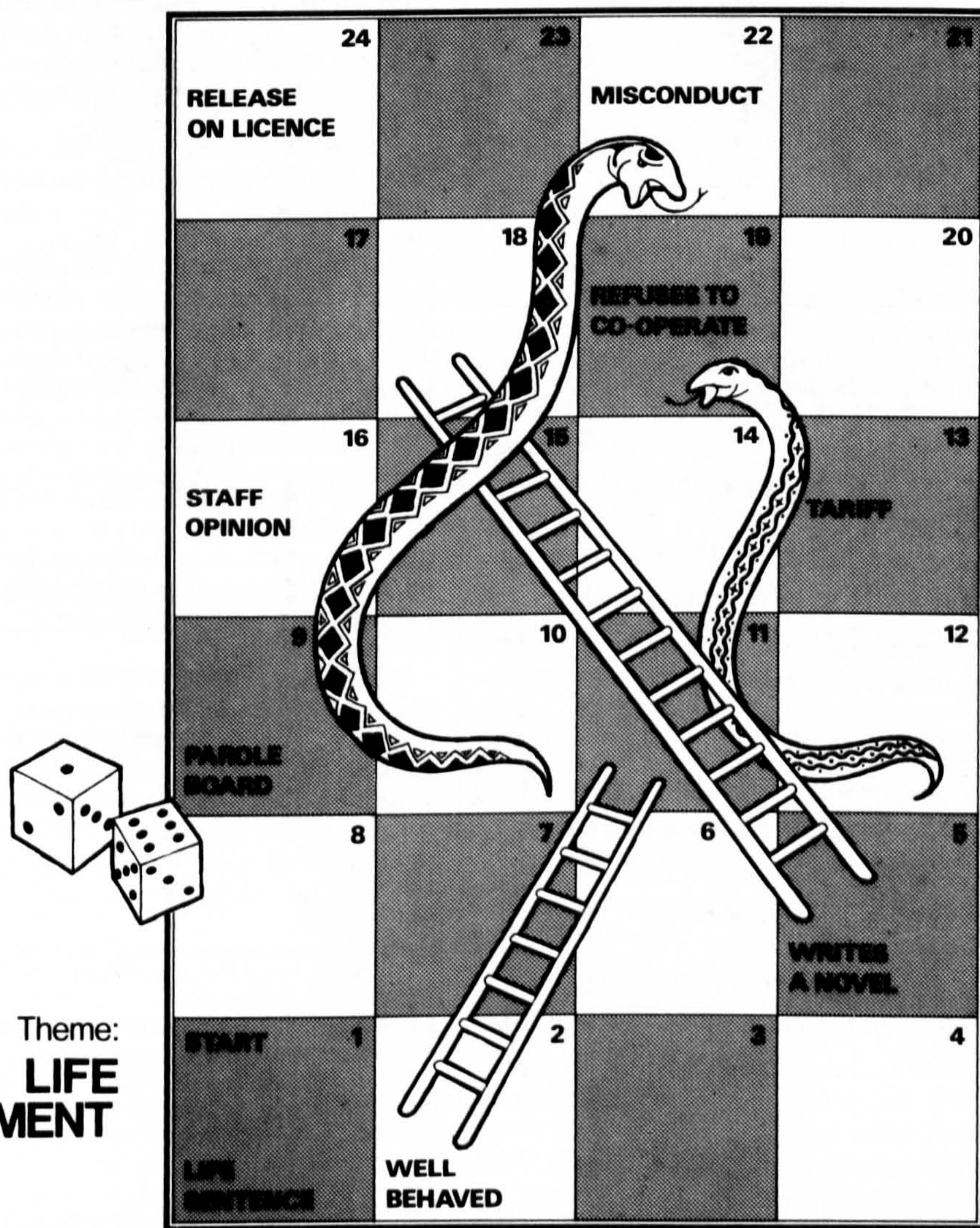


**LIFERS**

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**PRISON  
SERVICE**

# JOURNAL



Theme:  
**LIFE  
IMPRISONMENT**





# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

No. 42 New Series April 1981

**Editorial Office:**  
HM Prison, Leyhill, Wotton-under-Edge, Glos. GL12 8HL

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*The editorial board wishes to make it clear that the views expressed by contributors are their own and do not reflect the official views or policies of the Prison Department.*

## Comment

"Killing people is wrong" said a late colleague to a class of Commonwealth penology students - with some exasperation, for they still seemed unconvinced. The abolitionist case has never been a walkover, it is an argument in which one man's crystal pool is another's mud, and at that time the battle was raging fiercely. Those who think no more highly of judicial killing than of any other kind won, and in 1969, after a "trial" period, the tortuous lotteries of the Homicide Act were laid to rest, the country joined ranks with the majority of developed nations, and committed itself to finding other solutions.

"Lifers" are now a small growth industry within the penal system, their numbers calling for a special strategy of management, control and review. Not killing people has meant being willing to detain them in varying degrees of security for periods of time adjudged to reflect the appropriate tariff for the crime and - more important perhaps - the future dangerousness of the offender. It is the latter element which calls for skills of assessment and prediction that as yet we do not have in any certain form. It is not only that murderers who might have hanged are now preserved, but that the numbers of other disturbed, damaged and potentially damaging people, a legacy of the earlier legislation (manslaughter with diminished responsibility) are accumulating too; and there is apparently a growing third element of "lifers" detained indefinitely on largely preventive grounds, for non-homicidal and in some cases intrinsically trivial offences.

Between the Scylla and Charybdis of protection for the public and natural justice, all those concerned in the review and release of lifers steer a delicate course. On prison staff especially, at all levels, there falls the unique responsibility (because it applies to no other section of their clientèle) of assessing dangerousness and recommending accordingly. The quality of their work with lifers on the landings and in the workshops as much as in the interview room, is the base-rock on which the vital issues of reading character and predicting behaviour are founded, or will founder. More and more prison staffs (in 24 establishments currently) are being called on to perform this difficult task, for which they need special training, understanding and commitment, suitably varied and progressively planned regimes, and high standards of professionalism.

The development of lifer management to meet this challenge is the main theme of this issue of the Journal. We could not hope to reflect all the fundamental moral and practical problems involved in such a highly emotional subject, let alone the prejudice and ignorance with which it abounds, but we hope that readers will respond freely to some of the questions it raises for the Service and for society.

It has not been the practice for the Prison Service Journal to publish obituaries and there are many reasons for this. The Editorial Board, however, unanimously agreed to break with this tradition and express their deep sorrow at the recent untimely death of John Cape, Governor of Usk DC and Borstal. He had not long joined the Board, but had been offered and had accepted the post of Editor and we, who had looked forward so much to working with him on the Journal, thought that his many friends and colleagues in the Prison Service and outside would wish to join with us in recording our very real sense of loss in these pages.

# LIFERS

*—a personal reaction*

Joe Pilling

*Assistant Secretary, P3 Division.*

Entry to the world of the prison service via P3 Division is not guaranteed to uplift the spirit. Prisoners do not petition, MPs do not write to Ministers and pressure groups do not chase us unless they think that something is wrong. Even when nothing is wrong - and sometimes it is - fighting off the attacks can be a negative and wearying business. Against that backcloth it is not surprising that our responsibility for the service's work with lifers can seem like a drink of clear water after a polluted diet.

P3 takes lifers seriously and the conference at Bournemouth a year ago showed that a representative cross-section of the service takes them seriously. Progress is never better than two steps forward and one and a half steps back but that is above average for prisons. Preparing for that conference showed me how the service (and even the much-maligned) Headquarters had risen to the challenge of the last 15 years. There is much more detail elsewhere in this issue but the landmarks are worth recalling: Wakefield 1965, Cumberland Lodge 1972, Dorking 1973,

Circular 'Instruction 39/1974 and Cumberland Lodge 1976.

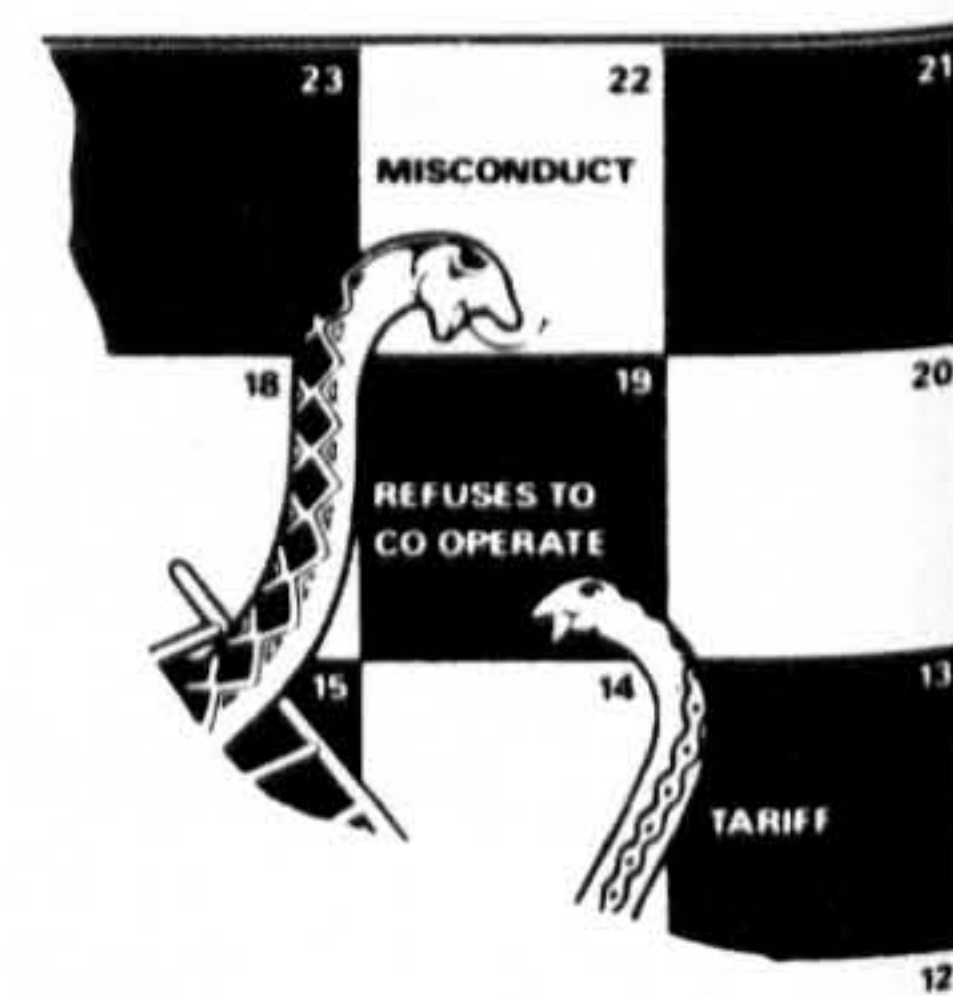
When prison staff with some seniority get together it is not long before they lament the developments of the 1970's. My judgment as a relative newcomer is that the work on lifers of the early and middle 1970's has been almost a textbook success. A growing problem was confronted, a long-term strategy was developed and we can say that it has met the test of the last six years. We only have to build on that work - *only* covers up huge scope for improvement, but it is being tackled with impressive enthusiasm by pretty well everyone involved.

When distinguished foreign visitors arrive in Ecclestone Square I never feel as relaxed as when we are telling them how we handle lifers. That says something in itself. It was a welcome decision to give an issue of this Journal to this subject and it deserves to kindle yet more interest in an area full of challenge but with a good record of achievement already behind it.



# Men serving Life Imprisonment

Joan Worth



1. More than a decade has now passed since capital punishment for murder was first suspended in 1965 for a trial period, and then abolished by both Houses of Parliament five years later in December 1969. The effect of this, taken in conjunction with the Homicide Act 1957 which made the distinction between capital and non-capital murder and introduced the defence of diminished responsibility, has been greatly to increase the numbers of men and women committed to prison for life. On 1 January 1957, shortly before the Homicide Act was passed, in the penal establishments of England and Wales there were some 140 persons serving life imprisonment for murder. Nearly 24 years later at the end of October 1980, there were some 1600 'lifers', including 50 women. There was a need for further knowledge about this type of prisoner and research on lifers was accordingly started by the Home Office Research Unit in 1969, a report on which was published in 1979.

2. There are three main categories of offence which may incur the penalty of life imprisonment. First, there is murder, for which the life sentence is mandatory. The numbers of murderers over the years have risen consistently and this type of case now forms the bulk of the 'lifer' prison population. Second, there is manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility: annual numbers of men sentenced to life for this offence appear to be steady.\* Third, there are 'other', mainly non-homicidal, offences: men sentenced to life for such crimes averaged 2 or 3 per year between 1956 to 1964. The number then increased fairly sud-

denly and remained at 16-20 per year until 1969. The average since has been 22 per annum. The total number of 1,550 male lifers at 31 October 1980 can be sub-divided roughly into 70% convicted of murder, 9% of manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility, and 15% of 'other' offences. The remaining 6% (aged under 18 years) were detained during Her Majesty's Pleasure. This total includes some 50 men recalled from life licence. Male and female lifers represent about 3% of the whole prison population in England and Wales, but more importantly they now form a quarter of all prisoners serving terms of over 4 years.

3. Preliminary work on men serving life imprisonment for murder or manslaughter (diminished responsibility) was undertaken by the late Dr. Christopher Wallis for the Parliamentary review of capital punishment. His work indicated that the

only characteristic which related to whether a man was executed or reprieved, and to his probable length of stay, was the *victim-type*. This factor also distinguished between men serving 'life' and those sent to Broadmoor. Other preliminary research by Dr. Charlotte Banks and Miss Jane Troop suggested that men who had killed or injured women or children in the course of theft or for sexual reasons tended to form a major part of the long-stay population. (These particular men would almost certainly have been executed before the abolition of capital punishment.) A detailed study was therefore necessary because eventually such men were likely to be released. Before this study could be undertaken, however, and since detailed information on the growing number of offenders and their victims was not readily available, it was decided to set up an index of men serving life imprisonment. To this end information from the Home Office and

\*In a report on Homicide between 1967-71 Evelyn Gibson says "...there were marked variations in the penalties awarded for manslaughter. Among offenders suffering from diminished responsibility, nearly two-thirds were dealt with under the Mental Health Act 1959, most of them being given hospital orders with restriction, which meant that they could only be released with the permission of the Home Secretary. However a large proportion of the remaining one-third were given life imprisonment, which was of course the same sentence that they would have received had the charge not been reduced from murder. This was in sharp contrast to the treatment of those convicted of common-law manslaughter, who received shorter prison sentences if imprisoned at all."



Joan Worth graduated with honours in Economic History from London University in 1948, then worked in an economic capacity in the City for a number of years. She returned to the academic scene in 1964 and took a post-graduate diploma in social studies at Bedford College, later joining the homicide team in the Legal Research Unit there. She continued work on homicide with the Home Office Research Unit in 1970 and became attached to the Prison Department in 1976.



other departments was collected, co-ordinated and classified, and the index was based on victim-type because the importance of this factor had emerged from the earlier work already mentioned above.

4. The classification of victim-type that is used in the Index was taken from the report of the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment (1953). The three main victim categories of men, women and children are subdivided according to the background of the offence: whether committed in domestic circumstances, for sexual reasons, in the course of theft, or after a bout of drinking. At the end of December 1979 the male lifer population of some 1,500 was grouped as follows:

	Per Cent
Men who killed <i>domestic</i> victims (wives, girlfriends, mistresses and other relatives but excluding children)	19
Men who killed children	8
Men who killed women (other than domestic victims)	22
Men who killed men (including domestic victims)	36
Non-homicidal (arsonists, rapists etc)	15
	<u>100</u>

Two groups of lifers accounted for a third of the total population: - men who killed or injured women or children for sexual reasons consisting of 13%, and men who killed or injured women or men in the course of theft comprising 20%.

5. Although treated for certain purposes as a group in prison, life-sentence prisoners are not homogeneous but highly diverse in personality, skill and experience. A number of general points can be made about them.

a. *They are predominantly young.* At the end of December 1979 nearly 40% were below the age of 30 on conviction. (6% were below the age of 18 and such prisoners are detained during Her Majesty's Pleasure and are dealt with as a separate group by Prison Department).

b. *They are predominantly indigenous* to the U.K. and the Irish Republic, although immigrants, mainly from Pakistan and the West Indies, account for 10%.

c. *Some 80% have appeared before a court on an earlier occasion* Of the remaining 20% with no previous convictions a higher proportion figure among those who killed within the family circle, than in other types of circumstances.

d. *Half are in the first five years of sentence*, some 30% have served 6-10 years. At the other end of the scale about 2% have served more than 15 years. Some of these individuals may never be fit for release because of the nature and notoriety of their offences.

e. *A number of mentally disordered men are included.* These lifers suffer from neuroses, minor types of mental disease, epilepsy, personality disorders and occasionally psychoses. Murder is not confined to any one personality type but the 'psychopath' is disproportionately represented among murderers. Psychopaths, according to Sir David Henderson, who appeared as a witness before the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment "constitute the biggest, most serious and most controversial medico-legal and social problems. It is difficult to decide whether they should be regarded as criminally responsible for their actions. Those who had had most experience in dealing with them regard them as significantly less able to control their actions and restrain their violent impulses than a normal person.....". There is unhappily no recognised and accepted method of treatment for the psychopath; some believe that no effective treatment exists. Attempts have and are being made to help those psychopaths exhibiting sexual perversions as part of their disorder. In the main, however, these prisoners present an intractable problem for the prison authorities, and a few of them, because of the risk to the public outside, may have to be detained indefinitely. The Butler Committee considered that the penal system should continue to receive the psychopaths and suggested setting up two new units for those with dangerous, anti-social tendencies. These units would adopt a different approach from that used at Grendon based upon work patterns adjusted to individual needs.

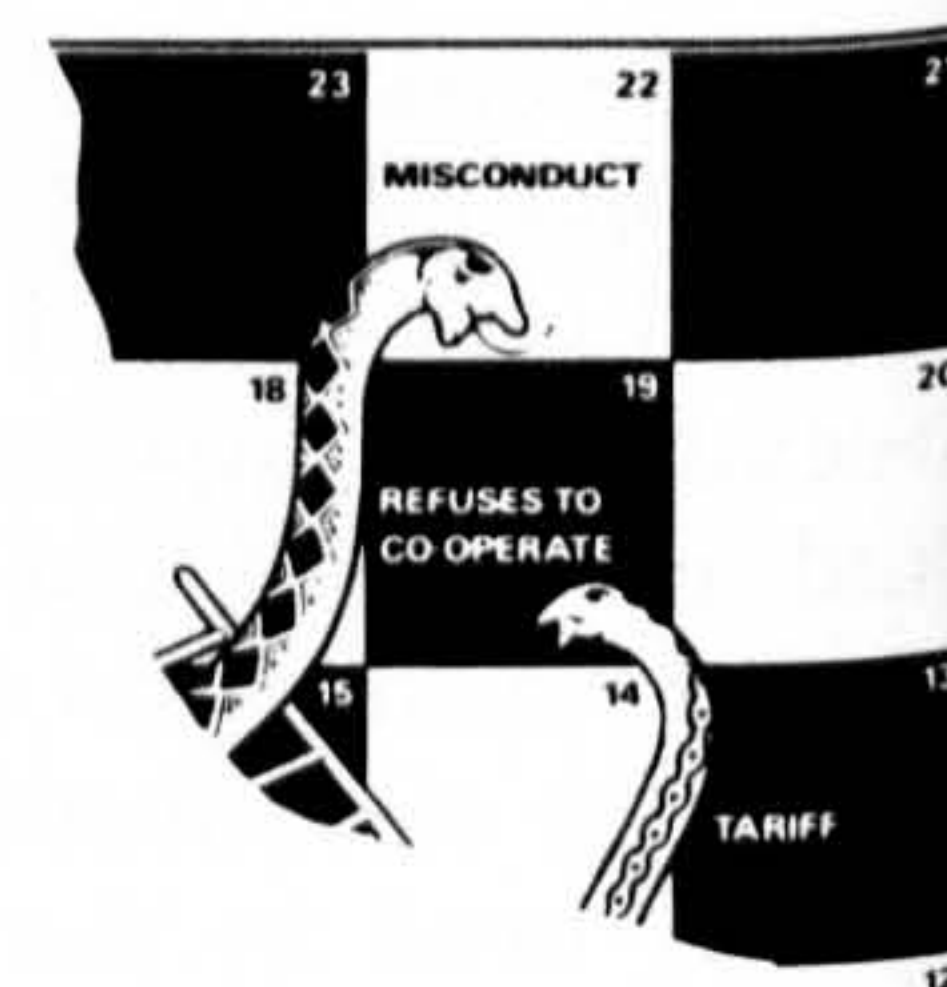
6. In the past many men serving life imprisonment were accommodated at Wakefield and Wormwood Scrubs for most of their sentence, following a short period at a local prison after conviction. Partly owing to the increase in numbers and partly because of the changes in the nature of the male life-sentence population itself during the early 1970's a new strategy of management was devised by Prison Department to contain these men. Its aim was to make the system more flexible, to give the authorities greater knowledge about the lifers within the system, as well as to help the offender himself feel that he has not been consigned to limbo for an uncertain number of years, and may also contribute to his own progress.

7. The average number of years served by male life-sentence prisoners released between 1970 and 1975 was 9.1. Men who killed in the domestic setting served slightly less than the average, while those who killed in the course of theft or for sexual reasons served rather longer periods. The released men have successfully negotiated the system whereas those whose potential is hard to assess remain in the care of Prison Department. Thus the average length of sentence would be greater if not based solely on those who are released.

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# THE MANAGEMENT OF LIFE SENTENCE PRISONERS

John Staples

**In writing this article I have drawn extensively on the papers produced for the Lifer Conference at Bournemouth 1980 and on my experience in the Lifer section of P3 Division. I cannot acknowledge all those to whom I am indebted but I am particularly grateful to Joe Pilling for his encouragement and advice during my time at Headquarters.**

My concern in this article is to explain how the Prison Department has responded to the growth in the number of lifers and to discuss the implications for the treatment of this increasingly significant section of the adult male prison population.

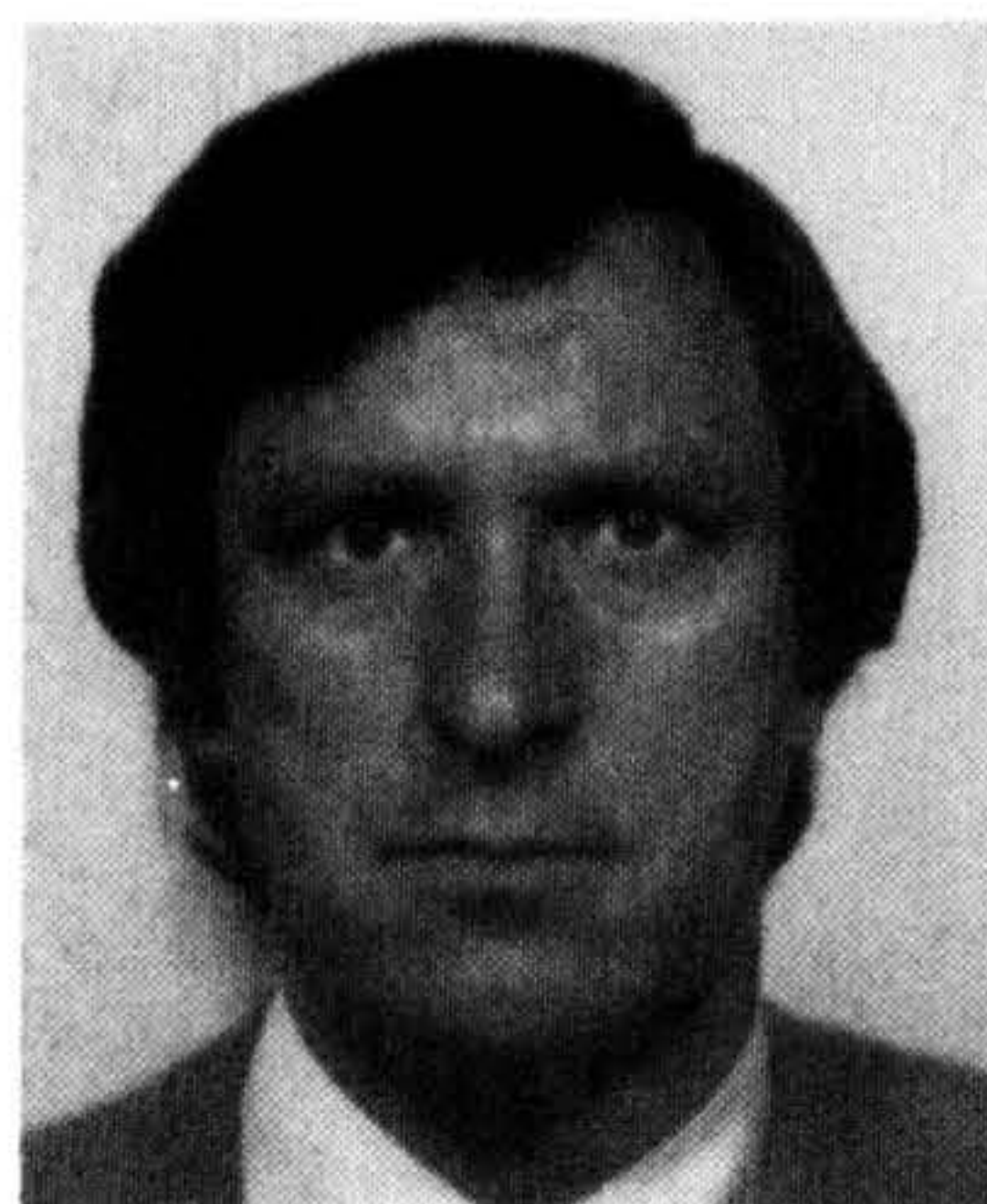
Joan Worth in her piece in this issue of the Journal describes the lifer population and the way in which it has grown. This growth has been both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the sentenced population of adult males, from nearly 5% now compared with less than 2% in 1967. These figures understate the change apparent in the training prisons where lifers form nearly 25% of the population. The forecasts are that this growth will continue. There is no sign of the plateau on the graph which had been anticipated in some statistical analyses.

The population is not only much larger, it is also more complex. It contains those who before the abolition of capital punishment would have been executed and will now serve very long terms of detention. There are also those who have been sentenced to life for manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility under the Homicide Act of 1957, as well as an increasing number of cases

in which the judge has chosen to give a life sentence to protect the public.

The decision when to release lifers is difficult, and requires careful assessment. There is often a mental element. For instance, as Dr. Laycock showed in her evaluation of the two lifer Main Centres, Wakefield and Wormwood Scrubs, 20% had had some psychiatric treatment before coming into prison and 4% had spent time prior to sentence in a special hospital.

At a number of Conferences in Dorking and Windsor from 1972 to 1976 the implications of the increas-



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ing number of lifers in the prison system were considered by mixed groups of governors and officials from Headquarters, and a response formulated: the Revised Strategy.

Practice had been for lifers to be moved after sentence from the local prison to which they had been remanded on the recommendation of that prison's long term allocation unit to a designated training prison. The lifer would remain there until he was released under licence through the pre-release hostel scheme, or moved to an open prison: a lifer could have been, and many were, released direct from Wakefield after a period on an outside working party and, sometimes, a stay in that prison's hostel. During the whole of his period of detention the lifer would have been held in only two prisons, his local and Wakefield.

There were but a handful of prisons designated as appropriate for lifers, six in 1964. It was clear that the rising tide of lifers would engulf these prisons and transform the regimes if there were no other outlets.

Not only was it felt that these existing lifer prisons should not have to cope alone, but it was considered undesirable that a lifer should spend so long in one place. Experience had shown that this led to dependency on the institution and was a poor preparation for release.

At this time there was one prison comprising only of lifers, Kingston, but it was seen as experimental and regarded as holding, not the mainstream of lifers, but those who were the least criminally sophisticated and had been specially selected. There has never been any persuasive argument for repeating the experiment and most governors have argued that lifers benefit from being with fixed term men, especially when release is a probability within the near future.

It was decided not only to increase the number of prisons receiving lifers, but to widen the range to include secure and semi-secure prisons and an additional open prison.

The purpose of the open prison for lifers was threefold:

a) To test them in a new environment which is as close to life outside as it is possible to achieve within the prison system, and before a release date has been set.

b) When the lifer has met the criteria for safe release and is no longer seen as danger-

ous, but is not thought to have spent a sufficiently long time in prison to have satisfied the retributive element of the sentence.

c) When a lifer has spent a considerable number of years in closed prisons he needs to be acclimatised to the world at large, not to test him but to help him prepare for release.

Leyhill was the only open prison holding lifers. It did not have sufficient accommodation for the future and so an additional open prison would be needed and some semi-secure prisons would have to take on the open prison role. There would be more routes out of the system.

This greater movement of lifers through the system would have the advantage of providing them with some concrete indication of the progress they were making towards release. Coping with the indeterminacy of the sentence generated much anxiety, especially through the middle phase of detention. It could be extremely helpful to the individual if decisions about transfers were taken within a structured plan applicable to the generality of lifers.

In order to formulate such plans and to ensure that the allocation of lifers to a wider range of prisons was facilitated and such decisions made in the light of the maximum amount of information available, it was agreed to retain central control of allocation. Furthermore, two prisons were nominated to be Main Centres for the reception of lifers within a short space of time after sentence. All that would be left to the long term allocation units to recommend was to which of the two Main Centres the lifer should be allocated.

Wormwood Scrubs and Wakefield were the chosen locations for the Main Centres. Both had a high level of security, medical facilities and staff experienced in the problems of long term prisoners. Thus the majority of lifers could be suitably located in either of the two prisons. Only those in the highest security category have been exempted and then usually only where there has been a need to separate potentially disruptive groups.

This first stage of the life sentence was observed by governors to be marked by withdrawal and defensiveness in the lifer's relationships with those around him. The lifer was usually ignorant of the review proc-

edure and still feeling an acute reaction to the offence and imprisonment. Through the support which staff could give at that stage would come an understanding of the lifer, an assessment of him and his needs so that a recommendation could be made as to how these needs might be met within the constraints of the prison system and without placing the public at risk.

To achieve this the stay at Main Centres would need to be an extended one. Initially it was set at three years from remand but it has tended to drift towards a four year stay. At the end of that time reports are submitted by the Main Centres for consideration by a Joint Committee of the Parole Board and the Criminal Justice Division of the Home Office. In the light of those reports, the gravity of the offence, and with regard to public opinion, the Committee sets a date either for the case to go to the Parole Board or to be reviewed again by itself. This decision is an indicator of the approximate length of detention likely to be served. However, it is not made until after the Main Centres have recommended an allocation. The recommendation, which was made in the context of the Main Centres' own estimate of likely length of sentence, is reconsidered after the meeting of the Joint Committee. This is done by the Lifer Section in P3 Division of the Prison Department, who are informed of the date set by the Joint Committee.

How can Main Centres ensure that their estimates of likely length of sentence are reasonably accurate? To begin with, the information available to them is much the same as that before the Joint Committee. And although it cannot be said that there is a tariff for the offence, a broad consensus exists amongst those making release decisions. For example, murder within the circle of the family may, under this very broad generalisation, earn less than ten years; murder in the course of armed robbery around fifteen years; battered baby cases, nine years; murder during an affray between rival gangs of youths, nine years; murder for gain, twelve years; manslaughter less than nine years; and a young person committing murder, around eight years; an immature and inexperienced youth in a sexual killing, less than a man killing in the course of rape of a woman unknown to him, but both might attract



between ten to twelve years. (In all cases there will be quite wide individual variations.)

Some judges write privately to the Secretary of State giving their views on cases they have tried and offering guidance on length of detention. In some serious cases a minimum recommendation will have been given in open court and this is an indication of likely sentence length: in 1978, for the first time, three lifers were released having been detained for shorter periods than the minimum recommended at their trial but this is likely to be a rare event.

There is no avenue of appeal against a minimum recommendation and the possibility of a variation occurs only where:-

- a) There is inconsistency between a recommendation made in earlier days and current practice with regard to both sentencing and the making of minimum recommendations.
- b) There is inconsistency between recommendations made currently.
- c) Exceptionally good progress is made in prison with real evidence of reformation.
- d) There are particularly propitious resettlement arrangements.

However, if the Main Centres have arrived at a sentence length incompatible with the decision of the Joint Committee, P3 Division can revise the allocation accordingly.

For many years allocations have been linked in the minds of lifers with release and this has been reinforced by current practice. To move a lifer from a high security prison to one of lower security means to the lifer a move nearer the gate. To make such a move even for his greater convenience because it is nearer home or administratively because there are empty cells at that prison without regard to this notion would be to raise hopes falsely, which when dashed could lead to a severe reaction.

It might be said that to give lifers any indication about the length of detention when this is not surely known, and even the Joint Committee's decision is only an indicator is to invite disaster if those indications prove false. The view expressed at the Conference held prior to the introduction of the Revised Strategy was that after the initial shock of the sentence and when the lifer came to realise that his

sentence was reviewable, then he was forever looking for pointers to release, comparing notes with other lifers, asking staff for guidance. If he is not provided with clues based on what knowledge we do have, the lifer will simply invent his own which are inevitably less accurate and more likely to lead to disappointment.

The Revised Strategy has been in operation for over five years and the position we have reached now is that the growing number of lifers is being contained in suitable accommodation without adversely affecting regimes. They are sifted through a range of prisons usually of lessening levels of security until the Secretary of State approves a move to open prison or a date for release. The speed with which this process is accomplished is dependent upon the Joint Committee and the Parole Board's view of the risks attendant upon the release of each individual, a view based upon a judgement about dangerousness gleaned from prison reports and on retribution determined by precedent; before a lifer can be released the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge are consulted and their view is formed from past experience.

It is essentially a cautious process geared to holding back lifers who would be safe if released rather than risking the release of one who might re-offend.

The problem might have been tackled otherwise. Recently the case has been put forward by the Advisory Council that a life sentence should no longer be mandatory in cases of murder. This would lessen the number of lifers, which could be even further reduced by withdrawing the indeterminate sentence from courts for offences other than murder.

Such a strategy might not have reduced the prison population, but would have diminished the number of lifers. This in itself would have lessened the pressure on the administration, and on lifers themselves in coping with the special problems of indeterminacy. How hollow are the words of the judge who gives an indeterminate sentence, (life) to a man in the name of leniency, when that sentence brings with it such uncertainty, such vulnerability. Is there a lifer who would not sooner exchange his detention for a determinate sentence of almost any length?

Another approach might have been to adopt a policy of releasing more

lifers and releasing them earlier. The Parole Board was asked by the Home Secretary to adopt fresh guidelines intended to achieve a higher rate of release for fixed term men in 1975 and this has been done with no undue risk to the public. Perhaps a similar strategy could be adopted for lifers.

However, although representatives from the wider Home Office were present during the conferences which formulated the Revised Strategy only the Prison Department made any radical change. Perhaps it is only fair to say that the Parole Board and Criminal Justice Division did agree to have the first review of the life sentence by the Joint Committee set at a time to coincide with the end of the Main Centre stay. Even this small adjustment to established procedures has been modified in practice so that the review sometimes does not occur until nearly four, not three years have elapsed from date of remand. This has caused considerable stress to lifers in Main Centres and embarrassment to staff, but so far away from the impact of such decisions are those who make them that this has been insufficiently appreciated. In the Home Office the treatment of long term offenders is not the total responsibility of any one division or department alone and change which has to cross the boundaries of departments is often slow to be implemented fully.

So the Revised Strategy had to be operated against a background of the Parole Board's very cautious approach to release and the long established but somewhat arcane review procedures.

Bob Morris, who was at the time the Assistant Secretary of P3 Division said at one of the lifer conferences, "Unless there is some conceptual framework behind what is otherwise mere movement, then the Revised Strategy would appear to be little more than a matter of administrative convenience." The Prison Department have been at pains to develop a system with a conceptual framework which attempts to avoid lifers being shunted from place to place simply to achieve some short term practical aim. How feasible is such a system which has to be sustained against the day to day pressures?

It is in the nature of institutions that the outlook of those who live and work within the walls tends to be confined also. So many of the judgements made about prisoners



are to do with how they conform to prison routines. For the sake of good order in our overcrowded institutions we are interested in and reward obedience. In the recent "Strange-ways" programmes on television an officer at Manchester speaking of discipline said "never mind what happens out there. In here the rules must be obeyed." Clearly this view has little to do with rehabilitation, whatever that can mean in a place like Manchester. His words convey a picture of that prison as a world apart, and what goes on there as having little or no implication for society at large. In other words the prison must be a place of discipline and order. What the world outside cares to tolerate in permissiveness and disorder is of little concern to those inside.

The development of more sophisticated assessment and classifying techniques may only provide further pressures and incentives to coerce prisoners into being "docile and useful". Perhaps an attractive prospect for prison staff and administrators but of no use to the prisoner nor to the society to which he will return.

How can these coercive tendencies be counteracted? In the first place the lifer himself must be brought into discussions with staff on the decisions being made about him. This is not new. At the two Main Centres prison staff do invite the lifer to put forward his own ideas about allocation. When being considered by the Parole Board prisoners have the right to put forward their representations. Could not they do so in the case of other equally significant decisions? A prisoner can of course petition but this is usual only after the decision has been made.

Secondly the Parole Board could give the administrative process an external aim and direction, because it comprises people who are independent of the prison system and Home Office, and therefore could set objectives free from the taint of administrative expediency. Instead of having a joint committee of Parole Board and Home Office officials, a sub-committee of the Parole Board might set not simply a date for the case to be considered, but also the criteria for release.

It might be argued that the presence of Criminal Justice Division is essential because it is they who advise the Home Secretary whether to accept the Parole Board's re-

commendation. A similar 'constitutional' argument was used against the notion of an independent Inspectorate for the Prison Department, but it was seen that the issue of achieving public acceptance of the independence of the Inspectorate was of greater importance.

At lifer panels of the Parole Board governor grade members of P3 Division attend as advisers to the Board. Occasionally it happens that this provides the opportunity for some insight into the reasons behind the Board's decision to be fed back. Why could this not be formalised in regular practice?

There are grave difficulties about giving reasons for Board decisions and, perhaps, these have to be accepted for fixed term prisoners. But for lifers the decision is so much more significant and the reaction likely to be more acute. There is no fall back date for the lifer to draw comfort from, no date of release beyond which he cannot be held. Such a peculiar disadvantage demands extraordinary treatment.

The setting of criteria for release at an early stage would imply some commitment on the part of future panels to accept those criteria. Membership changes frequently and panels are not like-minded. To a degree this problem exists already when the Board accedes to a suggestion from Criminal Justice Division that a lifer should go to open conditions. Implicit in that decision is that release will come within the next four years or so. At least one member of the Board maintains a record of the decisions to which he is a party and uses them as precedents. There has to be some degree of consensus about decisions, otherwise the process becomes a lottery; so to ask that panels should feel an obligation towards accepting criteria for release set by other members is not so radical.

A constraint on the Parole Boards' decisions is the requirement to consult the judiciary before a lifer can be released. If such consultation could take place at an earlier stage than they now do, the parameters of the period of detention could be set. Lifers can accept that in part their sentence has a punitive element and that to satisfy this a period will have to be served, however safe for release they may be.

Once it was known what penalty deterrence and retribution demand-

ed, the Parole Board could add their requirements; for example, evidence of the lifer having learned to control his temper when in drink, and having demonstrated to those around him that he was capable of remorse and an understanding of the suffering he had caused. The lifer and the staff could be informed of the criteria and a plan for the individual's stay in prison leading to preparation for release could be submitted to the Board for approval.

The Revised Strategy was devised to meet a practical problem in an administratively convenient way. In solving that problem Prison Department consulted prison staff who brought to the debate a point of view which was influenced by the feelings of life sentence prisoners and gave to its Strategy the face of humanity. Reinforcing that has been the Department's policy to employ governors who have had first hand dealings with lifers in the administration of the strategy.

However, I do not believe this to be enough. If it is important to avoid the strategy becoming merely a tool of convenience, and I think it is, then it must be so structured that its direction and momentum should come from the Parole Board, people whose approach is rooted in the wider community. Their decisions and the reasons must be available for both the lifer and those around him to work on together.

This would go some way to ease the frustration and smouldering anger of many lifers. For those identified as men who had a lifetime to serve, proper consideration could be given to the conditions appropriate to them. For others who have more hope, direction and purpose would be given to their detention. With the numbers growing at the pace maintained during the last decade it is essential to meet these needs, or the build-up of despair and anger among so many may surface unwantedly.

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# VIOLENCE AND THE INSTITUTION

N.C.P.

*Inmate, HM Prison Kingston*

**For purposes of analysis, no institution can be divorced from the society out of which it arose. Institutions do not exist in isolation from their surrounding networks. Even such total institutions as prisons and mental hospitals are deeply affected by the wider cultural environment, although such factors as internal organization and policy contribute much to the sum life condition of the institution's inhabitants.**

As far as prisons are concerned, and to a lesser extent mental hospitals as well, violence is an ever present reality of day-to-day life. To a certain extent some of this violence is brought to the institution in the form of wider culturally based behaviour patterns. Upwards of 90% of all prisoners and, by definition, 100% of prison officers are working class. Working class culture places a much stronger emphasis on male chauvinism, toughness, and strength than does middle or upper class culture. Consequently violence is more a feature of working class life, in the school, in the streets, and in the workplace, than it is for the other classes. It is not surprising then that in an institution where only a very few people at management level are middle class, a certain level of culturally based working class violence should exist.

Prison violence is not totally culturally based though. If it were, the level of violence would be approximately the same as it is in the working class culture from which the

institution's inhabitants came. That the level is very much higher, both in degree and frequency of occurrence, unerringly points to the influence of purely internal factors.

Prisoners in this country are not as politicised as some of their foreign counterparts. This does not mean that they do not have a profound awareness of the existing power structure. The majority do not look on their crimes or life-styles as specifically political acts, yet many, as members of the working class, perceive the political system to be biased against them and thus a mitigating factor to their 'criminality'. Even if the myth of the meritocratic process of every man being able to proceed as far up the ladder as individual attributes will allow, has not been proved false for the individual prisoner, he will be aware that great inequalities and injustices exist in our society. He may well view his own 'criminal' act as being similar in kind to many acts committed by society's powerful elite, but for which they are not punished. He will soon realize that the prison

policy makers and managers are members of that same class who enjoy special privilege and protection. His perspective then will be profoundly realist. He won't necessarily accept that their view of the world is 'right' in any absolute sense. If he struggled against them in outside life, it is to be expected that he will continue to struggle against them in prison.

The controlling prison hierarchy at both local and national level share a common elitist perspective. They are solidly middle class. Their very positions are evidence that the system benefits them, so they can see little reason to change it. Working class criminals who threaten to upset the system by going outside it's meritocratic structure are a very real threat to them. Their aim is first and foremost to control, and secondly to get the criminal group to work within the existing meritocratic structure.

Basically then, the prison situation is the meeting point of two different and mutually antagonistic perspectives. On the one hand there is a middle class group of managers and policy makers with their elitist

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perspective, and on the other there is a working class group of prisoners who are well aware that the elitist system offers little benefit for them. That two such diametrically opposed perspectives should clash is inevitable. That another working class group, the officers, should be caught in between, is ironical.

Much has been written about the Victorian conditions in much of our prison system. This, together with overcrowding, is one of the main reasons given for the high level of frustration and violence. These conditions affect the officer though. The prisoner's living conditions are the officer's working conditions. Officers, as a working group, were paid. It is only because of the present government's emphasis on law and order that they have recently had a rise. They are still, as a group, poorly housed, their working conditions in general are atrocious and the rate paid for the long and unsocial hours they have to put in is still poor compared to that of other working groups. Why should they, in contrast to most other working groups, be neglected in such a manner?

The explanation lies in the nature of our capitalist system of production. The relationship of both officer and prisoner to this system is a negative one in that neither groups produce, but both groups consume. Traditionally, such groups who contribute little or nothing to the capitalist production process are poorly paid and otherwise neglected (e.g. nurses, teachers). Should prison industries ever become important in relation to the capitalist production process, a massive injection of capital into prisons would follow. The newly productively valuable officer and prisoner would enjoy an enhanced status. Working and living conditions for both would improve in the name of efficiency, and in the interests of maintaining a contented workforce. That such an injection of capital does not take place purely out of humanitarian concern instead of out of concern for profit, is a reflection on the capitalist system. Thus the system directly contributes to the level of frustration and violence in our prisons, because it is guided by priorities of profit, and so allows deplorable prison conditions to exist.

At the institutional level, these externally determined factors are compounded by contributory internal factors. In any situation where an extremely powerful group exists side by

side with an extremely powerless group, abuses will occur. When both groups are hidden from the public gaze by a wall and by the Official Secrets Act, criticism is obstructed and abuses will flourish.

Although there is a clearly defined complaints procedure to deal with prisoners grievances, in effect this generally consolidates the authorities position of power. Prison governors, in the main, side with their staff. In cases where they have to decide between the word of a prisoner and that of an officer, they generally take the word of the latter. Boards of Visitors rarely overturn a governor's decision on an important matter. Generally elderly and solidly middle class, the Board members share the same class perspective as the governor, and often know him socially. To the prisoner who believes in the justice of his complaint, yet is turned down, it looks very much like a conspiracy.

A petition to the Home Secretary has even less chance of success. Unable to take advantage of a face to face situation to plead his case, the prisoner has to express his grievance in writing, a medium that some may find difficult to cope with adequately. Together with the petition, couched in working class language, the governor sends his opinion on the matter, in solidly middle class terminology. The middle class civil servant who will deal with the petition in London, has probably never met prisoner or governor. However, his common class ties with the latter and the fact that they both work for, and implicitly support, the status quo, virtually guarantees a decision that will support the governor. This decision can take anything from three months upwards to be arrived at, so in any case the petition offers a prisoner no immediate solution to a grievance. Hanging over these complaints procedures and acting as a very real deterrent to the use of them, is the prison rule which states that any prisoner making an unfounded allegation lays himself open to disciplinary action. This disciplinary action will not be based on the same quality of proof as is asked of the prisoner to sustain his complaint, but will often rest merely on the word of a member of staff. Thus not only may a prisoner be refused equity for a just complaint, he may well be punished for making that complaint.

Letters smuggled out to the press are generally ignored, except by 'The Guardian'. Prisoners are well aware that prisons come under the aegis of the Official Secrets Act, and generally believe that 'D' notices can be applied to matters to which the Home Office strongly object. In short, the avenues open to a prisoner with a genuine grievance offer very little hope of equitable treatment. It has been said that a people denied justice by their rulers will make their own justice. Very often this is what prisoners perceive to have happened when there is a violent confrontation in prison.

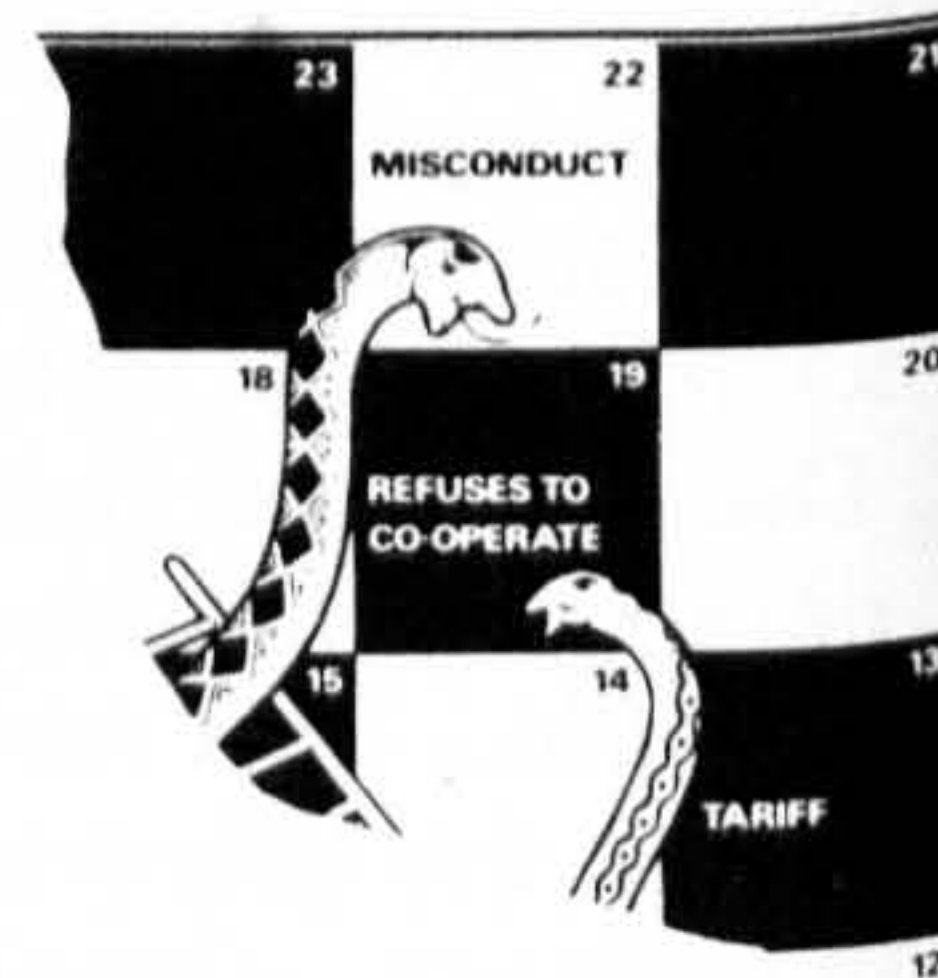
It is an unfortunate fact that, prisoners occasionally suffer physical violence at the hands of staff. Whether or not the prisoner has "asked for it" (a very subjective judgement), or was merely disruptive, is hardly relevant. The important point in the eyes of the prisoners' is that officers, the supposed guardians of law and order have broken the law, and what is more, have got away with it. This has the effect of legitimising violence. Instead of being something to be abhorred absolutely, violence becomes an accepted means of self-expression, because the authorities themselves condone its clandestine use to help maintain control. Violence thus becomes self-perpetuating.

Of all things which are anathema to the Prison Department, bad publicity ranks supreme. For this reason, there is a strong tendency to try to treat internal prison incidents as such, and deal with them internally. In less severe cases of inter-prisoner violence, especially where there are both publicity and security considerations to an outside court trial, the matter is often dealt with by the prison governor or the Board of Visitors. This inevitably leads to a much less severe punishment than an outside court would have imposed. Thus, inter-prisoner violence comes to be a lesser kind of violence, punished by lesser sentences. There is another double standard involved here too. In many prisons, a similarly violent assault by a prisoner on a member of staff, is automatically referred to the outside court. It is hardly surprising then that many prisoners draw the conclusion that the message is "you can do what you like to each other, but we will throw the book at you if you touch staff."

Prison authorities do sometimes

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# LIFE AND THE LIFER

H.B. Bingham

**Those who work in prisons, in day-to-day contact with inmates, tend to use the term 'lifer' as a generic label, apparently indicating a particular type of person with clearly distinguishable characteristics, yet it is quite clear, even from the most superficial inspection, that there is no such thing as 'a lifer', but rather a collection of offenders whose only common experience is that of serving a life sentence. Apart from that shared experience the individuals differ as widely as the spectrum of society found in the community outside prison. Perhaps this is the first significant point to be noted in any assessment of what lifers are and how the prison system might cater for them. The problem is one of considering individuals.**

However, while the legal system continues to lock away for an indeterminate period of time those who have committed certain crimes it is surely the responsibility of the nation to ensure, as far as it is able, that by the end of that period the inmate is equipped to rejoin the community. Not all lifers are recidivists; indeed, for many the offence is their only offence, and they will probably never again transgress. At the other extreme are the lifers with long criminal records which often reveal a progression through the system, the pattern developing from petty crime through assault and g.b.h. to homicide. Some lifers are professional people, well educated and with considerable social skills, while others have little education, perhaps no vocational skills, but certainly a capacity for survival gained of necessity during their formative years. Whatever their backgrounds may be it is a short-sighted policy which, having locked them away, assumes that they will be prepared, in every sense of that word, to rejoin the community with the intention of making a worthwhile contribution to it and with the minimum of adjustment being needed to accept its norms, *unless* conditions during that

long sentence actively lead in that direction. Clearly it is not cost-effective for the nation to pursue a penal policy which releases people from prison *less* well equipped to cope with life than when they were convicted: the system would merely be adding to its burden, and the chances of reconviction or revocation of licence would no doubt be increased.

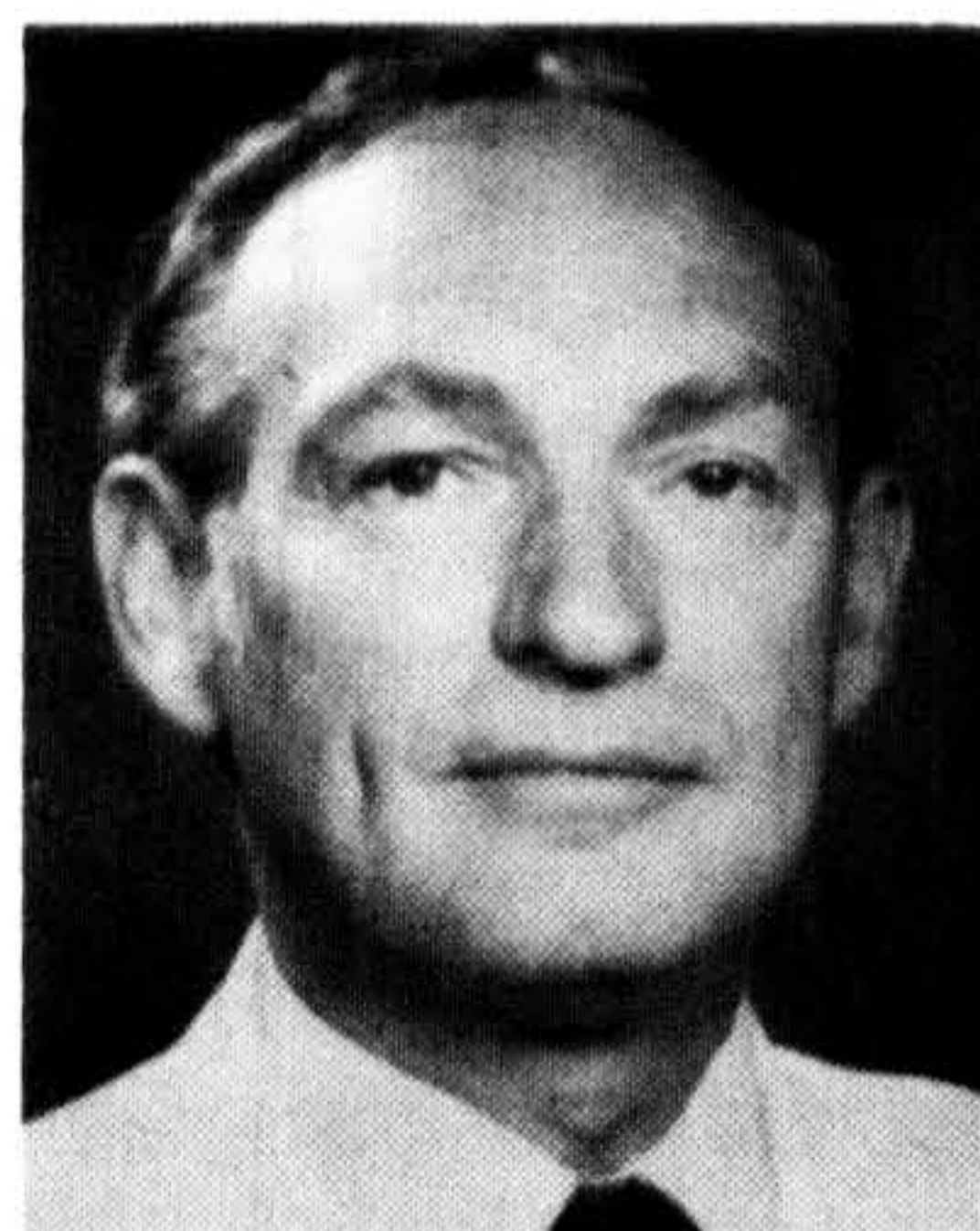
The lifer population now stands at nearly 1,600 and the figure is rising steadily, and with long indeterminate sentences ahead for many inmates it is time we looked carefully at any factors which might lead to these people ultimately rejoining the community as worthwhile capable individuals rather than as embittered socially crippled beings lacking con-

fidence and an understanding of what society expects of them.

## The Man Behind the Label

Let us take a closer look at the man. The lifer is an individual who has passed through the socialisation of childhood and adolescence and whose attitudes and concepts are largely a consequence of his total experience during those years. Of course all human beings go through those phases of life, yet for each the experience is unique, and individual encounters and events form our concepts or modify existing ones. Similarly, intelligence, ability and achievement differ vastly from one to another, and, significantly perhaps, their potential and their level of *under-achievement* varies considerably from one to another. We will return to this point later.

Lifers appear to deal with survival in the system in almost as many ways as there are men serving life. Some identify with cliques or with individuals and sustain themselves by the group identity and solidarity so obtained, while others adopt a highly individualistic approach keeping their views and personal activities very much to themselves.



Bev Bingham is 52. After qualifying as a teacher of Physical Education and English at St Paul's College of Education, Cheltenham, he joined the Royal Navy. Later permanently commissioned in the Army, he held a staff appointment at the War Office and served in Korea, Malaya, Berlin and West Germany before retiring in 1974 as a Major. He is reading for a B.Ed degree in Further Education and hopes to research for an MA. His sport is parachuting.



Some appear to need the recognition of their peers and status within the pecking order of the sub-culture if they are to survive, while others keep their distance and are often respected for it. Usually the stance is contrived, though not in a dramatic sense, to ensure that survival is as bearable as possible, and it is ironic that in some cases this personal manoeuvring leads to the man discovering, quite unintentionally, talent and aptitude which at first seem quite out of character for him. Latent ability, hidden potential, begins to emerge. It is seen in many forms: literary work, music, engineering skills, personal relationships, printing, book-binding, art, welding.

There are many lifers who have not fully developed their intellectual, academic or practical abilities, yet personal drive is there. In some cases that drive appears to find an outlet in activities which are certainly not acceptable to the community, yet it is surprising how many life sentence men *with a low level of attainment on conviction* become involved during their sentences in activities which enable them to gain academic, professional or craft/trade objectives far beyond their own expectations or those of the prison staff. While I am not saying that enabling latent talent to be realised *will* produce a 'better' man one can hardly argue that the effect is regressive. Surely the person who finds *worthwhile* outlets for his ability will have an improved self-image, will have reduced the internal drive, and will perhaps also receive some recognition for his achievement from those around him.

Perhaps a closer inspection of the prison environment together with the needs of the individual will help to reveal the areas which require attention if we are to enable lifers to rejoin the outside community as capable balanced citizens. The impact of a life sentence can have a devastating effect upon a man. He has no date to which he can look forward for release, and almost any activity can seem pointless other than as a means of passing time. Differences of opinion which might be insignificant outside prison can produce hostile confrontations inside. Options are severely limited, and the opportunity to make decisions occurs far less than in a free society. Even if private cash is available many personal items and materials cannot be acquired. Perhaps the most power-

ful factor of all is the prison's sub-culture itself: a society from which there is no escape. It is hardly surprising that in this setting the lifer discovers that he must devise his own strategy for survival, and it is probably during these planning phases are structured or formal; educational staff can help him to find areas of interest which he can explore. I am not implying that such phases are structures or formal; indeed they tend to be spontaneous events, perhaps a consequence of news received from outside or sometimes the product of several months of apparently aimless and listless existence which might have been hiding an unconscious search for a sense of direction. It is at this time that staff with appropriate expertise and knowledge should take the opportunity to draw attention to the need for particular forms of training or education with the long term view in mind. Clearly a man who is illiterate needs assistance in the shape of remedial teaching and those lacking vocational skills require facilities for trade training, but it is not always understood by those who had an enjoyable and successful time at school that for many men the word 'education' is associated with their own adolescent years in depressed environments and sometimes in educationally barren homes. Both factors can produce antipathy if not downright antagonism towards anything smacking of teachers, organisation, authority and especially 'education'. Earlier in this paper we mentioned *underachievement*, and in some cases the home and local environment during the formative years of life partially explain why people have not acquired the basic educational skills, those of literacy and numeracy, or have not progressed considerably beyond that level although they have the ability to do so. Whatever the reason might be it is certainly in the interest of the community and the individual to discover means of realising this potential; indeed, since the turn of the century there have been a number of moves to provide legislation which would permit people in employment to attend day-time educational classes on a day-release basis. This has been happening on the continent for some years, and in this country it is one of the tasks of the colleges of further education to provide facilities for those who need them and can find time to attend.

## Varieties of Need

Amongst the lifer population it is possible to identify a number of categories of educational need, but I am using the term *educational need* in its broadest sense, that is to include vocational and social skills and personal development as well as what we usually mean by *education* - numeracy, literacy and general academic attainment. These needs seem to fall roughly into the following groups:

### 1. Remedial Work:

for individuals who have not yet acquired or who need to improve their standards of literacy and numeracy, or who need an understanding of metrication. The metrication and numeracy specification can sometimes be directly related to a future objective such as craft training in engineering, radio and television servicing etc, but a basic level of all three skills is needed in the day-to-day management of personal affairs in the modern world.

### 2. Vocational Skills:

individuals without trade skills should be encouraged to undergo trade training during their sentence, although during a long sentence it might not be possible for appropriate employment to follow the training, and for that reason vocational training should not necessarily be seen as taking place shortly before release. Certainly for the lifer it can provide a form of therapy at stages in his sentence when a complete break is needed from the tedious routine of prison life if he is to maintain his equilibrium and morale. Additionally trade training can be useful in the diagnostic sense of allowing the lifer time to familiarise himself with certain work skills to see whether or not his strengths lie in that field. Although the current bleak economic climate might not encourage us to regard trade training courses as sampling devices I believe that in the case of men serving indeterminate sentences there is a sound argument for allowing this to take place. Certainly there is a good case for acquiring more than one set of vocational skills, or at least skills which can be transferred from one field of work to another,



and that approach is already being seen outside where *re-training* is becoming almost as important as *training*.

3. **Academic/Intellectual Development:** underachievement has already been mentioned, and facilities should be provided to enable self actualisation, realisation of potential to occur. At the same time it is important for those who provide counselling-Education officers, tutors, probation officers, discipline officers-to realise that the acquisition of qualifications *per se* will not guarantee the man's acceptance in a particular professional field, and for that reason a systematic reconnaissance should be undertaken before embarking upon a course of study with a specific career in mind. However, what has been said should not stand in the way of a man who wishes to undertake worthwhile studies simply for the enjoyment and intellectual stimulation which such activity provides. Indeed in many cases where lifers have undertaken demanding academic courses their motives for enrolling had no connection with future employment! It is therefore interesting to discover that some who chose to adopt academic activities found themselves, almost unwittingly, deeply involved in the work, and ultimately found that it had changed their attitudes towards work and society, in both cases for the better. Perhaps for the man the most important aspect of this work is the sense of personal achievement which success brings. Of course there are failures too, but good student counselling before selecting a course of study, together with suitable pacing of work, should minimise the chance of failure.

While these are the main areas needing the attention of the educational staff I firmly believe that Education Officers with responsibility for programmes affecting lifers should provide opportunities for sampling many activities without making a commitment to them. Surely this is the real meaning of education: it is a process of learning throughout life wherever and whenever stimulating and worthwhile opportunities occur, and in an environment which has so many con-

straints it must be the responsibility of the staff, particularly those who are qualified by training or experience - and the latter includes almost everyone - to ensure that opportunities to participate in such activities are available.

#### **Experiment with a Future?**

It was with this object in mind that Maidstone Prison set up a Lifer's Summer School during two weeks of 1979. The idea was to run a programme included free-activity with outside speakers taking part, which would introduce interesting topics not previously encountered in the prison programme. It was also an opportunity for some lifers to get away from the normal prison routine for a whole week. As the programme included free-activity periods and games between the formal sessions, and as meals were taken away from the main wing, it made a real contrast with the usual working week. The men suggested topics for the programme, and staff also put forward ideas, and the final format was therefore a combined effort produced by the lifers, Assistant Governor, Derek Brisco and myself, together with officer F G Southern and Senior Officer R L Pearce. Dr. Alex Barbrook of the University of Kent's School of Continuing Education provided the initial link with a number of stimulating and in some cases eminent speakers. Perhaps it is appropriate to say that in this venture personality is probably more important than professional knowledge, and we were exceedingly fortunate in finding speakers whose vast experience and knowledge was matched by their ability to establish instant rapport with the men. Topics ranged from silk screen printing - actually undertaken in the classroom-to the methods of oil exploration used by British Petroleum. The language of sculpture; textures in music; mathematical forms illustrated by soap bubbles; organizational aspects of a Rugby tour to the USA; advanced driving techniques; plant control and toxicology, and other subjects were covered, some appearing esoteric or sophisticated, yet all captivating the audience through the expertise of the speaker and his mode of presentation.

If education is a lifelong process of self development then these experiences were part of that process, yet the worthwhile nature of the event extended beyond the mere

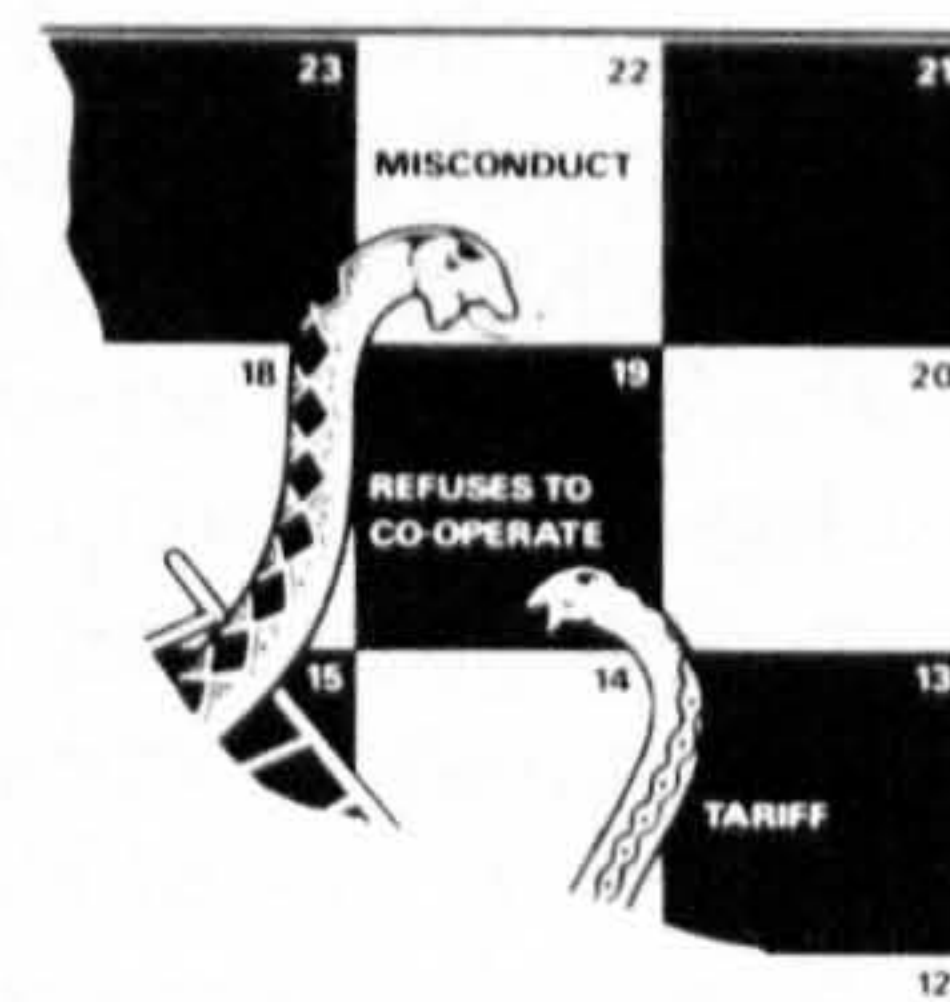
content of the course. It was seen in the mutual organization of the programme; in the break period, meal time and games sessions run by the two officers and inmates *together*, and in the mutual respect and appreciation which was a consequence of that activity. It is difficult to assess the value of a particular experience as it may have a lifelong effect on the individual's view of life. Certainly one is never quite the same as before the event, and it is interesting to find that men who shun certain activities through a lack of familiarity with them or through socialisation against them can enjoy their first encounter if it is not seen to threaten their life style. So are horizons widened and the quality of life enhanced. But the Summer School did not require a prolonged commitment to any activity; each session was a sampling, perhaps a taste of something new, and in the tedium of an indeterminate sentence it could not only help to sustain an interest in worthwhile things, but might even open up new avenues for exploration. The Summer School has an important part to play in that respect and in its ability to introduce the opportunity for appreciation of aesthetic qualities and contemplation of creativity.

Undermanning precluded running a similar event in the summer of 1980, but at the time of writing it is being planned for October of that year.

It is difficult to envisage a single career plan for lifers, a systematic progression through the life sentence, when the needs of individuals vary so much from one to another, but I firmly believe that *flexibility* and *diversity* must be the hall-marks of our approach to each lifer so that after our having helped him to assess his needs he can take the initiative in selecting what is appropriate to cater for the future, and in some cases to cope with the present. Many of the resources in the form of training and educational facilities are already available. Perhaps we need to identify, or help the man to identify, areas where self-development can take place, and indeed in some cases where it *must* take place if he is to be capable of survival with the minimum of support when he is released. There is therefore a hierarchy of needs for the lifer as for any other individual, but as the system assumes responsibility for imposing necessary constraints in his life it

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# LIFERS IN OPEN CONDITIONS

Paddy Scriven and Peter Gibbs

## A Warehouse in a Meadow

When we were asked to submit a paper on 'Lifers in Open Conditions', we tried to refuse on the grounds that in reality we could only refer to lifers at Leyhill Open Prison. This was deemed to be as inadequate an excuse as feigning illiteracy. In addition it was pointed out that as by far the largest majority of lifers in open conditions are at Leyhill we were better placed than anyone to have observed the phenomena, especially as they make up about 25% of our population at any one time. Having said that, many of our observations could apply to any prison and any group of prisoners. If, therefore, it seems that we are trying to teach anyone to suck eggs, we apologise, and in defence point out that it was not our idea in the first place.

Leyhill is a decaying, wartime camp situated in the rolling Gloucestershire countryside. Three hundred plus inmates, with sentences ranging from 6 months to life imprisonment, live here in partitioned bed-spaces, and physical security is reduced to a reliance on their natural aversion to treading in cow pats. In view of this, and the fact that there are only 20 uniformed officers to cover 174 acres, it is not surprising that there is a need for a high degree of commitment and involvement on the part of the staff. This can be favourably compared with staff involvement in some closed establishments, although it rarely is, because prison folk-lore conditioning during early training often fosters the mistaken belief that open prisons

equate with soft options for inferior officers. The consequent poor self-image can be very debilitating.

As all inmates at Leyhill are Category D, it may be imagined that the 'quality' of the population is statistically high. Mean age, for example, is 37 and the average number of previous convictions is 3.7, which is considerably lower than in many closed prisons; only 6% of the population were unemployed on offence and their socio-economic levels were significantly higher than average. Whilst all this is impressive, it does unfortunately fail to guarantee a tranquil population whose main aim in life is to give the orderly officer a peaceful existence. It does generally mean that when problems arise the 'opposition' is that much



Paddy Scriven (soprano) and Peter Gibbs (tenor) are Assistant Governors at Leyhill Prison, and joint Directors of the 'Make This Prison Profitable' scheme.

Peter Gibbs (the one with the beard) graduated from university after being lucky enough to find somebody to take his examinations for a very small fee. Paddy Scriven did not go to University, preferring to devote her time to first hand research on hedonism at the Portsmouth College of Art.

Both have an undying interest in apathy, which gave this paper a painful birth, and they share an ambition to be the two longest serving AG II's in the Prison Service, a goal which after this seems very much closer. Both, when questioned thought PSJ was a slimmers' lemon drink.



more sophisticated and efficient.

More and more, it seems attractive to have staff selected and trained with this in mind. Their flexibility and willingness to act on their own initiative can make or break an open regime coping with the complexities of assessment and resocialisation of life sentence men and the balancing of their needs against those of the determinate sentence population whilst remaining sensitive to the constantly varying *magna* within the population mix.

### **What is a Lifer?**

Lifers within the prison setting are growing in number and the problems they present are increasing exponentially. Simplistically it may be viewed that since the abolition of the death penalty the emphasis has had to move from short term containment to long term retention, with a commitment in the majority of cases to eventual release. The timings of such considerations for release vary but to give some indications of their extent it may be sufficient to point out that the range of time that our lifers have spent in custody for their original offence is from 5 years to 20 years. Exact quantification is confused by the disproportionately high number of recalls and hostel failures that we hold.

At the time of writing there are 66 inmates at Leyhill who were sentenced to be detained for life or to be retained during Her Majesty's Pleasure. Their offences include murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, GBH, robbery with violence, rape and arson. Contrary to popular opinion half of these were not 'domestic offences' and of the remainder a further half involved offences outside the nuclear family.

### **Timing of Arrival at Leyhill**

The allocation of lifers to us is dealt with by the Home Office after full consultation with all appropriate bodies. It occasionally seems to staff that the reasons for transfer are less than obvious. Perhaps the difficulties of our maintaining an overview of the national situation without adequate data is partly to blame for this, but that does not help a member of staff faced with an unwilling resident whose level of co-operation is several degrees below the survival mark. Once again it is to the credit of the staff that they are able to improve these levels in a very short period of time.

Generally it is believed that Leyhill is the penultimate step to freedom for most lifers. This belief is a great asset to staff in their immediate dealings with inmates, even if no one can predict the length of that step. Usually a man is with us for the 2 years preceding his transfer to hostel or preceding his discharge. More often than not this period of time incorporates a referral to our Local Review Committee after about 12 months here. Consequently the results of this review determine the length of stay. The other determining factor is the man himself. Leyhill is full of temptations of one sort or another, and as we expect men to make their own decisions and begin to lead their own lives as far as possible, it is almost inevitable that sooner or later someone will make the wrong decision and succumb to temptation. The job of the staff is to observe, support where necessary, report and assess the man's ability to survive in this minefield.

### **De Facto Activities at Leyhill**

The first thing that has to be done with lifers on their arrival here is to ascertain what they expect of Leyhill and generally put them right. Often men arrive expecting the Garden of Eden, only to find a materially inferior prison with poorer facilities, lower wages and fewer means of support. The resultant disillusionment must be put into perspective quickly because of our extreme vulnerability to absconds and abuse in general. Only after the dominance of the concept of deferred gratification has been established, can we start to work constructively.

Often this begins by watching people make the sort of mistakes they should know to avoid and stepping in only when necessary for the welfare of the man or the good order and discipline of the prison. Each episode of this sort aids assessment and consequently is of help, or otherwise, to the release process.

On the less passive side, can be found the establishment's main claim to notoriety. Through a variety of means activities are encouraged which legitimately take our men out of, or bring outsiders into, Leyhill. In addition to the more usual activities such as having 13 men on educational parole to outside colleges, 7 men on full or part time job familiarisation with local firms, we have escorted outside sporting activ-

ities, AA trips, debating society fixtures, and we also have a long record of service to the community. Entitled the Resettlement Scheme, there are 29 volunteer lifers cleared by Region and a number of long term men cleared locally to work unsupervised, at weekends, with civilians. These can be with local old age pensioners, at schools building swimming pools or extending buildings, or with youth groups, British Legions etc, etc. The scheme has 2 major results. The first is that it gives our men a taste of volunteering their time, energy and skill for no reward other than that of being accepted in their own right. If one of the problems of the long term prisoner is the loss of contact with the outside world and a consequent distortion of values, then this would seem to be just one way of beginning the process of resocialisation which is so vital if the trauma of eventual discharge is to be minimised. The second result is a growth in awareness and acceptance of the prison by the local community through a knowledge of what goes on 'inside', and by first-hand contact with both inmates and staff. This has built local confidence which enables us to hold constructively such a high proportion of life sentence prisoners without the emotive local responses which are apparent elsewhere.

Why then refer to our 'claim to notoriety'? The answer is fairly straightforward. Without financial or other supporting services Leyhill has proved to be good at what it does. Otherwise rootless lifers are given social background, work experience and more often than not, if they go to the nearest prison hostel for the final step of their imprisonment, we get them a job convenient to the hostel. This means that the Avon Probation Area has the highest concentration of discharged lifers in the country and they are, not surprisingly, disconcerted about this. The net result has been a policy decision by them not to allocate such cases to probation officers until after a provisional date for release on licence has been granted. What price 'through-care', that much publicised probation concept of the 70's?

It often appears that lifers are allocated to Leyhill for two primary, and not necessarily mutually exclusive, reasons. Resocialisation and/or further testing. If this is so, perhaps greater trust in the discretion of outstation staff and an improvement in feed-back of information to the Home



Office departments would be mutually beneficial. One aspect of this could be a degree of built-in autonomy for out-stations. Plans submitted for individuals often take an incredibly long time to be answered. This is not surprising when one considers the amount of research necessary, but in most cases it would seem to have been the logical move given the circumstances. Thoughts that have occurred to the establishment about a man should also have occurred to the relevant authorities. If so, a form of contingency planning for an inmate either on transfer or when given a provisional release date would seem to be one way of reducing the delays experienced, thereby reducing many of the inmates' consequent uncertainties, and increasing staff credibility.

The number of lifers at Leyhill is said to have a ceiling of 80. Why? Is this an optimum figure reached after careful research, or is it an arbitrary figure pulled out of the air? Is it possible to take more, if a suitable proportion were domestic lifers? If the population were increased, would it be feasible to consider

making the length of stay for designated men longer than the average? Open prisons are, after all, among the most economical to run. Perhaps this could be a way of capitalising on that, which would be of more help than utilising a valuable resource as a holding establishment for relatively short term prisoners who not only get little from the place, but who, more importantly, give little to it other than recent experience of freedom. Is the most important factor in the stability of the life sentence population the balance given to it by the determinate and short term population? Does the interaction between the two groups bring realism to the life sentence population, help them catch up with the world that has passed them by, and equip them better to go out into it? This proposition is being explored by us now but it is possible that it may be complicated further in the not too distant future by the rebuilding programme which is designed to be completed within the next two years. It is to be hoped that the constructive aspects of the present

Leyhill can be retained in the new buildings, because it would appear, from work done so far, that open conditions can be a valuable aid to the problems of sustaining life sentence prisoners and re-equipping them for survival on release.

It sometimes appears that Leyhill, and possibly other open prisons, are used - like mountains - because they are there. If they are to be a successful and integral part of the system, and indications are that they can be, then surely much of the work at Leyhill should be quantified and formalised, improved on and fitted into the total scheme of things, whatever that may be. This could then be adapted for use in other open establishments, or used to produce a model regime to act as a foundation for new open prisons in areas where they will be acceptable. Finally, should the successes achieved be used to preach the gospel of constructive containment, rather than remaining coy about it for reasons of political sensitivity? The signs are hopeful - surely the time has come to grasp the nettle before the nettle overwhelms us? ■

#### VIOLENCE AND THE INSTITUTION *continued from page 9*

have to contend with a 'wall of silence' when investigating violent incidents. This is partly of their own making in that frustrating policies have polarised prisoner and officer into rigid "us" and "them" camps. This can lead to the view that prisoners be left to sort their differences out amongst themselves. For the weaker prisoners, this usually means being left to the tender mercies of the bullies. An officially condoned prisoner sub-culture can develop, replete with its own rewards and sanctions, the latter, almost without exception, being violent ones.

In many long term prisons, the average inmate is locked up on his own for upwards of fourteen hours each day. Living on one's own for long periods can lead to a very self-oriented approach to life. When in company, the individual then has to adjust to other people's needs and wishes. The more self-oriented the individual becomes, the harder it will be to make this adjustment. Some prisoners cope by becoming introverted and withdrawn, even in company. Others, frustrated by vagaries in other's behaviour that free men would ignore, react violently.

Being on ones own for long periods also leads to some loss of the social skills involved in, and necessary to, social interaction. Innocent behaviour can be misconstrued and offence taken to it. An individual confronted by a face to face situation involving disagreement or stress, may find that he no longer has the necessary social skills to handle the situation to his satisfaction, so may resort to violence. Solitary living is hardly good training for group living situations.

In summation, much of the violence in prisons (and mental hospitals for that matter) is a result of frustrations caused by unjust, insensitive, or uncaring regimes. Obviously, factors such as loss of freedom, separation from families and friends and anxiety about release dates, all contribute to the general level of frustration. The individual prisoner, however, can generally come to terms with these inevitable realities of the situation, and they can be tolerated as unavoidable psychological factors of prison life. Overcrowding, filthy conditions, bad food, solitary living, petty rules and restrictions, and unjust treatment, all impinge on the prisoner's real, material world, and are much harder to tolerate.

When several or all of these material factors, together with the psychological factors, are everpresent features of the prisoner's daily life-situation, it is hardly surprising that some break under the strain, and resort to violence to solve their problems. That this 'solution' in fact increases their problems, is living testimony to the way that the pressures of prison life can distort the individual's very perception of the situation.

What makes these negative features of prison life all the more frustrating is that they seem so very unnecessary. Should prisons humiliate and degrade men, or should their function be simply to remove the individual from the community, wherein lies the real punishment for most men. If man is the product of his experience, the brutalising effect of prison can only produce a more brutal man. As the vast majority of all prisoners will eventually be released again into society, the prison system will have failed in its duty to that society if the only lesson it has taught its charges is that insensitivity to one's fellow man is an acceptable enough form of behaviour for it to have been institutionalised. ■



# Social Skills Training Course:

## *An Officer's View*

M.R.Quick

*Officer, Bristol Prison.*

**There are many social skills courses for inmates going on in British penal establishments, some of them official, others less so. I would like, for general interest, to describe one such course which took place in the long-term wing at Bristol Prison last year. Its underlying philosophy was that inmates can improve their social and life skills, can learn to cope better with everyday situations on release. The course aimed to strengthen such skills through a series of written exercises, role plays, video-recordings and games. The process of learning should be a two way effort: the teacher stimulating by the presentation of the subject, the recipient contributing through discussion, criticism and sharing his experiences.**

### **Preparation**

The social skills course was conducted by students on the social work course at Bristol University. To prepare for the exercise in the prison, I was allowed to attend some 24 hours of lectures, training and planning sessions with the students at the university. I was lucky to have had experience of this type of course and was able to advise on the course content as applied to the situation in Bristol. Sometimes I wondered if we would ever be ready to start as the students worried that the programme they were devising would not be suitable to the needs of the men. Their fears were unjustified, as the results of their 5 days at the prison prove. After much debate, this programme was produced:-

Wednesday afternoon before the course: Introduction. Tuesday: Trust exercises, employment. Wednesday: Leisure. Thursday: Social relation-

ships. Friday: Review, money. Wednesday afternoon after the course: assessment.

Each half-day session lasted 2¼ hours. The morning sessions started at 0915, and the course reconvened at 1400 hours each day.

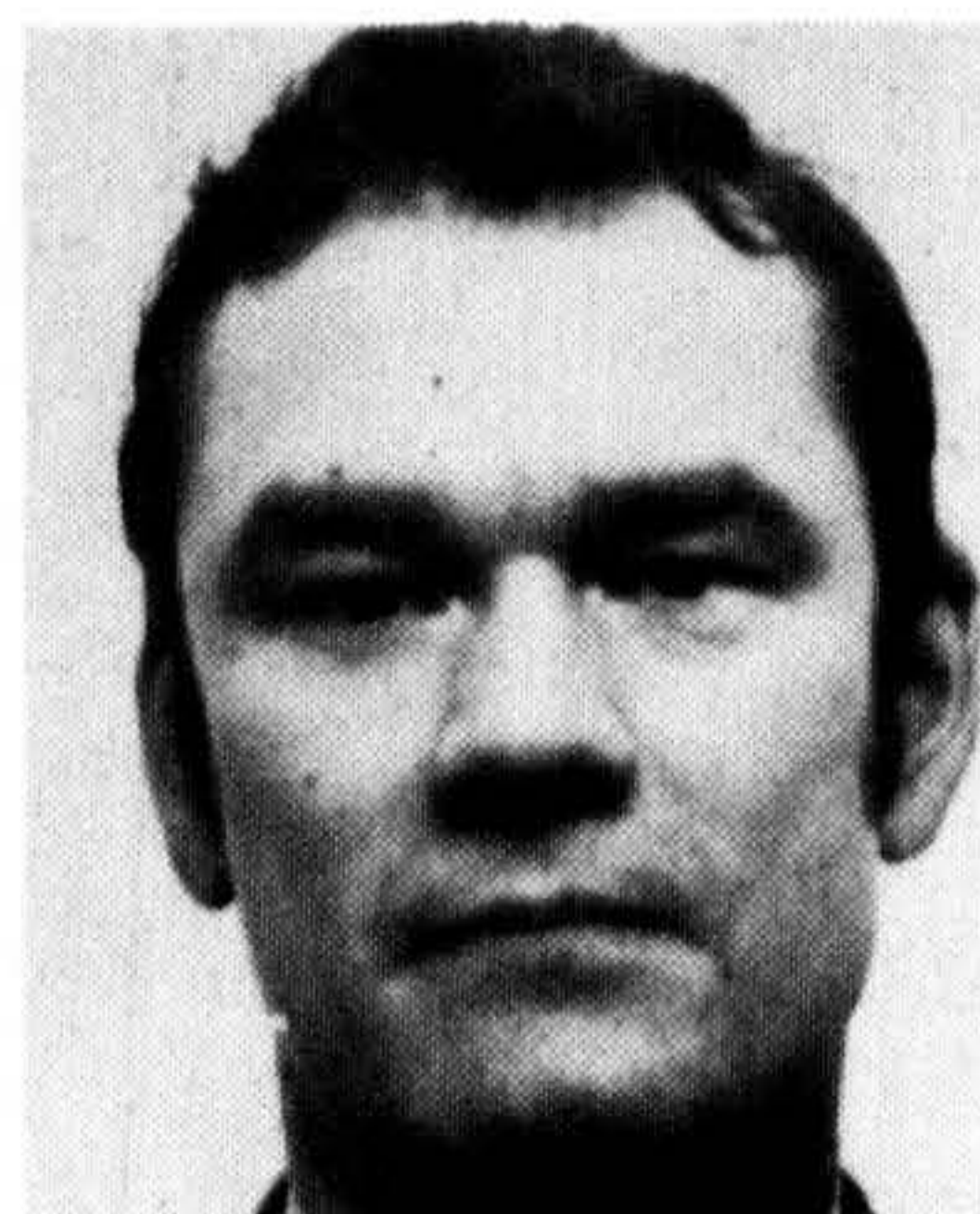
In consultation with the assistant governor and probation officer on the wing, we arrived at a list of inmates who were either in the last 12 months of sentence or were likely

candidates for parole. Of the listed 13 men, of whom 2 were lifers, 2 failed to turn up for the course and a third plucked up courage to come only on the last day. Seven students ran the course whilst the probation officer and I attended all the sessions and took an active part. During the week, we were visited briefly by the students' 2 tutors: it greatly helped the smooth running of the course to have few interruptions.

### **Introduction**

The "selling" took place one afternoon before the course. It was an awkward moment when students and inmates met. Having seen the students in their own environment, it seemed to me that they were very tense in their communications to the group. Each student said something about the coming week's programme and the ground rules were laid down.

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Mick Quick joined the Prison Service in 1964 at Bristol. After periods served at Campsfield House Detention Centre and Brixton, he returned to Bristol Prison in 1973, where he is now engaged on censoring and associated duties but obviously enjoyed taking part in the activities which he now describes.



# Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?

Suzanne Anthony

*AG II Styal Prison.*

**The relationship between legislation and public attitudes is, and has always been, a cause of tension. To what extent does legislation reflect a fundamental change of attitude in society regarding a particular issue? Does this attitude change pre-date legislation, or does the legislation engender the attitude change by bestowing upon a particular issue, an air of condonance or condemnation?**

**There are many areas which seem to touch upon fundamentally moral issues such as abortion or homosexuality, where the age old 'Chicken and Egg' syndrome can be seen clearly - which comes first, attitude change or legislation?**

Nowhere is this tension seen more clearly than with the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975. This particular piece of legislation, which applies to the whole of Great Britain, but not to Northern Ireland, makes sex discrimination unlawful in employment training and related matters (where discrimination against married persons is also dealt with) in education in the provision of goods facilities and services and in the disposal and management of premises. The Act also gives individuals a right of direct access to the civil courts and industrial tribunals for legal remedies for unlawful discrimination.

So it can be seen as a potentially powerful tool, but 5 years on from its emergence on the statute book has this potential been realised? The potential in fact lies in the hoary old problem of attitude change. Yes certainly there must have been acknowledgement of discrimination prior to the Act but without a general acceptance of the correct-

ness of the principle enshrined in the legislation, progress toward the elimination of sexual discrimination can only become blocked in cul-de-sacs of trivia and irrelevance.

But let's leave this generalized theme and get down to the nitty gritty - what has this legislation meant for us and by us I mean those employed by the Prison Department (in particular we who work in penal institutions) and at this point I expect many readers will reply, "bugger all" and turn over to the next article. But wait, think hard,

for many people the Sex Discrimination Act is seen as quite irrelevant to the operation of penal institutions. After all they're single-sex communities and therefore the Act does not apply - or does it? Well yes it does. Unlike the Armed Services the Prison Service was not given carte blanche exclusion from the provisions of the Act, but there is the area described as genuine occupational qualification (GOQ) which would seem to all but remove the manning of penal institutions from the scope of the legislation.

In s7(1) of the Act it states that sex discrimination (but not discrimination against married persons or victimization) by an employer in recruiting for a job, or in providing opportunities for promotion or transfer to, or training from a job is not unlawful where a person's sex is a *genuine occupational qualification* for the job. The GOQ is not an automatic exception for



Suzanne Anthony joined the prison service as an Assistant Governor at Styal in 1977 after taking an honours degree in Sociology as a mature student. Transferring this year to Chelmsford which is to re-open as a centre for young male offenders she is engaged, on an Equal Opportunities Commission grant, on research into the deployment of her grade in institutions for inmates of the opposite sex.



general categories of jobs but the criteria for determining whether a person's sex is a GOQ for a particular job as set out in s7(2) of the Act.

The section which gives some guidance for us comes in s7(2)(b):-

(b) Where considerations of decency or privacy require the job to be held by a man (or woman) either because it is likely to involve physical contact between the jobholder and men (or women) in circumstances where they might reasonably object to the jobholder being of the opposite sex; or because the jobholder is likely to work in the presence of people who are in a state of undress or are using sanitary facilities and who might reasonably object to the presence of a person of the opposite sex to themselves. It might be claimed, for example, that being a man was a GOQ by virtue of this provision for a job as a men's changing-room attendant.

and s7(2)(d)

(d) Where the job is in a single-sex establishment (e.g. a single-sex hospital), or in a single-sex part of an establishment, for persons requiring special care, supervision or attention and the essential character of that establishment or the part of it within which the work is done, is such that it is reasonable to restrict the job to a person of the same sex as those for whom the establishment (or that part of it) exists. A single-sex institution which exceptionally admits persons of the other sex does not lose the right to claim the exception.

These would seem to provide amply for the conditions prevailing in penal institutions but there is the rider that "the exception does not necessarily apply to all jobs in a single-sex establishment". It will need to be shown in relation to any particular job that the character of the establishment requires *that job* to be held by a man or woman. So what does this mean in reality?

There can be little doubt that at the level of junior discipline staff physical proximity to inmates throughout all parts of the day, from "slop out" to "bang up" requires that male staff be employed in male institutions and female staff in female institutions.

However, once we move beyond

this level of staff/inmate contact the GOQ case appears to be considerably weaker. In fact s18(1)(2) of the Act specifically states that "The employment provisions of the Act apply to the prison service, but there is an exception for different height requirements for men and women prison officers. The Prison Act 1952 is amended to remove the restrictions on the appointment of a man as a governor of a women's prison". Since about 1969/70 there has been a gradual move toward the interchange of governor grades within institutions, beginning at first with the posting of female assistant governors to boys borstals. A move incidentally that was opposed by the P.O.A. at the time of the initial discussions. However, the governor grades now have single seniority and promotion lists and at present there are altogether 40 governor grades working in institutions for inmates of the opposite sex. All of the female institutions now have male governor grades working in them but the department does not seem to have been quite so adventurous in the deployment of women governor grades in male institutions. Most women in the field are to be found in male young offender establishments. One can only suppose that this may be because of the original P.O.A. objections or perhaps women in male prisons may be seen as potential rape or hostage hazards on every landing!! Let's be honest most closed prisons, be they for male or female inmates, are pretty tense places to work in, but I'm not convinced that there should be an exclusion *per se* of women from this male environment. Working as I do in a female prison I do not believe that the verbal and physical violence that I have seen, or the very intimidation that I have experienced from women could be any more unpleasant from a man. Certainly those men who work in female prisons consider their inmates to be considerably more obnoxious than the male counterpart.

Perhaps this is where the need for attitude change becomes apparent. Is there not within the 1975 Act a potential for expansion within the prison service that remains unrealized through a lack of broad acceptance of the principle of sexual equality? How much could be gained by embracing the spirit of this legislation? The GOQ really does only apply at the level of senior officer and below, especially when we come to realise that in the

past few years the educational and welfare functions have been increasingly carried out by both men and women working together in penal institutions, and why not?

For many years the women's service has suffered from a dearth of middle management, while newly promoted male officers have had to wait months for a posting. There are many tasks at principal officer level and above that could equally well be tackled by women or men. In fact there are some duties that female principal officers never perform, e.g. in charge of a Crown Court. In the areas of training, detail, security etc. there is a real possibility for both male and female principal officers to move across to the 'other side', gaining both formal training and experience. But this is not happening and because women officers are restricted to the women's service their range of work experience is necessarily restricted to about twelve establishments. I realise that many men reading this, have, by now, become quite angry since it is generally agreed that women officers gain promotion much quicker and with far less experience than their male colleagues. But how are they to gain the range of training and experience which will make them acceptable in the male service if the doors of the male prisons remain firmly closed against them? We're back to the "Chicken and the Egg" again!

Perhaps a start could be made in so called 'mixed' establishments, like Risley. Now that this whole prison is under the operational control of the Region would it be possible to allocate Crown Court duties, night orderly duties etc. to principal officers from the female wing? And how about experienced male detail staff doing a stint in the female wing? Could the female Chief Officer stand-in for the male Chief Officer?

I'm sure there are many staff who would totally reject such ideas but I am equally certain that there are some who would grab the opportunity offered with both hands. And at the end of the day doesn't it all come down to attitudes? We belong to a very conservative service, change seems to take place very slowly, too often urged on by uninformed outsiders. Why can we not take this initiative ourselves? Resorting to legal remedies under the 1975 Act will not really solve the problem, although there have been many complaints made to the Equal

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# SPECULATIONS ABOUT SENTENCING POLICY

## *A Review of Canterbury Prison's Population in the Light of the 15th Expenditure Committee Report*

D.W. Atkins

*Assistant Governor, Canterbury Prison.*

### Introduction

Since the end of the last war, the daily population of the prisons in England and Wales has been rising very quickly. Many different ideas for reducing this population have been formulated but research shows that, in general, no type of treatment is very successful in preventing some people from committing crimes again and again. Although the number of people in prison has increased, there has not been a corresponding increase in the number of prison places available and, in March last year, there were some 11,846 prisoners sleeping two to a cell and 5,247 sleeping three to a cell. Attention has therefore turned from preventing recidivism to ways of reducing the number of people held in our overcrowded, undermanned and worn out prisons.

Many countries are now looking at the idea of "diverting" certain categories of offender out of the criminal process. There are several points at which this diversion can take place: at arrest, trial, or sentencing stage or by taking certain offences out of the criminal law altogether. In England, however, there are very few arrangements for diversion. Apart from police

cautioning, which tends to be used for juveniles and some motoring offenders, all offences must be dealt with by the courts. Although there has been some attempt over the last 10 years to introduce non-custodial measures, these have only slowed down or delayed the increase in the number of people committed into custody by the courts. With fewer resources available to the prison service there has been no possibility of absorbing the increased numbers and the situation was highlighted in the 70's by several disturbances and riots about prison conditions. These incidents focussed public attention on the prisons and various parties began to look at the problem.

### Expenditure Committee

In 1977, the 15th Expenditure

Committee set up a sub-committee to explore ways of reducing pressure on the prison system. The sub-committee enumerated 6 possible ways in which this objective could be achieved:

1. Shorter sentences.
2. Alternatives to custodial sentences for some categories of prisoner.
3. Better conditions for staff and prisoners.
4. New ventures in partnership between prison staff and the social welfare services.
5. Increased social work with young offenders and juveniles at risk.
6. Better relations between the prison service and the community.

They also identified 5 categories



After joining in February 1967, Dennis Atkins served at Lowdham Grange Borstal until being appointed Assistant Governor in 1971. Married with three children, he also served at Stafford Prison and Dover Borstal before transferring to Canterbury. The following is an edited version of the thesis he prepared for his Diploma in Criminology at London University.



of offender who, in their opinion, could be dealt with outside the penal system provided that the appropriate resources were made available. These were:

- (A) Mentally disordered offenders.
- (B) Alcoholics and those with a drink problem.
- (C) Maintenance defaulters and fine defaulters.
- (D) Illegal immigrants and deportees.
- (E) Inadequate offenders.

The committee felt that a reduction in the use of imprisonment for such people would significantly reduce the overcrowding problems that are besetting the prison system.

*The purpose of this survey was to explore this hypothesis and see what the actual effect might be on a local prison if these categories were removed from the penal process. The survey was carried out, over a 3 month period, at Canterbury Prison.*

### Canterbury Prison

Canterbury is a small local prison built in 1808 to house men, one to a cell. The present certified normal accommodation figure is 234 prisoners. With the present level of overcrowding, the usual number is between 370 and 400. In 1979, the highest figure was 406 and the lowest 359.

The prison serves 3 Crown Courts, with 2 more due to open in 1980. All prisoners committed to custody from these courts, and from all the local magistrates' courts, are held at Canterbury. When sentenced, they are allocated to an appropriate training prison. Because of the general overcrowding, however, most prisoners wait a considerable length of time before being transferred and many of the shorter sentenced prisoners are discharged from Canterbury without ever reaching a training prison.

In 1979, a total of 1,894 new receptions entered Canterbury Prison. This does not, however, reflect the actual volume of human traffic going in and out of the prison during the year. A large percentage, perhaps as large as 80 per cent of these prisoners, will be on remand, going backward and forward, to and from court every week, sometimes for months. For example, in 1979, while 1,894 new receptions entered the prison, a total of 6,426 prisoners actually passed through the reception unit.

The working hours of the prison officers are geared to the servicing of Crown Courts and of escorting prisoners to magistrates' courts and to other prisons. This means that the bulk of officers should be required between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Only a skeleton staff, therefore, is available in the evening, making it impossible to allow association for all prisoners. Thirty to forty sentenced prisoners can attend education classes, but the great majority of prisoners is locked up from tea time until the following morning.

Under such conditions, it is easy to see that a small number of men coming into the prison regularly to serve very short sentences can cause extra work and inconvenience which are quite disproportionate to their needs. Valuable accommodation is taken up by men who cannot be transferred because of the shortness of their stay; medical, mental and welfare problems must be dealt with immediately because of the imminence of their release dates; routines and procedures must be disrupted, to the detriment of other prisoners, to make allowance for this relatively small number.

### The Survey

From 1 October 1979 to 31 December 1979, all men entering prison for the first time on their present charge were checked to see if they fell into the categories identified by the Expenditure Sub-Committee. Although the period of the survey included the Christmas holiday, there was no evidence to suggest that this period was atypical. Comparisons with other months indicated that a similar number of new receptions entered the prison. There was therefore no significant difference between the period under consideration and any other period of the year. To avoid exaggeration or overrepresentation, the criteria used for each category were very strict and any doubtful cases were rejected. One minor change was made to the categories defined in the Sub-Committee report. The category of maintenance defaulters and fine defaulters was made into 2 categories, since maintenance defaulters are civil offenders and are therefore subject to different rules and treatment from fine defaulters, who are treated like all other convicted prisoners. Because of the strong feeling that offenders under civil

law should be dealt with outside the prison system, the category was expanded to include other civil offences such as contempt and failure to pay rates.

During the review, a total of 437 new receptions entered the prison. Originally, 103 cases were identified as fitting one of the categories. A further sifting produced 3 cases which were rejected for minor deviations from the strict criteria. This left 100 cases, arrived at purely on the basis of the three month research period and not as an attempt to 'adjust' the data to produce an easily manageable number, although one may be forgiven for believing so! The following sections show how these cases were distributed amongst the categories.

### Mentally disordered offenders

Several of the people received into prison exhibited bizarre behaviour which suggested some degree of disorder. There is, however, a clear definition of mental disturbance which is sufficiently serious to warrant removal to a special hospital under the Mental Health Act 1959. Only two cases were removed to a psychiatric hospital under the Mental Health Act during the period of the survey.

During the review, there were several prisoners located in the prison hospital because their behaviour was so disturbed that it demanded continued medical supervision, but these did not come under the strict definition of mental disorder.

### Drunks, alcoholics and persons with drink problems

There were *eighteen* cases whose basic problem was excessive drinking. Although the offence may not, at first sight, be connected with drink, further investigation showed it to be the root cause. Most of the men involved were middle aged, of no fixed abode, and had no family connections. Many of them were well-known to the probation and prison authorities because of the regularity of their offending.

### Maintenance defaulters and other Civil Law offenders

This group was not criminal but included many who had refused "on principle" to pay maintenance or abide by some other order of the court. Although serving a prison



term, they must be kept apart from sentenced prisoners and are generally located with remand and trial prisoners. There are differences in entitlements and privileges between civil and remand prisoners which mean that this small group creates inconvenience and work that is quite disproportionate to its size.

Of the *twenty-three* cases in this category, 9 were maintenance defaulters, 12 were contempt cases (usually defying a court order restraining them from contacting or molesting an estranged wife) one failure to pay national insurance contributions, and one failure to pay rates. For example, a 31 year old man, now remarried, was committed for 42 days for refusal to pay maintenance to his former wife. He had served several terms for the same offence and even arranged with his employer to take his annual leave during the time he was "inside" so that his job was not jeopardised and his second wife received his wages while he was away. Another, a 26 year old journalist "waging war" against a newspaper over an article written by him, was committed to prison for 7 days for a second time for contempt by refusing to comply with a court order.

### **Fine defaulters**

By far the largest of the groups, *forty-six* cases in the sample, was committed to prison for failure to pay fines imposed for a variety of criminal offences. Several of these could also have been included in other categories but the rigidity of the criteria prevented their inclusion on minor technicalities. For example, several of the offenders admitted that the original offence for which they had been fined had been committed under the influence of drink but, since the records did not give definite pictures of men dependent on drink, they were not included in that category. Many of the men had difficulty in holding a job, managing their finances or generally coping with life. These cases could perhaps have legitimately been included in the section of petty, inadequate offenders but did not exactly fit those criteria. If the underlying problem could not be identified beyond doubt, the cases were included in this section for there was no doubt that they had failed to pay their fines.

This was the most heterogeneous of the groups; there was no similarity

in age, background or marital status. Some men had stable homes, others did not. Many had previous convictions of varying seriousness, others were first offenders. One, a 21 year old single man with a formidable list of previous convictions, was fined £546 or 83 days for offences of criminal damage. A member of a well-known criminal family, he was quite content to serve out his time instead of paying the fine. A second, a 57 year old married man with 5 children, had been fined £167 or 53 days for making false representations to obtain Social Security benefits. He had no criminal history. He was unable to find another job after being made redundant but could not manage on Social Security benefit and had, therefore, committed the offence. For the same reason, he was unable to pay the fine and was obliged to serve all the time, despite efforts made by his wife to raise the money.

### **Illegal immigrants and deportees**

This category was restricted to prisoners who were held pending deportation. There were several non-British prisoners who had been recommended for deportation but these were also serving prison sentences for criminal offences. In most cases their arrest had brought to light their illegal entry or provoked the deportation recommendation. In normal circumstances, they would have served a prison sentence in any case, so their retention in custody could not have been avoided. People awaiting deportation, however, could be held in detention at Harmondsworth for short periods if decisions and action on deportation were made more quickly. In some cases, deportees had to wait many months in prison before they were finally returned to their country of origin.

During the survey, *six* men were either held in the prison to await deportation or had completed their prison sentence and were held solely on a deportation order. The majority were from India, Pakistan, and other Asian countries and had been arrested initially for attempting to smuggle drugs into the United Kingdom.

### **Petty inadequate offenders**

The concepts of "inadequate" and "petty" are highly subjective, and it was decided to use the same criteria as the Expenditure Committee.

Almost all the men in the "drink problem" category would also fit into this group but only *five* cases were placed under the heading of petty, inadequate offenders. As with the alcoholic types, most of these men had broken or unstable marriages and were well-known to members of the prison staff because of the regularity of their offending.

One, a 58 year old man, divorced and out of contact with his former wife and 2 children was serving 6 months for shoplifting. He had 33 previous convictions, all for minor thefts and burglaries. He was of no fixed abode and spent most of his time drifting from hostel to lodgings, doing spasmodic work, and committing offences when he was in need of goods or money. Another, a 32 year old married man with one child, was serving 3 months for making false representations to obtain Social Security benefits. He had 7 previous convictions and, on reception was very weepy and upset about being in prison, although the experience was certainly not new to him.

As with the other categories, there were several other men received into prison during this period who would, in the opinion of most of the prison staff, fit into this category but who did not fit the criteria exactly. Five, therefore, represents the minimum number of men who would be affected if the recommendations of the Sub-Committee were put into effect.

### **Assessment**

The number represents *23 per cent* of the total number of new receptions during the 3 month period of the review. If projected over the whole of the year, this would represent a reduction of about 435 prisoners, serving an average of 2 months imprisonment. With the exception of the civil offenders who represent over 5 per cent of the total number of receptions, the reduction in numbers would be concentrated in the wing of the prison where, at present, each cell is used to accommodate 3 convicted prisoners. The effect would be to reduce this "trebling up" to such a degree that no cell would need to hold more than 2 prisoners unless the fluctuations in receptions caused a bulge in numbers at any time. If such a saving were reflected over the whole of the country, the effect could be quite dramatic.



The Prison Service is committed to pursuing the ideal of treatment and training and it is therefore essential that facilities be made available in specific training establishments for sentenced prisoners serving medium and long terms of imprisonment. In general there is no serious overcrowding in training prisons and diversion of the kind suggested would have little effect on this section of the penal system.

The severe pressure of numbers continues to fall on local prisons which are unable to control the numbers of prisoners committed in custody from the courts and are forced to keep sentenced prisoners until a vacancy arises at an appropriate training establishment. The types under consideration would, almost without exception, be retained in local prisons until their discharge, so the impact of this reduction would be felt where the overcrowding is most acute. The saving in staff hours would make more Officers available to provide supervisory cover for association, and other activities and reduce the heavy burden of overtime that Officers are expected to endure at the moment.

### The Present Situation

At present, the facilities available in Kent for alcoholics, inadequate offenders and mentally disordered prisoners are reasonably good. There are several residential and non-residential hostels for inadequates and alcoholics, mostly run by voluntary organisations, and the area is well served by mental hospitals and psychiatric units.

Many areas, however, are not so well-endowed with facilities as Kent and most communities could not actually cater for a fairly large number of people, normally retained in prison, being thrust into their midst. Since it is generally accepted that the most expensive means of dealing with offenders is by imprisonment it would make good economic sense to expand the existing facilities so that the courts would have a larger range of alternatives at their disposal.

For a reduction of pressure on prisons to be achieved, however, the necessary facilities would have to be made available in the community and there seems little chance of this happening. The diversion of these categories from the prison system has been recommended by most of the working parties, researchers and

study groups that have explored the problem over the last few years. The latest and most wide-ranging of these, the Committee of Inquiry into the United Kingdom Prison Services, under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice May was published in October 1979. With regard to the reduction of numbers in the prisons, its recommendations were almost identical with those of the Expenditure Committee. The categories that the May report felt should be redirected were mentally disordered offenders, maintenance and fine defaulters, people convicted of offences of drunkenness, and inadequate petty offenders. The report observed that "prisons pay the penalty for being the resources that are available as opposed to the one that is appropriate in the particular case". Realistically, however, the point is made that "none of these means offers substantial relief and we are obliged to conclude the population forecasts offered by the Home Departments are well-founded". The point remains that "the existence of these possibilities, and the hope they must carry for individuals who without them could expect to be in prison, cannot absolve society from the duty of continuing to support for the foreseeable future a substantial penal population".

The situation is not completely black. In some cases, provision has been made for the type of assistance recommended by some reports and enquiries. For example, in 1971, the Home Office Working Party on habitual drunken offenders recommended the setting up of detoxification centres where drunks could be taken and dried out. The 1972 Criminal Justice Act (Section 34) made provision for such centres, funded by the Department of Health and Social Security. So far, only 2 centres, in Leeds and Manchester, have been opened and, with the present emphasis on economic stringency, it appears likely that this money will be stopped despite the success of the centres. The possibility of a London centre, mentioned in the Expenditure Committee report, now seems doomed. The reluctance of hospital staff to receive mentally disordered offenders who may be unpredictable and violent has hampered the provision of secure unit places, despite funds being available for them. At the moment, talks are being held between the parties involved and some pro-

gress is possible in the near future.

On 21 March 1980, the Home Secretary announced that the government intends to give help with "a sustained if necessarily modest" programme of prison building to cope with the rising prisoner population. He also voiced concern about the number of inadequate, drunken offenders and mentally disturbed people being sent to prison. He said that the courts must play their part in ensuring that "prisons are not allowed to remain cluttered up with trivial and inadequate offenders who are no real threat to anyone". Many of these people could be dealt with by fines or other non-custodial sentences. Some semi-secure centres, run by the Home Office, could be provided for habitual drunken offenders where they could be dried out over short periods, and changes in sentencing policy may be made to enable mentally disordered offenders to be dealt with by the Department of Health and Social Security, local authorities and some voluntary organisations. These measures could reduce the number of prisoners by between 3,000 and 4,000 by 1984. The fact that these measures are to be taken "even in a time of real economic difficulty" is an indication of the extreme seriousness of the present situation.

In June 1980, a Government White Paper was presented to Parliament giving observations on the 15th Expenditure Committee Report. The White Paper endorsed the view that "a programme of prison building - - - on a scale that the country can afford must be part of the strategy for relieving pressure on the prison system". With regard to lessening the demand for prison places the point is made that, whilst recognising that sentencing policy and sentence length must always be matters for the courts, the Government fully supports the view that wherever possible the categories of prisoner identified by the Expenditure Committee should be diverted from the prison system.

However, the White Paper makes it clear that "while greater use of non-custodial sentences in place of imprisonment has an important part to play, it is apparent that shortening the length of the sentence imposed has a potentially greater effect on prison population, and that the best and earliest hope of reducing the pressures on prisons lies there".

*continued on opposite page, col. 3*



## SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING COURSE

*continued from page 16*

The question of an officer being present was raised by the men but fears were dispelled by myself and my colleagues without too much debate. Discussion followed over a video-tape of street interviews on the subject of "crime and punishment". It prompted different opinions and attitudes so that every member of the group was stimulated and barriers began to be broken down.

### The Course

To break the ice on the first session of the course, 2 "trust" games were played: allowing contact with others in the group, the exercises got things rolling. With the opening behind us, the serious work began on the subject of employment. The well-balanced menu included paper-and-pencil tests, brain-storming of ideas, role plays and video recordings the last being of great amusement when it was apparent that there were few fears of acting in front of the cameras. I noted at the end of the day how the men seemed happy, how the students were less tense but feeling shattered, and how relieved I was that all had gone well.

The second day, focusing on leisure activities, started badly when the video equipment would not work properly. The group improvised until the tape of street interviews on boredom could be shown and discussed. Several role plays were also enacted, taped and replayed for comments. A review in the course of the day showed that some group members wanted material about accommodation, more on social relationships, and generally more time for discussion. I noted that things were going quickly, with parts of the programme being dropped through lack of time. The group, however, was still together, having fun and accepting me as a member.

The third day was perhaps the most difficult as social relationships are a very personal topic which may be upsetting. The day's work included a group sharing exercise (shipwreck game); filmed enactment of an argument that could occur in a public house; discussion about the relationship between a man and his wife or girlfriend; assessments of personal strengths and weaknesses between pairs of course members; and role plays of how to make complaints, deal with the police, and

handle tricky social situations. This was really hard work: soul searching, upsetting, but still not enough time available.

On the last full day of the course, we tackled accommodation and managing money - both subjects that the men had requested. Problems about money were approached with the aid of a game devised by the students. Despite a few snags, it proved helpful and it was interesting to note some details added by the participants as well as some cheating by certain members of the group!

### Assessment

The closing session was handled with thought and care as it was an emotional time for us all, the atmosphere subdued and quiet. It was agreed by all the men that this had been a helpful, pleasureable week during which they had felt as human beings again. There was no criticism of the content of the course, but too much had been covered in too short a time. It was a pity, they said, that the course had to end after only a week with no follow-ups planned for the future. Amongst other comments were encouraging signs for the officer's role: the course proved that uniformed staff can run purposeful programmes, can be trusted and can be seen to care.

For myself, the whole exercise was enjoyable and, for the first time in 15 years of service, I felt I had used my skills positively to fulfil Rule 1 of the prison rules. Once such a wedge has been driven in, the barrier of ignorance created by staff and inmates can slowly be eroded to make way for a more progressive system which can even receive encouragement from today's critics.

It is difficult to justify that time and money should be made available for uniformed staff to run groups. Inmates quickly point out that they are supposed to be trained and rehabilitated but that no one cares so long as they behave and do not try to escape. The groups that do run are in the hands of probation or psychology units and uniformed staff are rarely made available to participate. Perhaps, when all the talking has finished and the committees have run dry, we shall see the old proverb about actions speaking louder than words coming true and all of us who joined the Service believing the glossy adverts will finally be allowed to achieve the task we wanted to do. ■

## SPECULATIONS ABOUT SENTENCING POLICY

*continued from previous page*

### Conclusion

The pressures on the prison system continue to grow and the population of prisons has already exceeded the crisis level of 42,000 mentioned by Mr. Roy Jenkins, when Home Secretary, in 1975. This survey suggests that, if facilities were made available for the recommendations of the Expenditure Committee for reducing the use of imprisonment for these categories of offender to be implemented, a large number of people would be removed from the penal system and there would be a considerable, and welcome, reduction of pressure on the prison service. ■

### LIFE AND THE LIFER

*continued from page 12*

must also bear the responsibility for ensuring that those needs are met. I believe that the identification of those areas of need and of any change in priority or manifestation of readiness to embark upon new and worthwhile undertakings should be our primary concern, security apart, when considering what should comprise the career plan for a lifer, but the overriding factor must be our regard for the individuality and the need to cater for each according to his potential. ■

### WHICH COMES FIRST?

*continued from page 18*

Opportunities Commission, with at least one case being tested at law (that of the female civilian instructor at H.M.P. Leeds). Test cases may make a point or provide guidance for general application but they can't change attitudes and really that is what is needed.

At the beginning of this article I asked which came first, the chicken or the egg, legislation or attitude change. Well, we have the legislation, ignoring it won't make it go away but neither will it necessarily bring about a change of attitude - after five years it is clear that legislation alone is not enough. Single-sex working environments create as many problems as they might solve. There is much to be gained both for the individual and the institution in mixing the sexes and implementing the spirit of the 1975 Act. Let us at least open up this whole topic to informed discussion and begin to examine closely whether it is the inherent problems or the prejudice that is insurmountable! ■



# THIS SERVICE OF OURS

*The following extract is taken from a Night Orderly Officer's report at one of our more rural establishments.*

Sir,

At approx 2 am this morning I received a frantic phone call from Mr X. Night Patrol. He reported that although he had taken over a roll of 77 at 2100, his roll had inexplicably increased to 78 during the course of the night. I went to investigate and discovered that Mr X's extra "inmate" was in fact a mop, two pillows, a blanket and a pair of Wellington boots. I may add that there was no striking resemblance to "ALBERT R.N."

My immediate reaction was that of utter horror; were the other 77 "inmates" in fact, inmates or were they also life size effigies. To reassure myself of

this I made a full check and satisfied myself that the other 77 were all living, breathing inmates.

I can only assume that we have failed Mr. X in some way during his training.

May I humbly suggest that arrangements be put in hand, between yourself and Detail for him to examine at close quarters a real, live, breathing inmate in order that he may in future be able to tell the difference between them and these life size effigies.

*If you have any similar contributions to make from your establishment please send them to:-*

*Mr. J. Ross, South West Regional Office, Prison*

*Department, Government Buildings,*

*Flowers Hill, Brislington,*

*Bristol BS4 5LX.*

*The PSJ guarantees to preserve the anonymity of its contributors if necessary.*



# any

COMMENTS?  
ARTICLES?  
THOUGHTS?



Please send them to the Editor or:  
John St Q. Ross, South West Regional  
Office, Prison Department, Government  
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Due to the current industrial  
action, the Book Review Section  
does not appear in this issue.



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