Governor in all of them.

This situation has come about not because of any pressure from outsiders, and certainly not because of pressure from the Welfare Officers, but because of pressure from members of the Service who do not want involvement of this kind, and overdraw the difficulties facing colleagues who want to do more constructive work, whilst giving lip service to the ideals of these more enlightened colleagues. This "reactionary" element is always more vociferous because

their view of a prison officer's job has an historical, firm foundation. Supporters of a proposed new role are not usually very vociferous, even though they may welcome it, because it is untried and *could* therefore prove unworkable or disastrous. It seems that the committee have been given, in their generalized contact with the Service, the impression (correctly) that there are considerable obstacles which prevent a prison

officer engaging in a more constructive task, but they have also been given the impression (incorrectly) that these obstacles are insurmountable. Perhaps the time has come for prison officers who are anxious to extend their professional life to provide solutions to some of the difficulties, and thus not allow less anxious colleagues to misrepresent or under-estimate their intentions, wishes, or abilities to do so.

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