

# Probation and After Care in Holland

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RECENTLY, in the United Kingdom, the activities of the voluntary after-care societies have been taken over by the Probation Service, but in Holland this would be impossible as in that country the societies introduced the probation service and have always been responsible for it and indeed the societies remain the mainspring in all rehabilitation work.

Prevention of crime and after-care work have been successful in Holland where, with a population of 12 million, they have 4,000 in prison as compared with our 30,000 in a population four times as large. We have nine prisoners for every 15,000 of population but the Dutch only five. The opportunities for constructive work in prisons which are not overcrowded are thus very great.

Probation is extensively used and men are also released on parole under supervision so that there is a great need for probation workers, especially as the probation officer also prepares a very full report on every man or woman accused in Dutch courts. Yet there are only about 400 full-time

probation officers as against our 2,000. The secret of their success lies in the widespread use of volunteer associates of whom there are nearly 20 times as many as there are full-time professionals.

Rehabilitation work in Holland began in 1823 when an energetic Dutch businessman, W. H. Suringar, formed the Netherlands Association for Moral Reformation of Prisoners. Mr. Suringar and his associates received from William I, the first king after the French occupation, the right to visit prisoners. The society quickly influenced penal affairs and their activities grew and developed.

The Dutch have the advantage of a smaller and more compact country than we have and so their societies were not tempted to grow in small regional groups. The original society was followed by others founded by religious groups but all of them treat the country as one unit. The four largest societies today are the Netherlands Association for Rehabilitation, the Roman Catholic, the Salvation Army and the Protestant Rehabilitation Societies and in 1960 these

four societies had nearly 9,000 voluntary workers, but it is believed the figure is now slightly smaller.

In the beginning, Mr. Suringar and his friends concentrated on talks on moral improvement and the distribution of tracts, but they later began giving material help and the societies have now developed into organisations preparing for social help on release and doing much preventive work, their success depending more on personal caring than on the giving of material things.

The societies can look back on many pioneer efforts; by 1890 they were giving material help, in 1902 they started a central employment agency, in 1903 came their first half-way house to aid prisoners on release and in 1905 they first received financial help from the State.

The sentence on probation was introduced to the Dutch penal system in 1915 but by then a probation service had been active for over five years, for it was in 1910 that the Dutch societies appointed their first paid probation officer. This officer's first task had been to examine cases, for every discharged prisoner is not a saint and foolish giving only breeds delinquents, he had then to maintain the personal contact made with the prisoner and also to recruit his volunteer helpers.

A further valuable part of the Dutch system for dealing with delinquents, again introduced by the voluntary societies, is the social

report on each accused. These reports were first submitted by the societies to the courts in cases where they felt probation was a suitable sentence. The courts, however, soon recognised the value of objective and full accounts of the accused men and women and it is now standard procedure in all Dutch courts for the judge to be provided with a report on the personality, social background, family and life history of the accused. In a normal year probation officers prepare over 10,000 such reports.

The Mikado made the punishment fit the crime but in Holland the aim is to make the punishment fit the criminal and the social report is the first step in this direction. Sentences are subject to review and the Dutch claim that punishment is invariably a prelude to rehabilitation.

Once sentenced, care is taken to send the man to the most suitable prison depending on his age, the duration of the sentence, judicial antecedents and other factors and they have, for example, four prisons for juveniles aged 17-25. Children under 17 are not treated in adult courts and prisons. At Zutphen, young offenders get vocational training and can pass examinations to get certificates which do not disclose that they have been in prison: training is given for iron and wood workers, masons, cooks, electricians and clerks.

At the juvenile prison at Vught we found a maximum security

prison which was not dark and oppressive although it had been a Gestapo concentration camp, had a guarded fence and buildings with bars built round them. This, like all juvenile prisons, has a resident civilian psychologist in addition to a welfare worker and the psychologist interviews all young men on arrival and sees them more often if the prisoner wishes and it has been found that many men will talk freely to the civilian worker who respects their confidences.

On admission they spend the first three and a half weeks at the observation wing, then move to the orientation wing where reports come from guards, sports leaders and works officers. They can then progress through wings A and B gaining extra association and spare time freedom and trust as these are earned.

In Vught prison the normal working day is from 7.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. with a midday break from noon to 1.30 and "lights out" is at 10 p.m. The atmosphere in the wood and metal workshops was that of an ordinary factory and for the prisoners who are not so bright there is simple repetitive work assembling plastic products into cardboard boxes for an outside firm. The youth returning from a Dutch juvenile prison is accustomed to a normal working day.

It was also possible to visit the open prison at Roermond which most closely resembles an English hostel. The prison is an old house in an ordinary residential

neighbourhood and the men here live during the last five or six months of a long sentence. They go out to work with local firms where only the employer knows they are in prison. Sixty per cent of their earnings goes to the State, the remainder is credited to the prisoner who is given 14s. a week and 2s. a day spending money. During his stay each man has some weekend leaves at home and receives family visits. The first such Dutch prison was opened in 1957.

Dutch rehabilitation works through probation and after-care and to carry out this work and also the preparation of pre-trial reports, probation officers are needed and in Holland extensive use is made of voluntary associates, in fact traditionally it was the voluntary associate who first employed the probation officer. There is in Holland a deeply rooted system of the combination of voluntary workers and fully trained professional probation officers.

The Dutch point out that the probation officer suffers from an inevitable drawback in that he must do his supervision from a distance and when the probationer at any given moment needs help the probation officer is far away but the voluntary worker can be present immediately. This applies especially in country districts. A probation officer with a case load of 50-60 cannot give as much time to a man as he would wish but if he has 50 associates, each with one case, it is a much simpler matter

to supervise and maintain constant help and guidance.\*

Voluntary workers lack skill and sometimes suitability but the essential in their selection is their psychological suitability and this the professional can best assess. The full-time professional recruits his helpers and they are trained through discussions and lectures in local working groups. The use of voluntary workers, especially in country districts and small communities, can lead to a general reduction of delinquency as it becomes more a community effort

\* In 1960 the Dutch societies had 15,000 probationers under care, 1,000 parolees and 1,500 mentally defective and "psychopathic" delinquents also placed under their supervision.

to care for its own delinquents. It has also been possible to extend rehabilitation by groups rather than individuals in the case of small offences such as petty thefts in factories. Recruits to voluntary work often come from suggestions of prisoners and probationers who frequently suggest some relative or neighbour who has previously tried to help. One finds in Holland a general acceptance of the fact that men can be led rather than driven. Coercion plays no part in reform, for the people of Holland have seen the futility of force. during the second world war they experienced the full pressure of a Gestapo which failed completely to change their ideas although over two million Dutch people died.

**"Hill Hall,** which Nicholas Pevsner calls 'one of the most impressive earlier Elizabethan houses' is now an open prison for women . . ." writes Frank Dawes in *Essex Countryside* (published by Letchworth Printers, Ltd., Letchworth).

He says: "At the churchyard gate I met a small working party in the charge of a young and most personable wardress who was making absolutely no parade of her authority. All answered my 'Good morning' spontaneously enough and I got the impression that H.M. Prison Commissioners are getting the right sort of staff, at any rate at Hill Hall".