

## Group Therapy in Prisons

SIR,

The Mountbatten Report is widely accepted as a fair and reasonable document. One topic to which it refers briefly is group therapy. Speaking of the new prison at Grendon it says: "Group therapy is a specific psychiatric technique, but a close involvement of prisoners and staff, whether by group counselling or by other experiments, provides opportunities for pressures and discontents to come spontaneously to the surface where, if they cannot be resolved they can at least be identified".

Group therapy is a new idea, relatively unfamiliar. I believe it can be used in prisons but only under certain conditions.

Therapy must in the first place be realistic. An American prison group therapist replied to my question how he handled breaches of law and plans to escape of which he might learn in the group, "I am only interested in their dreams, not in their behaviour". Not surprisingly, group therapy in that particular prison has since been discontinued.

If the therapist is too much on the side of the prison authorities he will be distrusted by the inmates, if too much on the side of the latter, therapy is not likely to be allowed to continue. There is here a similar problem of balance to that faced by the Probation Service: it has developed a tradition that enables the probation officer to be a "servant of the court" but at the same time befriend the probationer. For group therapy the same issue of attitude to authority is crucial.

A third prerequisite is a sense of community in the prison. Therapy is a practical possibility in British prisons only because some of them constitute genuine communities, more comparable to other modern communities than to prisons of the bad old days which merely imposed blind obedience.

Such a community sense must be protected: the "normal" prisoner and the prison officer alike need protection from vicious criminals, who form only a very small fraction of the inmates. This would ensure recruitment of superior officers, whose day to day contact with the prisoners largely determines the atmosphere of the institution. There is a preliminary theoretical issue, however. Will it be to the advantage of the prisoner, when he obtains his freedom, to have become integrated into a prison community? Fifty years ago it was felt desirable to adjust the prisoner to prison, by breaking him: in the changed atmosphere it is necessary to reconsider what adjustment is desirable for him.

Yours etc.,

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## Custody and/or Rehabilitation

Sir,

The Mountbatten Report seems to have led to certain resentments within the Prison Service that have not, as yet, found expression in your columns. A recent letter by one of my colleagues to the Journal of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants exemplifies this. Mr. De Berker writes: ("State Service", March 1967) "The Mountbatten report and the debate which has surrounded it, has made it clear that the Prison Department has the tasks of custody and rehabilitation of prisoners in that order of priority".

May I suggest that this interpretation of the report is a case of "the eye of the beholder"; for, while suggesting (section 18 of the summary) that each governor of a closed prison should have the services of a "qualified security officer", the report also urges (in the same section) that specialisation in "training" and "rehabilitation" should be encouraged. Similarly, Lord Mountbatten's recommendation for the extension of the principle of home leave (section 23) will surely make as great a contribution to our rehabilitative as to our custodial goals. It would be the blindest cynicism to suggest that the "rehabilitative" recommendations of the Mountbatten Report are not seriously intended.

If we expand a little on the theme of specialisation in the training of officers, the opportuneness of the report's recommendation will be clearer. In *The Prison Officers' Magazine* (February 1967) Mr. George Nicholson proposed a new series of grades for prison officers: "The proposal is that the grades should be roughly as follows: group officer, rehabilitation officer, welfare officer, after-care officer". And, in the same issue, the third interim report of the Joint Working Party on the Role of the Prison Officer stated: "Further progress has been made in the provision of extra-mural training courses for prison officers. It so far appears that arrangements for extra-mural courses in criminology, human development and other related subjects in co-operation with universities and colleges of further education could be made available for some 50 to 60 establishments".

Whether officers should be permanently differentiated by their training, or whether each officer should fill each role at different stages of his career is a more particular question. What is quite clear is that, when the

recommendations of the Mountbatten Report are seen as a whole, they offer a great opportunity for the realisation of the hopes of a great number of prison officers and, I would add, of those who work with them.

It would be most distressing if we lost this opportunity. Already "security officers" are being trained at Wakefield; it is up to us to urge on our Department that corresponding implementation should be given to the other side of the coin—to press for similar training in group work and rehabilitation.

The urgency of this matter cannot be over emphasised. For, already, it seems that a hasty decision has been taken: in agreeing to implement the report's suggestion (section 17) for a new grade of senior prison officer has the Prison Department avoided consideration of the much more relevant type of reorganisation of grades proposed by Mr. Nicholson?

If 1967 is eventually seen as a year which marked only a fresh concern with the implementation of our custodial aims, the fault will be ours and not Lord Mountbatten's.

I am,

Yours etc.,

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#### CONTRIBUTORS (continued)

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