

Homes for the Homeless

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WE HAVE COME to the conclusion that the present methods used for dealing with social inadequates or misfits, drunks or social nuisances—call them what you will—are futile. We have also come to the conclusion that when all our medical, religious and social aids have been brought to bear on such men, no permanent change of outlook or behaviour can be expected. We are therefore more than ever convinced that there is only one possible answer to their needs—accept them as they are, provide a permanent home and care for them.

Our priest, Willie Kahle told us that such homes existed in Westphalia and the Rhineland, and suggested we should visit the country to see these. We, Michael Shrewsbury and James Thomson, took Willie Kahle up on his suggestion, agreeing that it would be useful to try to collect additional evidence for a change in sentencing policy and leading to the provision of suitable homes for the social nuisances.

This report is compiled by the Rev. Michael Shrewsbury, Chaplain of Pentonville Prison, the Rev. Willie Kahle, R.C. Priest, Pentonville and Holloway Prisons and Mr. James Thomson, Senior Social Worker, Pentonville Prison.

Hearing of our plan, our respective authorities agreed to grant us special leave, the cost, however, to be borne by us. We arrived at Dusseldorf on 21st July 1966, where we were entertained hospitably by the British Consul-General in Dusseldorf.

During our briefing by Ministerialdirigent Simon, who had invited representatives of prison, clergy and welfare to meet us, we were told that some 18,000 out of a population of roughly 38 million were held in prison in this area, measuring approximately 300 by 250 miles—much larger than England and Wales. There are local and training prisons and institutions of an in-between range. We were told that after-care for the homeless and social nuisances could be divided into three categories: (1) voluntary rehabilitation centres such as Bodelshwing House in Wuppertal and Kurklink am Hellweg; (2) workhouses (not to be confused with our conception of "workhouse") like Brauweiler; and (3) the farms Arbeiter Kolonien, like Wilhelmsdorf and Petrusheim, where those who cannot be rehabilitated in the ordinary sense are cared for. The Church (the two main churches,

Catholic and Protestant) and the State have an equal share in their control. In Germany there is a church tax collected by the State and therefore the State usually leaves it to the churches to provide after-care and other amenities for the social inadequates. It took the churches many years and much effort before their work in the after-care field was finally recognised by the State and it is only since the second world war that a firm partnership has grown up and been consolidated. In 1958 a law was passed by which the State made itself responsible for providing living accommodation worthy of human beings for the homeless. While we were primarily interested in after-care projects we started our tour by spending the afternoon in the local prison in Dusseldorf. Another day we visited the prison and staff training college at Lethringhausen.

The problems with which they are faced are similar to our own in preparing men for freedom. It was also apparent that their methods of treatment were, with one or two differences in policy, much the same as ours. We recognised that in both prisons there was an awareness of the part played by the after-care units. Social workers in the prisons have a close liaison with after-care units and the socially isolated, friendless men who have no home are frequently taken to these units. The nearest one to the Luthringhausen prison is 10 miles away at Wuppertal and staff members under

tuition visit the unit as part of their training.

THE FARMS (ARBEITER KOLONIEN)

In 1872 Pastor Bodelschwing founded Bethel as a community to care for the neurotics, mildly insane, epileptic and incurably sick. He was concerned for those for whom nobody cared. Bethel is now a community of about 10,000 people and forms part of the town of Bielefeld. It consists of hospitals, homes and hostels and is known as the city of the sick. Pastor Bodelschwing also saw the problem of the homeless (the wayfarers). Industrialisation, with its disruptive effects upon mainly agricultural communities, meant that many individuals were unable to find their way back to a secure way of life. He realised they had to be cared for and with his vision, conceived the idea of putting them to work on farms which he called Arbeiter Kolonien—a colony for workers. Due to his determination, about 20 farms were started within a few years. It would have taken days to see the whole of Bethel but as we were primarily interested in these farms we made our way to see the Rev. Mr. Frank who is both the chairman of the committee of all farms that exist in Germany and the general manager of those that are supervised by the Protestant Church. He told us that the set-up of the farms had remained the same up to the present time. They were run by a group of religious (brothers), administrators, farm manager

and other employees together numbering about 12. The brothers are needed to keep the spirit of "care", lead the men to work and look after them spiritually. Pastor Bodelschwing insisted that the administrator and other employees needed to be adequate, normal (whatever normal may mean) and efficient. It was obvious to us that this policy had been maintained.

For many years the income for these farms was derived solely from Church funds and voluntary contributions from local societies which were founded to support them. The project was not a local one and throughout the years it expanded. In a number of areas, homes, some with farms attached, were opened to house many of the social inadequates. At the present time 32 such units are in operation in West Germany, run by the two churches for the care of forgotten men. This number gives an idea of the determined efforts to provide care for the inadequates; the smallest unit contains 80 men while the majority house 200 or more; altogether about 6,500 such men are accommodated. Many of the projects have sheltered workshops.

PETRUSHEIM

The 600-acre farm called Petrusheim is in the heart of the country. It has residential accommodation for 200 men of the wayfarer type. The chapel attached had been built by the inhabitants as had many of the farm buildings. The whole is administered by a staff of seven, plus five Franciscan lay brothers

who live there and work with the men. The unit has a herd of 80 beef cattle, 2,000 chickens—deep litter and free range, 400 pigs and 40 breeding sows; its own abattoir—a bullock is killed once a month and a pig once a fortnight, and the eggs and other food produced on the farm go a long way to making it self supporting.

The residents are 80 old-age pensioners who have been habitual wayfarers and 120 inadequates of various ages, most of whom have seen the inside of prison. The accommodation consists of one large block, part of which houses the pensioners and the remainder the others. Each group has its own dining hall. According to their wishes and to suitability, some live in single, some in double and others in treble bedrooms. The whole is heated by an oil-fired boiler which is maintained by one of the inhabitants who has made his permanent home there. Cooking is done in one large kitchen supervised by a staff member and most of the chores are done by the inhabitants. There are two full-time paid farm workers and many of the inhabitants work on the farm. In theory they work an eight-hour day but some of the less able just potter about. Wages for the inhabitants are roughly 2 marks, or 4s., a day plus keep and clothing.

The farm buildings are a model of perfection in structure, tidiness and cleanliness. The unit has its own shoemaker and, most important, laundry. The standard of accommodation is first class. This high

standard surprised us as we were assured that nearly all the inhabitants were homeless and many were classed as social nuisances; a number were alcoholics, some chronic. Men wandered in during our visit, they were dirty and dishevelled.

For the first 48 hours, new arrivals spend their time in the reception unit where they are bathed, deloused if necessary, and generally cleaned up and medically examined by a visiting doctor. Only when this procedure is completed are they allowed into the main block. The food served to us at lunch was of very good quality and was of the kind served to the men. A staff member with whom we discussed the inhabitants told us that their aim was not to rehabilitate; all knew this to be an impossible task, although occasionally they did have one who made the grade. They had discovered that it is not possible to rehabilitate all men but it *is* possible to look after them and this is what they are doing. Perhaps this is rehabilitation in a different sense.

As said before, alcoholics are allowed to buy wine and beer from the shop in the unit, and while there we saw no less than four men who were drunk and apparently oblivious to all around. We were told they only get drunk when they have money and that as their income amounted to only about 4s. a day their bouts of alcoholism could be overlooked; after all, they said, as they saw it there was no harm in a man getting drunk in his own home.

WILHEMSDORF

It is situated in beautiful country and we saw it at its best. Here again we were impressed by the high standards. There are three units each housing 80 men, supervised by a deacon, making a total of 240 inhabitants. This number includes about 100 old-age pensioners of the type mentioned before. Many of the residents work on the large farm and market garden attached, some on outlying farms and some, including the pensioners, are employed in the light assembly workshops assembling locks for doors, to mention but one example. We were told that the light workshops were a great asset in inclement weather. The staff consisted of nine full-time employees and three deacons (deacons are akin to lay brothers) together numbering 12, live in the grounds. Their homes reminded us of the type seen in our own select residential areas.

The unit itself has a reading room, television room, tea and coffee bars. The two latter had obviously been designed by an interior decorator with a taste for culture and comfort.

The procedure on entry is similar to that at Petrusheim.

Many of the men look on the farm as their home, but in one way they are perhaps more fortunate than ourselves because if they get the wanderlust they can move on to the next one as their fancy takes them.

In this, as in most "Protestant" farms, alcohol is not permitted.

Our week's tour of the units left us with a lot to think about. Naturally we discussed the merits and demerits of the different systems and felt we should record our views briefly. It was made abundantly clear to us from what we had seen that there is complete recognition of the fact that social inadequates, petty pilferers and social nuisances need to be looked after. While one home may favour the view that an alcoholic be allowed licence to drink and another may not, all we encountered were insistent that such homes must be provided and must be of the highest possible standard.

Since our return we have been more acutely aware of our "head-in-the-sand" attitude when it comes to looking after social nuisances or misfits in our society. Whilst acknowledging that over the years shelter has been provided for these people, we find it regrettable that when shelter is provided, quality is often forgotten. At one time we had a chain of reception centres, State sponsored, throughout the country; most were the lowest form of doss-house, but most of these have now been closed. The handful left are staffed by people who are interested in the psychology of man. Unfortunately the physical structure of the buildings does not permit a homely atmosphere. For many years the Salvation Army and the Church Army have provided shelter for a number of the homeless and whilst not wishing to decry the valuable work which has been done and is being done by these and other

organisations, the accent has been on the provision of shelter only. Many of the hostels were built during the age of the workhouse and are gaunt, dark and dingy; the few modern innovations have made little change. Lack of financial resources has prevented any major extension of modernisation; nevertheless, some effort has been made—the Church Army in Bristol is an example. At the present rate of progress these organisations will never be able to modernise fully or provide shelter for all the homeless. It is estimated that each night in London alone at least 1,500 sleep rough.

The most recent efforts to provide for the homeless ex-prisoner have taken the form of halfway houses. The title "halfway" speaks for itself and indicates that these houses serve as props for men who are "helpable". In theory the men selected in prisons for such places are thought to have a good chance of rehabilitation and will, with the amount of help given in such homes, take the step which will lead to standing on their own feet in outside society. In other words—these homes provide a buffer for the men who have spent a long time in prison and are thought to be in need of support.

Norman Houses were the first in the field and these have been followed by the Langley Houses. It was thought that the creation of a family atmosphere was necessary. The total number of occupants in any house rarely exceeds 15. In

England, in all, they provide 218 places. The provision of such homes depends on charity. We know from experience that these homes do play a valuable part in the rehabilitation of men from prison, but they could play an even larger part if given State aid on a generous basis. Cheese-paring State assistance would not be sufficient in our view. Halfway houses, according to their policies, are excluded from the problems of housing the chronic alcoholics and social nuisances who, in the main, are left to find solace in the doss-house or common lodging-house, some of which are unfit for human habitation.

We believe that farm units of the type we saw in West Germany should be set up throughout the country. For example, two or three such places could be opened within a radius of 100 miles of London. Large estates could be purchased by the State and the mansions attached altered, modernised and equipped to house 200 men, that in theory there be a full working day and the inhabitants paid a wage for work done. In addition to farming and gardening, workshops should be established for the provision of work in inclement weather, and such units should be staffed by individuals who are competent to run them to the best possible advantage. The initial outlay for these homes would be costly but from a long term point of view, the saving to the taxpayer would be considerable; and psychologically

we would have the satisfaction of knowing we were caring for the misfits and not branding them as ex-prisoners and second-class citizens.

We know that a home for 200 men can be efficiently run by less than a dozen well-paid staff. At least 70 staff are required to run a prison for 200. In this country, if there were places, such as described, to house the social nuisances instead of sending them to prison, the present prison staff would be given a chance to carry out reformatory work amongst those for whom therapeutic treatment might be considered beneficial. In the event of such units being established we would advocate that the law be changed and the courts be allowed to recommend that men be sent to the appropriate home or farm. Some would need to be sent for a compulsory stay to a place like Brauweiler. We know that many will say "but we must not interfere with individual liberty"—the truth is that many of the men who would be affected do not know what "liberty" means and we know from our experience they would appreciate a home in which they could be looked after, even if it meant a compulsory stay of two or even four years.

During the past six months we have questioned many hundreds of men in Pentonville who, in our view, will never be able to live an orderly life in outside society, and nearly all have said: "I wish I could be put in a home of the type you describe,

a place where I could be looked after, because I cannot look after myself and I do not want to come to prison where I am looked on as dirt. The staff here are not bad to me but I know I am not wanted anywhere, but I cannot help it".

To hear this every day confirms our belief that prison provides no solution.

As an appendage to this report we have thought it necessary to record our brief observations on the following measures which are being introduced to help to deal with the problems in our midst.

APPENDIX

SHORT SENTENCE

The White Paper on how to deal with short term offenders indicates that men who are now sentenced to short terms of imprisonment will, in future, be fined and that this will help to reduce the numbers in our over-crowded prisons. This is a progressive move—many of the men affected are of the type with whom we are concerned in our scheme. Most of them will not have the money to pay their fines as they depend on State aid when outside and are not capable of holding down a job. We feel they need the support of a community similar to Petrusheim.

PAROLE

Parole has been introduced. This, too, is a forward move. After a set period of time men will be released to the care of a parole officer for the remainder of sentence and if a

man does not meet or comply with the terms of the parole order he can be returned to prison.

Parole or licence is not new to us; for over 50 years certain categories of sentenced men have been released on licence or parole. Until the Criminal Justice Act 1948, such men had to report to the police; from then until the end of 1965, men subject to supervision after release had to report to the Central After-care Association through the Probation Service. Since the beginning of 1966 the Probation and After-care Service has been solely responsible for supervision.

The numbers subject to supervision have never been more than a few hundred adults each year and over the years there has been a constant 33 per cent to 38 per cent failure rate under supervision during the first 12 months after release.

In mid-1966 an outworkers scheme was commenced in Pentonville. Men who are selected for this may be serving sentences of four years and over and are not subject to supervision after release. On entering the scheme six months before the end of sentence, they are expected to work in outside employment and return to the shelter of the prison each night. During this period they are encouraged to make a continued effort. The ratio of failures equates with the percentage above.

Both the percentage rates quoted lead us to believe that unless an effective service of parole officers is

established, the failure rate will rise because whereas at present only a few hundred are subject to supervision or parole, in a short time, after the implementation of the extended or new systems, the numbers qualifying for parole may be between 5,000 and 8,000 men. We understand that the Probation and After-care Service will be responsible for the supervision of parolees. With its present responsibilities it is overtaxed and unless it is relieved of some of these or, alternatively, greatly increased in manpower, the success of the new parole system may be in jeopardy.

Without the provision of an alternative to prison the difficulty will be what to do with the kind of person we have described in our report. We are pleased to know that the Home Secretary has accepted the recommendations of the Lady Reading Report for the provision of small homes or hostels; such places will require two full-time paid staff members to look after eight to 15 men. By comparison, our scheme would need only 12 full-time employees to look after 200; a ratio of 33 to 1. This would be financially advantageous. But in our opinion, there is another more important aspect. In any small unit of the size envisaged in the Lady Reading Report, the involvement and interaction between staff and residents is usually found to be quite intense. From our varied

observations and experience we believe the kind of pressures which must inevitably be exerted upon staff by the extremely helpless kind of individual with whom this report is concerned may be well-nigh overpowering. This is not a job which can be left behind at the end of the day. Here staff are involved in a full-time living process wherein they will, indeed, sometimes find themselves inordinately bound up. We believe that a larger unit, with its consequent increased staff size will not only allow for the development on a wider scale of a staff-structured supportive programme but, and every bit as important, give staff themselves the kind of support from each other that they will undoubtedly need.

We believe all schemes are essential but we do know that the small schemes which are envisaged will never cope with the problem by themselves. The large unit would, without doubt, have an immediate effect on reducing the prison population and there may then be less need to build more prisons.

If a report of the visit in full is required please write to the Hon. Secretary, Quo Vadis, c/o Welfare Officer, H.M. Prison, Pentonville, London, N.7.

N.B.—Since this report was completed a weekly per capita payment of £1 has been authorised by the Government to accredited hostels.