

Security and Treatment

The Constant Dilemma

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THE TRADITIONAL VIEW of prison as a place of punishment and safe custody demanded no initiative from a staff whose task was simple and uncomplicated. The first ideas of reform and training introduced an element of confusion, and over the years many penal philosophies have been developed and discarded, some having proved effective, but most never having been allowed to approach a positive conclusion.

The dual role of our present system, with all its internal and external pressures, has multiplied that confusion, and yet security has always been the first requirement. No one has ever issued an instruction to relax security. The old rule 6 and the present rule 1, however vague and unsatisfactory, have not told us to abandon part of our security in order to train or reform our charges.

Inevitably, however, the concept of treatment, in its specific and wider senses, has cut across the idea that security is the only consideration. And of course security is not the only consideration; treatment is of equal if not of more importance

in the final analysis, but it should not be forgotten that our task is to train within conditions of security.

We are presented with an apparently insoluble dichotomy which promotes conflict for staff and prisoners alike. Can we reconcile the two? Should we not attempt to make both more compatible—by clear definitions of our task—a more accurate assessment of prisoners' characters, potential and needs—and a constant re-examination of what we are doing and of the results we achieve?

OUR RECENT CRISIS

We can blame a multiplicity of events for the greater confusion we have seen in the last 18 months, following a series of notorious escapes. We can blame the very idea that we should train prisoners—or the development of a complex staff structure, which has brought in many specialists who have not received adequate security training—or lack of communications at all levels—or overcrowding and antiquated buildings; we can blame

fluctuating political issues which pay little or no attention to basic problems and to the people who are directly concerned with prisoners—the inconsistency and ambivalence of a society which expresses totally different demands in the light of our publicity; we can blame our own short-sightedness, our poor planning and our weakness in the face of political storm, our failure to evaluate our situation and to examine the real problems of running complex organisations which have developed their own local traditions.

Breaches of security were treated relatively calmly at one time. Bland assumptions were made that—

- (1) the escaped prisoner would soon be picked up;
- (2) having discovered his escape route, it could not happen again; and
- (3) the hue and cry from Press and public would soon die down and we could then relax again—instead of realising that escapes will be a potential event for as long as we have prisons.

The beginning of the present era of conflict came with a new feature in sentencing policy—the award of very long sentences for several of the great train robbery gang. (Hitherto only one man had received a relatively long sentence—for spying.) Such sentences caused the gravest problems regarding security and treatment, and we had grasped few of the implications before the first

man escaped. The criminal world had proved to be well organised and extremely resourceful.

A security adviser with the rank of assistant director was appointed, whose arrival was greeted with some fear and suspicion by many levels of staff. Should not his appointment have been sufficient to solve our dilemma—not only by whatever recommendations were made by the security adviser, but by the reminder presented to us by his appointment that we had serious security responsibilities? One may argue that it should have been sufficient had the logical process of examination, recommendation, decision and action been carried out with the minimum of delay.

And yet, further crises were to arise. Another escape took place, by which time the “public” became uneasy and more vociferous in its demand for “security and never mind the treatment”. The storm finally broke with two more escapes of long-term prisoners. The Press enjoyed a field-day, having fanned the flames of our hitherto smouldering fires into a national blaze; the stories of blundering, inefficiency and indecision greatly promoted newspaper sales. The resulting political action gave us an unprecedented number of patrols, police with dogs, and mobile radio communications, and allowed at considerable cost, for the immediate installation of alarm systems, flood lighting and closed circuit television for several prisons. An enquiry was held under Eart Mountbatten and

its recommendations have been well debated in many quarters ever since.

THE SIZE OF THE PROBLEM

An examination of statistics of recent years, including an analysis of offences and sentences, would lead to the conclusion that the size of the problem (that is, the number of escapes as a percentage of the total prison population) was relatively small. In numerical terms the escape figures for 1966 were not much higher than those of 1965, and in fact were lower, pro-rata, than those of 1964.

It is not sufficient of course to study the problem only in numerical terms. One has to take into account the crime, notoriety and sentence of escapers, especially of those whose departure caused so much disquiet. We may further conclude that the initial diagnosis of these special cases was at fault and that we had not utilised our existing resources to the best advantage.

MOUNTBATTEN AND AFTER

The Mountbatten Enquiry resulted mainly in the re-emphasis of security. It has been unfortunate that the majority of readers have seen the word "security" only, and for the most part have ignored comments on the importance of training. Paragraphs 47, 48 and 49 do, in fact, stress the training aspect, although one may question the theory that a liberal regime and reasonable living conditions can reduce the pressures to attempt escape. One may also argue against a proposal to concentrate a nucleus

of difficult prisoners in one place; this kind of situation would hardly be conducive to good security or effective treatment.

The report itself, while making certain recommendations for change and innovation, highlights our various problems and endorses some of the solutions which had previously been offered up by many grades of the service. It tends to ignore the economic considerations which have played a great part in the neglect of our interests for so many years, and which, at the time of writing, look as if they will again force us to make the best of a bad job for some time to come.

THE EFFECTS ON PRISONERS

The restrictions imposed on inmates, especially those in security establishments, were obviously unpleasant. Withdrawal from outside labour, curtailment of association and recreation periods and the postponement of educational programmes, seemed to indicate that training was an entirely secondary matter. Tension mounted, but fortunately the prisoner population on the whole accepted its new situation better than might have been expected—possibly because it knew that as many privileges as possible would eventually be restored—and the prospect of parole was a further incentive for conformity.

Perimeter security affected staff resources at many establishments; subsequently the continuity of care and internal supervision suffered, interrupting our treatment task.

This situation still prevails and recent staff working schemes have not brought about any improvement in this vital and now somewhat neglected area.

THE EFFECTS ON STAFF

Many who had seen only conflict and confusion in modern penal practice welcomed "Mountbatten" as the beginning of a return to the comforting world of security—a world which they knew and which perhaps represented the only stable factor in their job. Increased tensions and the enforced abandonment in many prisons of in-service training, enhanced this view. The word "security" was given a more urgent emphasis, especially in our principal training establishment. The modern approach to prisoners and their treatment was in danger of collapse, even despite many years of training programmes, group-work, special courses and exchange schemes with outside agencies.

SOME ADVANTAGES

Apart from the advantage of having some of our age-old problems aired at national level, we now enjoy a better system of consultation in some areas. In "Mountbatten" we have a hopeful list of suggestions for general improvements in the service, in order that we may be able to perform our task more efficiently. For the first time ever our views have been considered and recorded by a parliamentary committee.

The foundations for an effective, modern Prison Service have been

consolidated, but we must wait, probably for some time, to see what can and will be built upon those foundations.

OUR TASK

No matter in what type of establishment we serve, our task is to treat or train our charges in conditions of security—from the minimum security of a small open borstal, to the maximum security of a large class "A" prison.

The efficacy of security at all establishments depends not only on human and mechanical devices, but even more on the initial diagnosis of offenders in the classification unit and an immediate and comprehensive follow-up at the prison or borstal to which the inmate is transferred. The diagnosis will involve many factors, including a better use of the information available about a prisoner; the result should reflect the man's training needs in the security he needs.

This is probably an over-simplification of the problem, for one may think of the bulk of our prison population—the short-termers at our local prisons—who have no opportunity of receiving any form of prolonged treatment, despite their many needs. It may be argued that the short sentence is no longer justifiable; and in fact, should prison be the place for our thousands of social misfits and rejects?

To carry out some of our proposals for treatment we would need an overhaul in sentencing policy, for which we are not responsible.

In the case of many long-termers one may wish that such overhaul would proceed beyond the present parole system to permit a more indeterminate minimum/maximum sentence; this may induce a more positive response to treatment, and would allow for prisoners to be released at the right time, i.e. when they are really fit for discharge, and when further imprisonment is likely to prove detrimental to the man and to whatever progress he has made. Conversely, a man should not be released until he has made some effort to progress and to reorientate his thinking about his place in the community.

Much will depend, of course, on our definitions of "security" and "treatment". It is comparatively easy to define security needs, but often difficult to assess precise training requirements. One can readily quote cases where specific training needs are minimal or even non-existent by virtue of the inmates' rejection of formal treatment. We must face the fact that we have within every prison subculture, many sophisticated prisoners who are virtually untrainable, and will by choice remain so, no matter how we attempt to induce a positive response. Our task in this case, apart from to "keep on trying", would be to provide the normal daily welfare facilities, and to hope that finally imprisonment will have served as a deterrent if nothing else.

Again it would be difficult to provide any immediate formal training for a "30-year train robber"

or a "42-year spy"; and in fact our diagnosis here would probably specify nothing more than intensive psychological support, especially for the first and greater part of the man's sentence. Training must be related to release and our task would simply not be viable if we had to devise a specific training programme for a man whose normal discharge date was 20 or 28 years hence.

There are many prisoners, of course, who reject training or treatment in the initial stages of their sentence and we would need to be very patient in our methods of "training them to be trained". In many cases the process of natural and peer-group maturation may eventually bring about the desired result.

The needs of some men may rest solely on their physical or mental state, a repair of which should be available (if repair can be effected at all), in our hospitals and psychiatric units—since prison is considered to be their most appropriate disposal.

Those who are prepared to take advantage of training and treatment, whether it be from the beginning of their sentence or not, should find our training prisons equipped to meet their requirements in terms of technical, educational, cultural, recreational and medical/psychiatric facilities. Ideally, whatever is lacking at first, should be provided at an open prison to which they may be transferred later at an

appropriate stage in their imprisonment. The establishment of the open prison seems to have sprung more from economic considerations than from any defined area of penal philosophy, and the value of the open camp as an integral stage of a training programme has yet to be fully exploited.

We need, of course, to explore further the development of the therapeutic community in all areas of the service, for psychiatric and non-medical cases. The more informal social training required by so many inmates may be provided to some extent by a new and more realistic system of prison visiting, by further contacts with outside agencies, some form of community service and more well-directed group and case-work. This takes for granted that staff training will have afforded us an expertise and professional skill to carry out our task systematically and objectively: we would also depend upon the existence of a well-organised and effective after-care service to complete any process of treatment.

For many years we have thought of training and treatment in a rather abstract fashion, having no clear objective or task, often lacking in resources and direction, and occasionally imposing our personal and emotional needs on the situation in which we work. To assume that we will reach a perfectly lucid solution, eradicate all conflict and perform our task with an assurance of easy success would be facile and would imply a belief that crime itself will cease. We will yet be subject to pressures and demands from many quarters; they will continue to be conflicting, destructive and sometimes unrealistic. There will remain an element of confusion in our situation, but our terms of reference are surely to give our charges the necessary treatment in the appropriate condition of security. A regular re-examination of the service we provide, of the results we achieve, and a meaningful system of research should help us discharge our duties to the prisoner and to society in an effective and progressively improved manner.

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