

Work and Vocational Training in Borstals

G. EMERSON

IN THE JOURNAL for January, 1962, there was an article on "Work for Prisoners", that being the title of the first report of the Advisory Council on the Employment of Prisoners. At the end of the article it was stated that the Council had begun to study the employment of borstal boys with particular reference to vocational training. The results of that study were published last February in the Council's second report, which was entitled *Work and Vocational Training in Borstals (England and Wales)*. In a Parliamentary statement the Home Secretary welcomed the report and expressed his intention of developing work in borstals on the lines suggested.

While the report is, of course, of particular interest to those who are concerned with borstal training, much of what is said in the report has a considerable bearing on the training carried out in other types of penal establishments. Many of the prisoners whose training and treatment constitutes the most difficult problem facing prisons have been through borstals. The rehabilitation of offenders of different

ages ought not to be regarded as distinct and unrelated problems.

The report is not revolutionary. It does not recommend that we scrap our present methods of employing and training borstal boys and substitute something quite different. Nor does it suggest that our approach to the whole problem is based on wrong general principles. The Council found much to praise but also some grounds for criticism, and they have made a number of important recommendations.

In Section III of the report the Council set out what they considered to be the objects of providing work and industrial training (including vocational training) for borstal boys. These are likely to command general approval and the Council would not claim to have done any original thinking here. They say that the objects should be:

- "(a) to prepare them for getting a job on release;
- (b) to develop their latent skills, perhaps hitherto unrecognised by the boys themselves;

- (c) to make them appreciate communication;
- (d) to teach them how to live in social groups and accept their disciplines;
- (e) to enable them to see what contribution they can make to society."

In Sections IV, V and VI of the report the Council give their findings about vocational training. It will gratify many, though hardly surprise them, that the Council are strongly in favour of vocational training, that they consider it to be well organised, and that they highly commend the work of the instructors who carry it out.

It is against this background of general approval that the comment and recommendations of the Council must be considered. They gave a good deal of thought to the selection of boys for vocational training courses. They asked themselves (and many members of the Prison Service) whether the right boys are being selected; whether too many or too few boys take courses; whether the methods of selection are efficient; and how far boys get the courses for which they are most suited. They came to the conclusion that under the present arrangements there is little risk that boys who can benefit from courses fail to get them. They thought that the only danger here is that a few of the boys who are put on courses have not enough natural ability to meet the intellectual and other

demands which a vocational training course makes.

The Council found that it is a difficult problem to give every boy the course for which he is most suited. There is a wide variety of trades which are taught throughout the borstal system, but a course in every trade is not to be, and cannot be, provided at every borstal. And, since different borstals take different types of boy—according to their ages, intelligence, degree of criminal sophistication, and so on—the borstal which, on these criteria, is judged most suitable for a particular boy may not run a course in the right trade. The Council therefore came to a paradoxical conclusion: the needs of most boys will best be served by restricting, not enlarging, the variety of trades taught. The point they made is that, to the extent that each borstal goes in for courses in the less widely popular trades, it cannot run so many courses in the more popular ones.

The Council were unable to consider in detail whether existing courses in any particular trades should be abolished and their advice may well be more appropriate to future developments than to present arrangements.

One final point on vocational training must be mentioned. The Council were emphatic about the need to relate a boy's work throughout his stay in borstal to the vocational training course he takes. "As things are at present", they say, "a

boy spending a year or so in a borstal may, after an initial month on the house cleaning party, spend two or three months on the works party, six months on a vocational training course in engineering, and the remaining three months on farm work." (Paragraph 55 of the report).

The Council regarded this as a failure to make the most of vocational training. They realised the difficulty of providing production work in borstals in many of the trades taught, but they urged that everything possible should be done to obtain it for the boys, either inside or outside borstals. They specially advocated follow-up work after the completion of courses in order to sustain the interest already aroused.

The second half of the report is concerned with employment and industrial training for boys—the majority—who cannot meet the demands of vocational training. It is here that the Council make what is probably their most important comment on existing arrangements. They say, in effect, that, as things are, most boys not up to vocational training are merely put to unskilled labouring, whereas they might well be capable of the type of semi-skilled work which is so common in industry today. The Council make the point by saying (paragraph 68): "some of the boys who at present get labouring jobs [on release] might have got semi-skilled jobs if they had been given training

and experience in more skilled work in borstal."

It is generally agreed that, if an ex-borstal boy can get a good job on release, he is less likely to revert to crime than if he can only get casual, unskilled labouring work. As regards boys who do not take vocational training courses, we do not, in the Council's view, do enough in our borstals to prepare them for the best kind of work of which they are capable; and they recommend that more semi-skilled work and training be provided.

Here they make a point similar to that which they made in connection with vocational training: complete changes from one type of work to work of a completely different type should be as infrequent as possible. The aim should be to train boys in a specific type of work and as far as possible he should be kept on that work throughout his period in borstal. The Council draw attention to the practical consideration that an instructor to whom a boy is allocated, and who is responsible for getting some necessary work done, will be encouraged to take the trouble to train him only if he knows the boy will probably remain in his charge for a considerable period.

The report concludes with a brief mention of employment on release, with particular reference to the possibility of further consultation with employers and trade unions about facilities for further training for boys who have com-

pleted a vocational training course in borstals. The Council have been in touch with both sides of industry and are aware of the difficulties. Most of these stem from the fact that the majority of borstal boys are too old on release to complete a period of apprenticeship by the age of 21, even if account is taken of the training they have received in borstal. The Council nevertheless recommend that an approach be made to the national joint organisa-

tions concerned with apprenticeship and training in the different trades.

The report—that is, the booklet containing it—concludes on the outside of the back cover with words which are not the Council's own, but which are nevertheless of interest to the Prison Service: "Printed in England for Her Majesty's Stationery Office at H.M. Prison, Leyhill". It will be agreed that the quality of the printing and production compares favourably with booklets printed commercially.

Crime in Africa

TSOTSIS are the teddy-boys of South Africa. An article from *Lumen*, 'the voice of the Catholic African leaders', (reprinted in *Excerpta Criminologica*, 1962 November/December), describes their behaviour and its causes. They spend a lot of time gambling, drinking and smoking 'dagga'—the local variety of reefer. They occasionally work for short periods, but generally live by theft and extortion. They are violent: they have been known to kill another African by throwing him from a moving train—for the offence of wearing a necktie and therefore looking like 'one of them', that is like a conformist or goodie-goodie.

What makes them like this? The African author mentions four of

the reasons. The first is overcrowding. Many places have no recreational facilities. Even in the Government's new housing estates, boys and girls in large families often have to share a room. Girls who live on their employer's premises are easily accessible to young men: in Alexandra Township, 75% of the children are illegitimate. The author also spells out the effects of poverty, unemployment, and the disintegration of the closely-knit African community.

The article ends on a mildly optimistic note: the church and its members can help by supporting clubs and football teams, by providing a library in every parish, by helping youths to find jobs.

M. WRIGHT.