

The Next Decade

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IN THE FIRST number of this Journal, Sir Lionel Fox, whose recent death is deeply regretted by the service to which he gave most of his working life, wrote of the prison service since the war. He had a story of solid achievement to tell, while I must deal with hopes and ambitions whose fulfilment depends not only on the efforts of the prison service, but on events which we cannot control. Prophecy is a dangerous business, whether it be about human beings or horses, and it is no more possible to predict the size and nature of the prison population in ten years' time than it is to give the name of the Derby Winner of 1970.

Who would have thought ten years ago that a prison population of 20,000 would grow to nearly 80,000; and who can say whether it will continue to grow, or whether, as it has in the past, it will decline? This is the major uncertainty against which we must plan the future of the service,

but there are others no less important. There is to-day a very high level of crime among young people. For the prison service this has meant that new establishments, such as Everthorpe and Hindley, which were intended for adult prisoners, have had to be used for young offenders. There is some reason to think that this high rate of crime among young people may not be maintained and that boys and girls born after the war may be less unstable and more law-abiding. But methods of research are not yet sufficiently certain, and we cannot tell whether the younger element of the population, on which we must obviously concentrate so much of our efforts, will continue to make as heavy demands on our resources as it does to-day. Nor can we foresee the effects of changes in social conditions and social policies in other fields, such as mental health and the general welfare services, all of which may have an indirect bearing on our work.

But despite the uncertainties of

the future it is not difficult to see what our main objectives must be. First, we have to see that our existing organisation is as effective as we can make it; secondly, we must prepare to meet those new demands which we can foresee, and keep enough flexibility to deal with the unexpected; and thirdly, we must seek every means to increase our knowledge and understanding of the problems which face us to-day and in the future. To this three-fold problem there are three keys — the training and effective use of staff, the development of more individualised methods of treatment, and the extension of research.

Of these the training and effective use of staff is, without doubt, the most important. This article is not the place for a full discussion of the question of recruitment. It is well known that, despite recent improvements in pay and conditions of service, it is not easy to find men and women with the right qualities for work in the prison service. Whatever changes there may be in conditions of service, this difficulty is likely to remain. The special nature of our work, and the fact that it must involve some week-end and evening duty, makes it quite different from most other occupations, and the supply of people able and willing to undertake it is likely always to be limited. It is all the more important, therefore, to ensure that those

who do so are given full opportunities for training, and that their duties are so organised that they can give of their best.

Sir Lionel Fox described in the article which I mentioned earlier the improvements which have been made in recent years in the training of recruits in the service and in in-service training. Plans are being drawn up for the enlargement of the Staff College and the improvement of the Officers' Training School, and we hope to develop in-service training on a wider scale and to broaden its content in the light of new developments in methods of treatment. As the work of the service increases in complexity, there will be more need for training of staff of all grades both in the early stages of their service and as they undertake new responsibilities on promotion.

Much has been said and written recently about the problem of communication within the prison service. This was the subject of Mr. Gordon Hardey's valuable article in the second number of this Journal, in which he stressed the difficulties that a prison officer may feel in seeing his day-to-day work as part of a clear and coherent policy of penal treatment. It is one of the objects of in-service training courses to seek to overcome these difficulties. They are not simply courses of instruction but provide

an opportunity for constructive discussion to which all those present are encouraged to contribute. They have already played a useful part in bringing the knowledge and experience of staff of all grades to bear on important questions of policy, and I am sure they will continue to do so. I believe we ought also to seek other ways by which that knowledge and experience can be used in the making of policy and the development of the service.

As the training of staff improves, so will it become the more important that their abilities are fully used. This is not simply a question of economy in manpower; it is of vital importance to a man's interest and satisfaction in his work—whatever it may be—that he should feel that it gives full scope for the use of his personal qualities of imagination and effort. In industry this presents great problems; but in the prison service, concerned as it is with human beings and difficult social problems, there are wide opportunities for work of absorbing interest. In developing these, we must be prepared to look critically at existing methods of organisation and to see whether we can find ways of making the work of the prison service more interesting and more effective.

It may be, for example, that some of the duties which a fully-

trained officer performs to-day and which do not involve close contact with inmates could be entrusted to others. The need to improve working conditions generally and the demands of an expanding service are such that there need be no fear that this would lead to redundancy among prison officers. Any such developments would, by the very nature of the work which has to be done, be on a limited scale, but they could help to free the prison officer to play his full part in the development of better methods of treatment.

The development of these methods requires a greater variety in types of establishments and more efficient methods of classifying inmates, so that they may receive that type of treatment which is most likely to be effective. As the White Paper on Penal Practice in a Changing Society pointed out, the greatest handicap to progress in the prison service to-day is that in the local prisons, which hold the bulk of the adult population, there are many different types of inmate. The wide variations which exist in criminal sophistication, personality and response to discipline make it difficult to devise a regime which is appropriate to all.

The long-term solution to this problem is to be found in the separation of these different types

by means of a more discriminating system of classification. During recent years we have been able to develop such a system for young offenders sentenced to borstal training, but the classification of adults is still in a rudimentary stage. The distinction between Stars and Ordinaries gives us a rough and ready division between offenders with differing degrees of criminal sophistication, and the creation of the two special sentences of corrective training and preventive detention has created two categories of inmate whose treatment differs in some respects from that of offenders sentenced to ordinary imprisonment. But this is very far from a system by which every adult prisoner is allocated to the type of establishment for which he is considered personally suitable.

During the next ten years we shall certainly need to give more attention to this question. The changes in the treatment of young offenders which will result from the Criminal Justice Act, 1961, will mean that the courts will have at their disposal only three kinds of institutional treatment in establishments for which the Prison Commission is responsible—detention in a detention centre, borstal training, and imprisonment for three years or more (or for 18 months or more if the offender has previously served a sentence

of imprisonment or borstal training). Where a court is in doubt as to which of these sentences is most appropriate, it will take into account the views of the Prison Commissioners, and we must seek to improve the service which we give to the courts at this first stage in the process of classification. It is for this purpose that we are providing nine remand centres for young offenders of which the first, Ashford, is already in operation. We shall also need to reconsider the arrangements for classifying offenders sentenced to borstal training. The numbers of these will be considerably increased when borstal training is integrated with medium-term imprisonment, and the scope of the system will be widened. Experience may also show the need for a more elaborate system of classifying those young offenders who continue to receive sentences of imprisonment.

In developing the system of classification for young offenders, we shall have the advantage of the experience already gained, and unless the population of young offenders increases beyond all expectation we can hope, in a comparatively short time, to have a sufficiently wide range of establishments for the different types of offender. With adults the problem is much more difficult. There is much work to be done before we can settle the principles of classification, and with the

population at its present level we could not put them into practice until the new establishments (and in particular the new secure prisons for men) are available.

Whatever system of classification may emerge, it is important that it should be flexible. Progress in penal treatment is the fruit of both practical experience and research, and we must avoid creating rigid categories which cannot readily be changed and which allow no room to take account of the development of the individual inmate. This does not necessarily mean that sentences themselves should be indeterminate but that, within the limits of a determinate sentence of more than a few months, there should be available for every inmate establishments with different degrees of security and supervision, and with a variety of training facilities, as there are to-day in the borstal system. We shall need secure prisons, of a manageable size, for that element in the adult population whose behaviour in prison demands that they be kept under particularly strict supervision, and for those whose offence requires that they should be held in conditions of security; we shall need open prisons, as we know them to-day, for those who present no great security problem; and between these extremes we may need to develop establishments with varying degrees of external security and internal control. We must, so

far as practicable, have enough establishments of these different kinds within a reasonable distance of each of the great concentrations of population, so that inmates do not have to be transferred to distant prisons; and it may be that in this way we shall develop towards a regional system.

Security is the primary consideration in any system of classification, not only because it is the first requirement of any prison system, but because of its effect on capital expenditure and the deployment of staff. Moreover, it is in general true that the greater the emphasis which has to be laid on security the more difficult it is to organise a constructive regime with full working hours for the inmates and varied training facilities. If there is too little secure accommodation it becomes overburdened, and if there is too much, material and manpower are wasted. The proper balance will not be easy to find.

Within the requirements of security there are other factors to be considered, such as the need for training in a particular trade, the special position of inmates serving very long sentences, and the provision of medical services, both physical and mental. There are also groups of inmates such as civil prisoners, alcoholics, vagrants, sexual offenders and others who present special problems. The

adult population is more mixed than the population of young offenders and is likely to need an even more complex system of classification, with some specialised establishments dealing with a particular type of offender. The new psychiatric prison at Grendon, which will be opened in the summer of 1962, will be one of these.

In the search for better methods of classification and treatment, we must make increasing use of scientific methods of enquiry. Above all, we need much greater knowledge of the nature of the prison population and of the various groups of which it consists. Descriptive researches, such as the study of recidivism, which is being undertaken by prison psychologists in co-operation with the Home Office Research Unit, are likely to be of particular value. Research into the effects of changes in methods of treatment is also needed. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations has completed a study of the effect of the Norwich system at a local prison, and has submitted a report which is being considered by the Commissioners, and the Home Office Research Unit is beginning a study of the operation and effect of the hostel scheme. Other research studies are referred to in Appendix 8 of

the Commissioners' Annual Report for 1960.

Research is a laborious process and may cause inconvenience and extra work for the staff of establishments. But it is an essential stage in the development of more effective treatment if this is to be based not on abstract theory but on practical experience. Those who are in any doubt of this might do well to read again the wise and witty article by Mr. J. P. Conrad in the first number of this Journal.

These three things—training and use of staff, individualisation of treatment, and research—are the essentials of further progress in the prison service. We shall be concerned with many other objectives of a more limited kind—the development of group counselling and the hostel scheme, improvements in the quantity and quality of inmates' work and the creation of a more effective system of after-care are examples—but in the long run everything depends on a better understanding of the problems with which we have to deal, a wide variety of treatment methods, and, most important of all, staff who are not only trained in the basic requirements of the work, but are fully informed about, and concerned with, the wider objectives of the system as a whole.