

The Administration Officer

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THE ARTICLE by Mr. Lee entitled "Managing to Govern" which appeared in the July issue of the PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL provokes me to take up my pen to challenge his views. May I, therefore, as a former administration officer put forward my personal views on the status and functions of the administration officer and the part I see he has to play in the management of Prison Service establishments in the 60's and beyond.

I must refute categorically the suggestion that there is in any way a power struggle between the governor and the administration officer. What is often mistaken for such a struggle is an effort to determine and establish lines of demarcation within the rules as they exist today. Nowhere can one find in concise and explicit form the duties of the executive grade in penal establishments, particularly the duties and responsibilities of the administration officer. One has to peruse the relevant passages of the 1933 Standing Order Book, the ensuing circulars of three

decades and the manuals. Difficulties arise between governors and administration officers on the interpretation of these rules or because of the absence of any rules at all. As Mr. Lee rightly points out, the difficulties are no less great from the governor's point of view in determining his responsibilities. In a small establishment, say a detention centre, the warden may consider certain jobs are his, whereas in a larger establishment, the same jobs are done by the administration officer. The higher the governor rises in the Service, the more difficult it is for him to deal with detail, indeed if he tries to do so, it can only be to the detriment of his overall responsibilities. Moreover, at the large establishments, the administration officer is a senior executive officer with a substantial executive and clerical staff; he is not a junior executive, he is both capable of and expectant of more delegated responsibility, being paid a salary commensurate with this. But the issue remains, should the

division of duties be arbitrary and dependent upon local determination? If, for instance, it was clearly laid down that the administration officer should be responsible for the opening and distribution of the post, then this would ensure that the ridiculous and time wasting ceremony that takes place in some establishments each morning was put on a proper business-like basis. Some governors have tried this and found that executive staff are quite capable of handling paper knives and can be relied upon to bring to the governor's notice all papers of an important or interesting nature. In terms of Treasury costings, the morning post-opening and associated "knitting" session is rather expensive and I commend to Mr. Lee and others the Treasury booklet *Costing as an aid to Management*. I personally, would delegate the post routine to an executive officer or to a clerical officer and save the valuable time of the administration officer. I understand the position may be improving as a result of the introduction of the non-returnable minute, but my much laboured example is no less valid if happily it is disappearing.

The solution of the problems which beset the management of prisons does not lie in the direction pointed by Mr. Lee. At the outset, he must appreciate that the assistant governor, class II, is no more than a basic training grade and the

analogy of having the governor's keys in his back pocket is no more relevant than the private with the field-marshal's baton in his knapsack. It can equally be claimed that each clerical officer is a potential under-secretary of state. The solution lies in the commonsense distribution (i.e. delegation) of managerial functions. It lies in the appreciation that no longer can prisons be run on pre-war paramilitary autocratic lines. Gone are the days when the main qualification for being a prison governor was an army rank and for being a steward, many years faithful service balancing the cash-book. Governors require to be professional students of penology and criminology with a suitably varied apprenticeship in the lower governor grades; to this I would add training in management. Likewise the administration officer must be a professional civil servant of high educational attainment, proved ability and experience gained by a thorough training in all aspects of administration. I hear outraged cries that this is the current state of affairs and the declared policy, but I venture to suggest that old practices die hard and that here and there the ghosts of the past still lurk in our penal establishments.

I suggest that the governor's role in modern terms is analogous to that of managing director. His

fellow directors are the medical officer, chaplain, deputy governor, administration officer, chief officer, senior works officer, tutor organiser, welfare officer, industrial manager and perhaps other senior officers depending upon the staffing complement at certain establishments; but not assistant governors. Their position is clear, they are the junior executives of the firm with certain responsible but circumscribed functions. In time, they may be elevated to the board of directors and with luck and ability one day may take the managing director's chair. Mr. Lee must be content to learn his trade in the only possible way, by devilling for his governor and accepting such delegated functions as the governor determines, but none which encroach upon the functions of the local heads of departments. To expound the analogy of the prison as a business unit, I see each director responsible for a separate function of the establishment, their collective responsibility being to the governor and through him to the Home Office. Within this framework, I can see Mr. Lee's dilemma as this puts the assistant governor, class II, in an anachronistic position. Either the A.G. II grade is largely superfluous to the efficient running of an institution or it must be acceptable on its present terms, namely as the "housemaster" grade, or as I

prefer to think of it, as the training grade.

I have been amused to read in several places references to primary and secondary goals. What nonsense this is! I am reminded of a nautical story of the captain who considered the engineer's job to be an easy one and the engineer who thought his the harder and more skilled job. They agreed to change over for one voyage: when the engines eventually broke down, the captain in the engine-room reluctantly asked the engineer for assistance, whereupon the engineer on the bridge replied that it was too late, they had just struck a rock and were sinking rapidly. The duty of each member of the staff is to render efficient service in the job for which he is paid. Let there be less nonsense talked about vocation by some grades with the inference that others work for the money and therefore have different goals. All animals are equal but some are more equal than others, said George Orwell; how true this appears to be with regard to assistant governors and executive staff. How often is the executive officer regarded as just a clerk and the administration officer as the senior clerk by some assistant governors. This leads to the reciprocal view by some administration officers that assistant governors are merely the governor's messenger boys and issuers of table-tennis balls.

Both grades must achieve a better understanding of their complementary functions and a more positive lead from the top is required. A governor friend of mine once told me that the advice he received from a senior officer on his first appointment as a governor, class III, was "make sure you're the boss and not the steward". I hope this is as isolated as it is improper and totally unwarranted. The administration officer fully realises he has a duty and loyalty to his governor. He has, nevertheless, a wide range of varied duties to administer. I do not propose to catalogue them but the extent and variety is formidable. His position is analogous to that of company accountant and secretary, plus his special responsibilities for industries and the employment of prisoners. In this position he is the confidant and adviser to his governor on all matters for which he is responsible. Where this is fully appreciated, and this is generally the case, there is a happy relationship between the governor and executive grades.

There is no room for complacency about the present situation, a great deal needs to be done by way of in-service training, conferences and consultations, encouragement from top management, clear directives, etc., to foster goodwill in the hearts of prison staff of all grades. The future may hold many surprises in the development of penal

institutions but whatever they are, there must be one officer in charge. The governor must govern, manage and serve his masters too. He must be assisted by experts selected and appointed for their special skills, ability and experience. They must be welded into a team, skilfully directed by a man of real ability and understanding. The administration officer must be a key member of this team as the business manager of the establishment—in support of this view I quote from the "Introductory Factual Memorandum" submitted by H.M. Treasury to the Fulton Committee regarding the role of the general executive class, paragraph 302 states: "the responsibility of the general executive class may be summarised as the day-to-day conduct of Government business within the framework of established policy, including for instance, the higher work of accounts and revenue collection and the management of regional and local offices". As prison administration becomes more complex, the governor must be free of all routine duties and must delegate freely to his senior staff. The administration officer and the executive staff are capable of accepting and discharging many of these duties, leaving the governor free to devote his specialist talents to the rehabilitation of the offender.