

The Prison Service and The Howard League

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PERHAPS it may be as well to begin by recalling briefly what the Howard League actually is. It is a small voluntary organisation of fewer than 2,000 members and a minute income. It has some dingy offices a stone's throw from Westminster Abbey in a building, the general decor of which is like a mixture of the less attractive features of Pentonville and of Horseferry House. Everyone from Prison Commissioners to ex-prisoners cannot but feel at home in such familiar surroundings.

The League itself was born in 1921 but it has, as one of its parent organisations, the Howard Association, named after John Howard, and founded in 1866. The first President of this Association was Lord Brougham, a famous Lord Chancellor.

The objects of the Howard League are the prevention of crime and the promotion of constructive treatment methods for offenders. The first of these objects, though highly desirable, is unlikely ever to be achieved: having a shot at the second is both enormously difficult and highly rewarding.

I think perhaps one aspect of the gradually changing relationship between the Prison Service and the Howard League was the growing realisation of common aims.

In an article in the *Bulletin of the International Penal and Penitentiary Commission*, May 1949, Sir

Lionel Fox, in a typically generous manner, summed up the relationship as it then was:

"To start at the top on the national level I would first mention the position of the Howard League for Penal Reform. I need not describe this organisation, which is internationally known. I wish only to bring out two points. First, it is an entirely voluntary and independent organisation whose sole purpose is to further the ends of penal reform and to protect the interests of prisoners wherever necessary. Second, that its existence in that capacity is recognised by authority as being like that of 'His Majesty's Opposition' in the House of Commons, completely desirable and necessary. The Prison Commissioners are generally prepared to give the representatives of the Howard League full information and facilities to visit their establishments, and welcome their activity as a useful corrective to official complacency."

What stands out here is the way in which the administration is prepared to accept the existence of a possible "opposition" and indeed to aid and abet it in order to ensure that it can function effectively. This is in the finest tradition of democracy and of disinterested public service. In other countries similar arrangements are not only unknown but unimaginable.

Partly perhaps in response to such a positive attitude and partly because of a growing and possibly more sophisticated understanding of the difficulties of the administration and of the Service, the League

has tried to place the emphasis of its work increasingly on support of the Service. It seemed to us that it needed encouragement far more than it needed criticism to accomplish its task. Today the primary task of the League is probably the help that it might be able to give in the consideration of how present treatment methods might be deepened and made more effective.

Specifically, what we have tried to do in the Howard League in the last few years, as far as the Prison Service is concerned, was this: we sought to understand, as fully as possible, the status, function and social role of all members of the Service, and the attitude which seemed to be engendered by these things. Secondly, we tried to look for ways in which status, function and social role of staff members could be improved or made more positive. In doing this, we particularly tried to see whether pilot experiments in industry or in mental hospitals (the organisation of which has certain resemblances to that of prisons) could be adapted. Finally, we tried to grope towards a treatment rationale, that is to say definite treatment aims related to the personality and character of prisoners, especially recidivists.

One of the most difficult problems that besets modern criminology is precisely this enormous task of trying to bring about changes in the attitude of adult recidivist prisoners whose personality is already set. It may well be that we shall never find a completely satisfactory solution, but in struggling towards new ways of understanding and tackling the task—today perhaps by means of group counselling and group therapy, tomorrow in other ways not yet discovered—the

League can aid and abet the Prison Service in its common aim. It can also help to change the public image of the Prison Service and aid in bringing about a sympathetic understanding of what is being attempted. It can do this by the public lectures it arranges and by seeking to influence what is written or said about the Service: in a sense, by public relations on behalf of the Service. In a different sense, in its summer schools the League has, in recent years, specifically tried to encourage custodial staff to express their views and to communicate their sentiments to magistrates and social workers, in order to increase mutual understanding.

People have a great need to feel themselves understood. Whatever small part the League might eventually play in this, the new PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL has a unique opportunity to serve as a channel, not only of new ideas, but of real communication. The more the Service gains in self-awareness the better it will be able to see itself and its own problems, and the more effective and united it will become.

The JOURNAL is being launched at a time which is particularly interesting and important. The long and often stony road that has led to the present exciting possibilities, the new methods already used or planned, the new building projects, the research schemes, the endeavour to test specific treatment elements—all this adds up to a Service in process of transforming itself into a vital and dynamic social force bent upon a greater understanding of the human personality and the encouragement of its growth where it is stunted.

From my temporary vantage point at the Council of Europe in

Strasbourg, I have been able to see a little of the Prison Services of other countries, and as far as I can judge, none comes up to the actual standard or performance potential of our own. And what is more, even though there may be things which our Service can learn from industry or mental hospitals, there are already some matters—there will be many more—which industry or hospital administration could learn from the Prison Service.

In a middle-page article of *"The Times"* of the 15th February, 1960, this problem of interchange of information and co-operation was put extremely clearly:

"It is now increasingly realised that a large part of the study of 'handling human relationships' is a generic study, that is, it is the same kind of study for doctors, teachers, social workers, and so on. Because this is so it is now beginning to be understood that the advancement of these skills can be substantially helped by an interchange of ideas, of experience, and by co-operation in other ways'.

We have found it imperative to include in the Library which is attached to the Howard League* (and which is one of the largest of its kind in the country) books not only on delinquency and its treatment but also on human behaviour and human relations in quite other contexts. For instance, *"The Lonely Crowd"* by David Riesman is an important sociological study of the changing American character. It relates the emergence of a certain character type to a high or a low growth potential amongst the population as a whole. But this book also helps to make some aspects of modern juvenile delinquency more comprehensible even though it does not deal directly with the subject.

Criminology and penology cannot grow in isolation. They need to be

nourished by, and nourish, the discoveries of other sciences and other skills. It may be that from time to time the Howard League could help to bring together people who work in related fields, as in the past it has tried to interest the administration in the findings of social psychology in industry and hospital administration. It could, perhaps, do this by special meetings or courses, and to some extent by what is published in the Howard Journal.

The Howard League is, of course, not exclusively or even mainly concerned with prisons. It is at least as concerned with juvenile delinquency and with other treatment methods such as probation. I must confess, however, that I personally have gradually developed a special interest and liking for the Prison Service and there are many times when I envy those who have the opportunity to try out for themselves new and hopeful ideas.

I hope that the new PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL will become a great success. I hope that as time goes on the editorial board will have a long waiting list of contributors, and that the JOURNAL will become an important and respected instrument for forging opinion. Finally, I hope that the Prison Service will grow increasingly conscious of the tremendous power for good which is in it, and that the Howard League may in some small way remain associated with it in the effort to bring that power to bear in the most effective way possible.

*This library is open to members of the Prison Service and if anyone wishes to avail himself (or herself) of its services, he (or she) is very welcome.