Detention

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DETENTION WAS INTRODUCED to the range of methods open to the Courts for dealing with young offenders by Section 18 of the Criminal Justice Act, 1948. It is perhaps enough to say that its general intention was to provide an alternative to imprisonment for young offenders aged from fourteen to twenty-one; and so to pave the way for the provisions of the Magistrates' Court Act 1952, Section 107 (4), which forbids the imposition of sentences of imprisonment upon this age group.

The Dilemma of Detention

Since the passing of the Act the training in Detention Centres has, in some ways unfortunately, become associated with the notion of a short sharp shock. The difficulty of carrying this idea into effect is more easily seen if a simple practical question is asked. In order to produce a short sharp shock for eighty boys during twenty four hours in the day and for three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, what is to be done? Lord Pish Tush (it will be recollected) first described this course of treatment and his arrangements are recorded in the lines:

To sit in solemn silence in a dull
dark dock,
In a pestilential prison with a
life long lock,
A-waiting the sensation of a
short sharp shock,
From a cheap and chippy,
chopper on a big black block.

Already we are on the fringe of absurdity.

But this absurdity touches detention in a very real way. Pleasantly alliterative though it may be, the phrase disturbingly suggests that somewhere in a dim background there is carried on a system of semi-legalised physical torment. Nothing, it need scarcely be said, is further from the truth.

The consequence has been the emergence of two principal bodies of criticism. There are those who unthinkingly welcomed the sort of regime which the phrase suggested without considering how it was to be carried out, and who, having since visited a centre have been disappointed that no short sharp shock was readily perceptible: and there are those who condemned the idea of detention from its first inception, who seized upon the words as exactly expressing their worst fears, and who have since made no attempt to visit any Centre to re-examine its methods.

It should therefore be said at once that however pleasing the short sharp shock theory may be to those not actually called upon to undergo it, it does not stand up to serious examination. Intelligent persons have suggested that detention centre inmates should not have beds; that they should never be allowed to wash in hot water;

that they should not have books; should not play games; and so on. These suggestions are no doubt made so that detention may be suitably hard: though what exactly is meant by hard in this context is something which has never been satisfactorily established. This is one of the dilemmas of penal reform and is particularly the dilemma of detention. It is not easy to decide what, in detention, is a luxury, and what is essential to it. It is even less easy to know how hard (or how soft) the regime should be. One thing however seems clear. To follow this sort of thinking very far is likely to result in detention centres becoming very much what prisons were some hundred years or so ago. Thus with very little effort it will be possible to come full-circle and to establish something which will be the exact opposite of the declared object of detention—to provide an alternative to imprisonment for young offenders aged from fourteen to twenty-one.

In spite of this danger it will probably be generally agreed that the young men sent to detention do require pulling up—and somewhat sharply. What detention has to do therefore is to provide a regime that will not reproduce all that was worst of the dirt and desolation of the old time prison—and so justifiably arouse public fears; and yet will provide the tonic shock suggested by those who inarticulately require that detention shall be 'hard'.

There seems to be only one way to do this. This is to insist that whatever is done shall be done as well as the boy is able to do it and that no other standard shall be accepted. To be kept at a high standard of performance in everything all day and every day will, it is suggested, together with the paraphernalia of security and an atmosphere of discipline, provide all the short, sharp, shock that is necessary or practicable. And it has these added advantages: that when the shock wears off, as inevitably it must, and a feeling of familiarity takes its place, a natural inclination to do things well may possibly remain; and the method may be used to train as many boys as necessary throughout the whole of their sentences without undue strain.

It is easy enough, no doubt, once the way has been pointed, to agree that this shall be the object of detention and to define it in suitable language. As thus:

> The objects of detention shall be to induce in young offenders a respect for law, a regard for property, and a proper sense of pride in themselves; to foster in them an awareness of their own neglected abilities: and to do so by means of an ordered, regular, and demanding routine, and by the personal influence of the staff.

But this is not to dispose of the problem of detention. There then arises another and greater difficulty. Critics and theorists have, as a rule, a very clear idea of the results they desire that detention shall achieve. They require that youths shall become less intractable, less

noisy, less given to the use of offensive weapons (and language), less riotous, less disorderly, less dishonest: more inclined to useful occupations, to good manners, to more responsible attitudes and orderly behaviour, and to honesty. They would like to see them more mentally alert and aware, and less apathetic and bored. These are very admirable aims. The further problem of detention is that when techniques are employed to try to produce these results the critics do not recognise them for what they are. They see only the drills and not their significance. And they appear to imagine that the good habits which they so much wish to see in the inmates can be learnt without being practised. It is to this problem that consideration must now be given.

The Practice of Detention

Detention has to deal with two principal classes of offenders—the disorderly and the dishonest; and it will be well to recognise that these two groups are not identical. The disorderly, those who brandish offensive weapons and who fight and brawl, are by no means always dishonest; nor are the dishonest necessarily disorderly. There are, it is true, those who incline somewhat to both—the car thieves for example. But broadly speaking there are two main groups and it will be evident that in handling them differing techniques will be required. To complain therefore, as some do, that the keeping tidy of lockers is not calculated to make anyone more honest is to mistake part, at least, of the object of detention.

If any attempt is to be made in a short time to induce orderly habits and thoughts in youths who have hitherto been disorderly it will be very necessary that every aspect of detention centre life shall play its part. It will therefore be desirable that the very buildings themselves shall assist by permitting an orderly movement. If there can be established by a proper setting out of changing rooms, lavatories, showers, washing facilities, dormitories and so on, a fundamental basis for an orderly and logical flow of traffic it is not perhaps fanciful to suggest that this may have some impact, however slight, upon the hitherto unruly habits and disorderly conduct of the inmates, as well as upon their confused and unthinking minds. But again no claim is made that these arrangements will make anyone more honest.

Routine

The daily routine, or to be more exact, the application and interpretation of the daily routine will be directed to lending emphasis to this need for reasoned thinking in an orderly world. It would be tedious and indeed unnecessary to list the possible ways in which this may be attempted. A single example will suffice. This routine will almost certainly provide between the hours of twelve and one for the single item 'Dinner'. It will be possible, of course, for the matter to end there. That is to say inmates may arrive as they are ready and

in overalls, queue with a plate in either hand, bolt their food and depart in search of it matters not what profitless occupation until one o'clock.

Or they may come in from work, wash off muddy boots and put wet overalls in the drying room; put on house shoes in the changing room and picking up soap and towel (which they will have remembered to put there in the morning) proceed to wash. In the dormitories they will complete their changing for dinner and when all are assembled in the dining room the meal may be served. A table of four will collect a first course and having returned to their table may be succeeded by the next. At the conclusion of that course one boy will remove the plates to the scullery for washing later whereupon all four can collect a pudding. Each boy must therefore give some of his attention to what is going on so that proper turns may be taken. Manners will be noted: a 'thank you' to the cook will not be out of place. And finally the tables will each be cleared by one boy and when all are ready a return can be made to the dormitories to change back again for work.

Thus will be taught with a minimum of difficulty and effort (the new boys learning from the example of the seniors) tidiness, orderliness, good manners, cleanliness, alertness of mind, and respect for and care of property.

Critics of detention who see only this aspect of the work when they visit are disposed to speak slightingly of 'regimentation', to deplore the 'moulding to a pattern', and are quick to point out that all this is but the outward and visible sign of only a present intention on the part of the inmates to obey rules for reasons of expediency. If this indeed were all, detention would stand condemned. If there is to be any real permanence, if there is to be any real change of heart, there must be derived from somewhere an inward and spiritual grace. It would not be reasonable to suppose that such inward grace will be supplied solely by attention to cleanliness even though it be next to godliness; nor by manners which proverbially maketh man. But it will be a strange philosophy indeed that denies the value of these things: and denying them supposes that moral training is thereby made easier. It does nevertheless happen that people who readily understand the need for an inward and spiritual grace appear to suppose that grace will burgeon in some spontaneous manner from within with no fostering care from without.

Moral Training

It is therefore necessary to consider from what influences may spring this inward and spiritual grace. Broadly speaking it will be from the words and example of the staff and from their interpretation of the regime. But unless this is to remain a pious hope or idle counsel of perfection some practical work will need to be done.

Enquiries must be made of every person who may be likely to give useful information about the boys' backgrounds and previous histories—parents, police, probation service,

school, employer, and so on. These, taken together, may indicate the sort of life the boy has been leading, the stresses and strains to which he has been subjected, and may assist in suggesting why he has behaved as he has.

Thus a first appraisal can be made. It now becomes of the first importance that the staff—the officer in charge of the house, party or gymnasium—should make their own estimate and make it known to the Warden. This they will do by means of weekly reports. These reports take the form of answers to certain questions. Thus the house officer comments upon the boy's general attitude to staff and to other boys; on whether he is naturally clean and smart; on whether he takes trouble or mumbles under his breath when given an order. The work party officer reports on his standard of work, whether he works hard, is reliable and can be trusted to do a job alone, or whether he has constantly to be supervised: whether the work is beyond his capacity or whether he grasps instruction readily: and again what is his attitude to other people. Any special characteristics not comprehended in these questions (and other similar ones) will be reported under a general heading.

It will scarcely be possible that all boys shall be reported on each week in this way. But it is important that it shall be done weekly until the boy attains his Grade II for which he becomes eligible after the first month. Another report after the next month will bring the inmate to within a few weeks of discharge (regarding three months as a normal sentence). This will provide a useful opportunity for a review of progress before discharge.

The value of these reports is very great and they are interpreted to the boy by the Warden each week. He will, if necessary, discuss the reports with the staff responsible for making them. It may be that a policy will be necessary so that all members will stress the same training point to a boy. Advice which he will not accept from one is perhaps more likely of acceptance if tendered by all.

So by example, report, consultation, agreed policies and advice an attempt is made to arouse an inward and spiritual grace. But grace may not always be attained save through tribulation. It may well happen that advice is rejected, that no effort is made, that positive misconduct occurs. In such extremities it may be necessary to proceed to disciplinary measures.

Discipline

The question of standards of discipline within any institution (and perhaps more especially within a detention centre) is one so calculated to arouse controversy and passion that it is scarcely possible that any written word may meet with general acceptance. But the problem exists and must be faced: nor will it be made the easier by a non-committal, hesitant, or apologetic approach.

The truth is, as has so often been stated, that, in the end, discipline, by which is meant a will to conform to certain standards of behaviour whether inside or outside an

institution, must come from within the individual. It must spring from the inward and spiritual grace already mentioned. It is an error to suppose however, as many people do, that this self-discipline which comes from within will emerge with no encouragement from outside: with no encouragement, certainly, from a formal or orderly routine which is curtly dismissed as regimentation: and with no assistance either from a reasonably close supervision. This is commonly denied on two grounds: one, that boys must be given an opportunity to misbehave so that they may be seen for what they really are—a policy horridly suggestive of the *agent provocateur*; and second, that if they are controlled whilst in custody they will, on release, be lost from absence of this control—a theory which completely ignores that they may have learnt the necessary lessons in the meantime from the patient instruction of the staff.

Perhaps the first thing that should be said is that it is not necessary, simply because the word detention is involved, to try to maintain discipline by means of constant loud shouting or a feverish running about. Because this is not done visitors sometimes wonder where the short sharp shock is to be found. A quiet firmness in an ordered life is what is required—but the firmness must be firm: and when that is established there can be demanded the highest standards of work and conduct. In such an atmosphere it will be the object of the staff, as has already been said, to induce in the inmates a respect for law, a regard for property, and a proper sense of pride in themselves; and to foster in them an awareness of their own neglected abilities.

Deliberate misconduct or any failure on the part of the inmates to make the best of themselves and their opportunities will be dealt with as a disciplinary offence. Of the various sanctions which may be imposed loss of remission and removal to a detention room are by far the most important. The use of this first very powerful sanction will, by itself, produce a very high standard of work and conduct. Furthermore it can be explained to even the dullest boy that if he wastes time at the beginning of his sentence the only effect will be that more will be added at the end; and for the staff a few more days training time will be provided. But perhaps more important, the boy will immediately be required to return and face the situation which gave rise to the report. This, though valuable, will not always be wise; and for those (usually few) occasions on which it might not be wise the detention room is provided. Here the inmate will be provided with some separate work out of association with the other boys. But even in a detention centre there will be borne in mind the general principle that the term should not be longer than that which it is thought necessary in order to produce the change of heart for which the staff is looking and hoping.

Education

Some of the boys received into

detention will be below school leaving age and these will be found in the junior centres. Their necessarily full-time education may be regarded as a continuation of their normal schooling.

In a senior centre 'schooling' will not be suitable for eighteen and nineteen-year-old youths during so short a period as three months necessary though it may sometimes appear to be. The sort of boys who come to the senior centres have no great use for writing and arithmetic. They are not called upon in their ordinary everyday affairs to write frequent and clearly expressed letters. They do not need to know more of arithmetic than will allow them to give change. In the same way that others who consider themselves to be better educated have allowed their Latin or algebra to lapse because they have no especial use for either, so have boys in detention allowed their English and arithmetic to lapse. It therefore becomes a real question whether, in a short sentence of detention, it is wise or useful to compel a boy to devote hours to subjects for which he has no particular use, in which he has no interest, and in which he is likely to be as ignorant as ever six months after his discharge.

As boys are continually moving in and out of the centres by the ordinary processes of admission and discharge some cyclical method of conducting further education in subjects likely to be of interest to the class of boy received is required. Many new subjects of which the boy may hitherto have had no glimmering but which may well be useful to him suggest themselves. One only will serve as an example of what can be done. A course is established in the internal combustion engine. On one evening instruction is given about plugs; on another pistons; on a third the gear box; and so on. Provided the parts are related to the whole there emerges an intelligible and interesting course no matter when the individual boy is admitted to or discharged from the class.

It is abundantly necessary that young men of detention centre age should be fit. This has been recognised by making an hour's physical education every day a statutory requirement for all inmates. But again the shortness of the sentence leads naturally to a consideration of what may be suitable and practical, and what may appear to be suitable in theory but has in fact little practical value.

Any games played must be of an active nature: they must be easily learnt: they must arouse interest: they must be adult: and they must be such that a boy may be reasonably inspired to go in search of a similar game on release—and find it. Two activities fit all these requirements, running and association football. It will therefore only be reasonable to devote some time to these things so that the inmates may be instructed in the use of leisure when they come to be discharged.

It has been argued that detention is not the place for table

tennis and darts and the existence of an indoor games room has been regarded as importing a holiday camp atmosphere. This is not a reasonable view. It is not uncommon to hear magistrates and others exhorting youngsters to join a youth club or to visit their local libraries and so to provide themselves with leisure time occupations. If this is sincerely meant it is not then reasonable to send them for three months to an establishment where no suggestion of introduction to a youth club atmosphere is permitted, or where the reading of library books is rigorously forbidden. It will be better to devote half an hour at the end of the day to these things and to encourage the inmates, additionally, to treat with respect property which is not their own.

It is almost safe to say that boys received into detention know nothing of their religion. This will be observable on their very first appearance in Chapel. It will then be found that it is always necessary to announce upon what page the Order of Service is to be found as failure to do so will result in most of the new arrivals becoming lost in the Commination Service or straying helplessly and sadly amongst the Psalms.

In religious matters, as in all others, it is important to know precisely what it is intended to do. There is a considerable spirit of enquiry amongst most boys about religion and not the least amongst those who are sent to detention. Instruction is on a cyclical pattern. Thus each three month period must comprehend the complete Life of Christ. It matters not that this arrangement will not maintain the liturgical tradition. What does matter is that the instruction shall be dynamic and forceful—if necessary dramatic. Its impact on the mind must be equal in every way to the impact of the hour's physical training upon the body. Time is short. A sense of urgency must prevail. There will be visual aids—a quarterly showing of suitable films on the wonders of nature and matters of fact and faith. Thus these things will come alive and be real: and the memory of the Story will remain long after the recollection of the most brilliant sermon will have faded or the weekly readings from the Old Testament have been forgotten.

Thus the instruction in detention. What of the Sunday Service? Most boys have a religious sense. They have moments when they see what they might have been and when they would give a good deal never to have entered upon evil ways. They have moments when they perceive, however dimly, that it is better to be pure than impure, law abiding than disorderly. The Sunday service should aim at these faint spiritual stirrings and in attempting to develop them will, by encouraging the boys to try again, bring them to an awareness of the grace that is within them.

Finally reference should perhaps be made to one of the more serious criticisms of detention — that individual treatment of the boys is not possible and, as a more extreme variant, that contact between boy

and staff is discouraged or denied.

The critic should work for a week in a Centre. He would then find friendliness and good humour existing between officer and boy. He would realise that a just anger on the part of the staff at some misdemeanour, reflecting perhaps a grave character defect in the inmate, is not merely an unnecessary display of an unbridled authority. He would see the care that is taken over the weekly reports. He would hear the advice that is given to inmates so that disciplinary offences may be avoided. He would appreciate the desire that officers have that their charges shall do well ('the award of Grade II would be an encouragement to him'). He would notice that boys, although kept at full stretch, bear no kind of resentment. He would hear the discussions that take place to determine what will be the best way of handling an individual boy. And he would begin to understand how it is that one who, on arrival, was described as, 'ungainly in action, of weak concentration, his personal habits far from what one expects', could, at the end of five months, be said to be, 'a leader among boys, keen and alert, and very proud of having learnt to make mats': and could also, three months after discharge, write to his Physical Education Instructor:

"Dear Sir,

Just a line or two in appreciation to the good advice you gave me before I was discharged. I know you will be pleased to hear that I have joined a gym club so I can carry on learning my gymnastics which I hope to benefit by in the future. I know you won't believe me but I have really got my brother interested in keepfit exercises. I will now close with confidence."

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