# Penal and Total Institutions

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A TOTAL INSTITUTION can be described as an institution that confines the inmate population in living conditions 24 hours a day. It provides work, recreation, eating and sleeping in the confine of some area. The community are the same in place and role. The result of total confinement of people within an institution is that the institution directly meets all personal needs which are going to be required by all confined. To have a complete total institution, it would be necessary to cut off all outside contacts and the inmate population be subjected to the demands of the institution. It is impossible to have an institution completely cut off, because the institution itself has to depend upon outside contacts for its proper functioning.

Closed penal establishments are, by their nature, the nearest approach to full totality. In making a comparative study with other types of institution within the classification of "total", it is necessary to recognise the institution falling within the category, such as mental hospitals and monasteries. To compare a penal institution with either a mental hospital or monastery and say they are similar is a bold statement, for the goals of each widely differ. On the one hand a penal population is an enforced one, while the other institutions are not completely enforced. Monasteries (although they have a prison-like existence) cannot be compared, for the monks themselves choose by vows to live their way of life. The nearest comparison is the mental hospital, for a vast number of their patients are obtained by order, and like prison, detained for the protection of society. However, today there are a growing number of people who enter mental hospitals on their own free choice because of mental illnesses which have grown with modern living and are treatable.

Being confined in total institutions, social relationships take on

a peculiar form, and there is a similarity of relationships both in prison and mental hospital. This may be due to the fact that in each institution there can be found a cross section of the inmate population. Both are subjected to security control and needs. In living together, they have a relationship with one another and the character type and degree of these social relationships depend on a wide variety of conditions. In both types of institutions, rules and regulations have to be applied to ensure the smooth running, and as a result, a barrier is developed between staff and inmates. The staff look upon the inmates as inferior beings, and therefore the role of inmates is subordinate and on the lowest level of the institution. All are classed the same, irrespective of the social status attained prior to admittance to the institution.

Social structure of staff is developed through grades and comprises of superior staff (non-uniformed) and subordinates (uniformed). Each grade develops and guards jealously, its own social status. All policies, orders and instructions setting out the way the institution will be run to achieve the desired aims, are passed downwards from the head of the institution through the various grades. This system creates problems of interpretation and communication thereby developing

a lack of the "personal touch", which adds to the individual losing his identity. The subordinate staff, who have the responsibility of giving the information to the inmate, are often misunderstood. Rules and regulations are enforced upon the inmates by the uniformed staff, with the result that officer/inmate relationships are often in conflict. The inmates look upon the subordinate staff as all that is evil in authority. There is no doubt that the officer in the prison and the nurse in the mental hospital find themselves in a buffer state, receiving the pressures placed upon them by senior members of the staff and inmates alike.

Inmates in both types of institution do have and share a similar kind of experience. Each on entering his respective institution loses his individual dependency. Loss of liberty and the taking away of personal clothing and effects, leads to a loss of identity. Contacts with the outside world are limited and inmates and fitted into the institution with numbers in place of names. Inmates are not seen by staff as having a structure. This helps to create the gap between inmates and staff, and rules of behaviour for staff and inmates forbid the gap to be closed especially among the prison community.

In general, total institutions have the smooth running of their units as their primary aim. The prison

inmate or mental patient is not accepted or tolerated as an equal with others of the institution and thereby controlled as such by the authorities. Many patients in the mental hospital submit with the hope of getting well. Some prison inmates submit to prison routine if it meets their needs. Others do not submit easily. Anyway whether the institution is accepted or not, a sub-culture emerges which affects the personalities of the inmates. The more one is addicted to institutional life, the more pronounced is his personality attitude. Once in the grip, it is difficult to break away.

Mental hospitals today are adopting a more permissive regime by the development of therapeutic treatments. With group relationships, involving the efforts of staff and patients alike, the patients are encouraged to try and understand their problems by discussing and expressing themselves with others in the same predicament. A staff/patient relationship aimed at coming to terms with the problem of mental instability. Prisons today are looking to see if a similar approach can be effective with the unstable personality of the prisoner. At present only the surface of group therapy is being scratched. The development along these lines in a penal institution must proceed with caution, for many conflicts can and do arise when change and tradition clash. One can point out

that by this development of change, the individual is being focused upon.

A comparison can be shown in the way these total institutions are proceeding, but in times of pressure, such as public alarm and lack of confidence, the total institutions, especially prisons, will swing back to the traditional line of defence. If penal institutions are to make progress in providing the means in which an inmate, by his self-exertion can change his attitude towards social responsibility, then a balance has to be struck between security and rehabilitation. Security is the responsibility of all who serve in the institution and not just one grade of worker and therefore all have to ensure that basic security measures are carried out with efficiency. Likewise, with the carrying out of rehabilitative policies of the institution, all staff, irrespective of their specialised functions, have to be part of a team as a whole, in which communication and understanding of each other's role is appreciated—this being the foundation of rehabilitation.

If prevention of crime is to be one of the main goals of society the penal institution has to come to terms with change in a total environment in which there will be some hope for the inmate to re-adjust himself for acceptance by society and society has a social responsibility in accepting him back into the fold.