

Who Cares about A. C. T. O?

To the Editor,

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL
Sir—On discharge from prison the former inmate is immediately in need of shelter, either a home to go to, or to lodgings provided by friends, or by the Prison After-Care Service.

An address is necessary if employment has been found for him, and he indicates that he is at last going to try to keep outside prison walls.

A prospective employer requires proof of stability, and previous employment. Evidence of experience whatever the type of job being sought is very necessary. Service in H. M. Forces may have some weight, but many employers are dubious unless there is proof of service in a tradesman's corps or regiment.

For a previous white collar worker, clerical posts for men are usually filled from younger employees who have proved their worth. On the selling side of industry again, proof of ability and trust are required for posts with some degree of responsibility attached.

Whatever skills a man may have as a tradesman, technical training and practice in prison may not be up to the standard demanded in a world which over the past ten

years has gone over to automation and computerisation in a big way. Most production plants require evidence of training and performance, and recruit in the main from school leavers, technical schools and technical colleges.

Semi-skilled and non-skilled employment in engineering, manufacturing, wholesale and retail distribution, is dependant on the market from week to week, or even day by day fluctuation of supply and demand.

At present unskilled employment is hard to come by in view of the selective employment tax, while work of a casual nature depends on the person seeking it, being in the right place at the right time. In the building industry the casual or sub-contract worker is mainly of the Irish immigrant type.

The management of a business in manufacturing and distribution of the end product depends on the goodwill and reputation among its customers. The activities of a personnel manager in the engagement of labour is governed by the judgment of both directorate and the labour force employed.

The personnel manager has a first duty to his employer in selecting the best possible workers from the available labour market.

The atmosphere and temperament among the employees of the concern, and labour relations as a whole, rests on the selection of suitable employees.

Again the attitude of foremen and supervisors in industry is directed by both the people in their charge and the management. Output, economic working and harmony in the factory or workshop have to be considered when choosing potential employees.

Any person who takes a job in a modern production organisation must be ready to accept the disciplines of work study, quality control, time and motion, and such-like methods as adopted by the employer and accepted by the labour force.

Acceptance by workmates may be retarded by their knowledge of the previous history of a newcomer. It does not take long for this to become known. It may be magnified by any slight deviation or mistake and make for antagonism rather than acceptance.

Membership of a trade union is required in many trades. The question of membership fees or payment of arrears brought on by being out of touch may prove a barrier to acceptance. The union branch members hold the balance of power in this direction.

For the protection of a prospective employer the up-to-date health and employment card and Form P.45 is necessary to comply with the law. The absence of stamps to cover the period of imprisonment

may be assessed, and paid for by the employee at the end of a period fixed by the Insurance Commissioners, advice from the after-care officer may help in an arrangement with the person involved without subsequent loss of benefit.

Where there has been a break in employment by imprisonment, and the question of re-coding for P.A.Y.E. arrears, allowances, or rebate arises, a permanent address is vital for the passage of correspondence to bring records to date satisfactorily.

In the matter of housing, a place on a local housing list is allocated on completion of the council's questions. A term of imprisonment does not enhance the application although special circumstances *may* be considered by the appropriate housing committee where children are concerned. Most large towns and communities have applicants of good repute who have had their names on the waiting lists for five years or more.

It is a recognised practice when new employees are engaged for the first week's payment to be kept in hand. It may be that a person is without payment for two weeks, this matter can cause difficulty and lead to awkward situations arising which would require after-care attention.

When family responsibilities are in question the after-care officer needs a full picture from the department or organisation which has helped in the care or maintenance of the wife or children during the

rather's term of imprisonment. The matter of separation and maintenance depends very much on the after-care officer's success in the field of employment and housing.

When seeking lodgings for an ex-prisoner the essential truth has to be told, landlords are in the main, shrewd people who expect to make a living without being too much involved. The preference is for lodgers who have been recommended by her friends or by local firms who can vouch for her client. It may be that persuasion by the after-care officer will have success in placing an ex-inmate.

The hostel schemes have been operated at various prisons, whatever successes they may have had, cover only a limited period of residence. Hostels situated away from the prison atmosphere and regulated by the local authority with the supervision of the Probation Service would relieve or balance the work of the after-care officer inside the prison at the same time implementing the Mountbatten Report.

A discharged person with no fixed abode who requires assistance in finding employment is a problem for the employment exchange, the probation officer, the after-care officer, and local voluntary bodies. The area of employment is small in this type of case where the person is not entirely co-operative.

Redundancy in industry is a subject to which every worker is liable. No employer can give promise of long term employment

with certainty. The operation of the selective employment tax makes discrimination by employers keen and exacting. The problem where ex-prisoners are concerned is a matter for a review of this tax. Relief for employers from this tax would have some argument in their acceptance of employing men and women from prison.

The descent to the common lodging house level by the ex-inmate can be swift. For both the young, and the old, it is inevitably a return to crime or scrounging money for drink or drugs.

It may be that previous acquaintances of an ex-prisoner are only too ready to welcome him or her back, ready to continue past relationships in regard to crime and anti-social behaviour.

The use of leisure time depends on circumstances, the lure of entertainment in the evenings and week-ends, can alter the course of promises and resolutions. It demands the time of probation and after-care officers as much as that of securing daily employment.

The Probation Service would be relieved of some of the burden of the reporting of persons on licence, and the supervision of those not likely to respond to probation, if this duty was under the care and part of the duties of the local C.I.D. or Regional Crime Squad, or better still the crime prevention officer in each district.

Yours, etc.,

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Leicester.