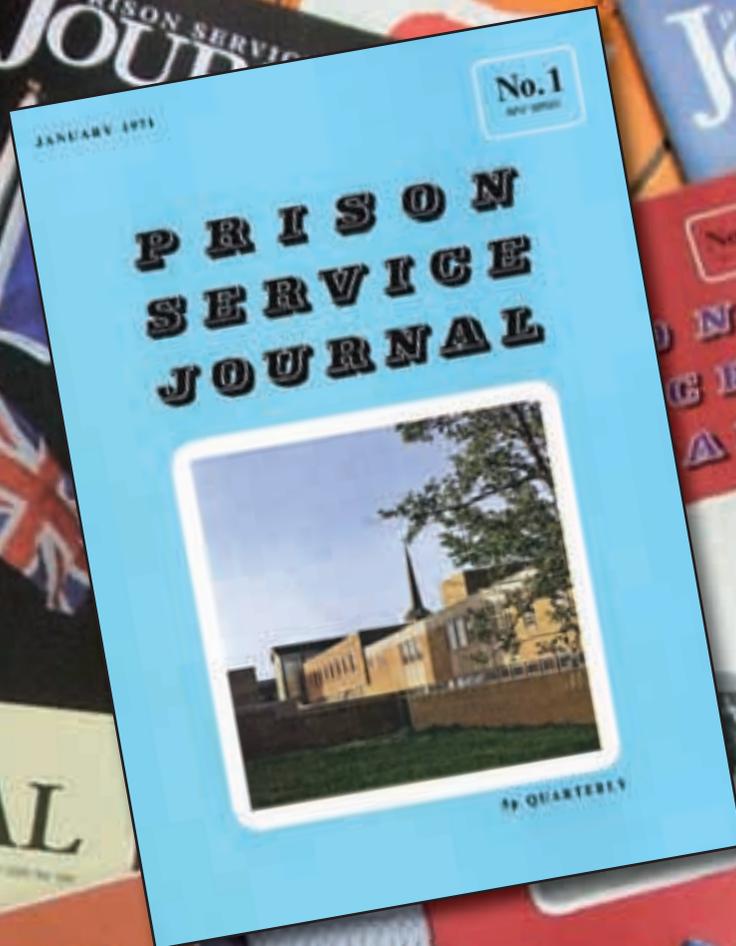


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New Careers for Ex-offenders

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Agencies that have as a goal the betterment of the offender have long lamented the difficulties their clients have in finding stable employment and in particular the problems in starting out on a new career. It is therefore rather surprising that these agencies have not themselves set other employers more of a lead. This is one of several arguments put forward in the United States by those who support the concept of new careers for ex-offenders within correctional agencies. Some developments in the United States over the last decade have ensured that this concept cannot be dismissed as a rather improbable innovation.

The employment of ex-offenders by official agencies can be viewed within the context of a wide social movement that encompasses the philosophies of self-help and ground level participation in decision making. In brief, solutions are sought from within the social problem rather than from external sources. Alcoholics Anonymous and Synanon are two of nearly 300 self-help groups that have sprung up. These groups demonstrate that people with similar problems can be of mutual assistance and that as a result of their involvement in the difficulties of others they are more able to master their own, a phenomena which prompted a new term for American sociology, 'retroflexive reformation'.¹

During this same period there was a growing sensitivity within the liberal establishment to the high level of paternalism in many official programmes designed to combat poverty. Governmental support was therefore forthcoming for the view that 'if the poor have a stake in their own destiny, if they have an opportunity to utilise education for personal advantage, and if they are afforded dignity in the process, then motivation to participate in the system will logically follow'.² 'New careers for the poor' and 'maximum feasible participation' were catchwords in the days when the Great Society could be mentioned without any hint of irony. Officially sponsored anti-poverty programmes employed many ex-offenders and these developed alongside non-official agencies and self-help groups.

One such non-official agency, not founded by ex-offenders, is the Vera Institute of Justice in New York

City. Vera was established with the aim of reducing the inequities of the pre-trial situation and it employs ex-offenders in several of its projects. New Careers Development Inc. in Oakland, California, is directly involved in the training and placement of new careerists in social service agencies. There are some 140 trainees and they are mostly from the ghetto with about 10 per cent having arrest records. Douglas Grant who was largely responsible for setting up the organisation is gradually withdrawing in favour of the group of highly competent ex-offenders who comprise most of the senior staff. Of the self-help societies founded by ex-offenders for ex-offenders the best known is the Seventh Step Foundation. The seven steps have much in common with those of A.A. and they were developed by the late Bill Sands and others in Kansas State Penitentiary in 1962. Although chapters do recruit people without criminal records, 'square Johns', onto their boards of directors, Seventh Step has remained very much an ex-offender's association. When 'square Johns' take over, as happened recently in Los Angeles, the chapter is likely to disintegrate. Several chapters do, however, work closely with official agencies, an example being at the Preston School of the California Youth Authority,³ and there have been only a few instances of the distrust that characterised relations between Synanon and officialdom. Seventh Step workers often stress that nothing has changed within themselves but rather that they are finding new directions to channel their energy and skills. Coming to work with Seventh Step, said one of these men, was 'starting an adventure' and for him it involved much of the unpredictable excitement that he had experienced in criminal activities over a 20-year period.

New careers programmes are concerned with ex-offenders, by which is meant people no longer on probation or incarcerated. There are, however, close links between developments and projects where the offender, whilst in custody or on probation supervision, is an active participant in strategies arising from the betterment goal. Because the ex-offender is in a stronger position to determine events, new careers programmes are more highly developed than projects within the correctional situation. There are, however, indications that the offender may not be far behind the

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1. Cressey, D.R. 'Changing Criminals: The Application of the Theory of Differential Association'. *American Journal of Sociology*, LXI, 1955, 116-120.
 2. Pearl, A. and Riessman, F. *New Careers for the Poor*. New York. Free Press, 1965, p. 73.
 3. Fagin, B. 'The Seventh Step Programme at Preston'. *California Youth Authority Quarterly*, 21, 3, 1968, 35-42.

ex-offender in this respect. At the Washington State Penitentiary a number of men, identified as being mainly strict constructionists of the inmate code, asked permission to form their own self-help group with a focus on recidivism.⁴ More recently at the O.H. Close School, Stockton in California, several boys have founded a drug investigation group which among other activities is reviewing books and articles on drug taking. A large number of self-help groups are flourishing and receiving official support at the Colorado State Penitentiary.⁵

Prison inmates have, of course, long worked in a variety of tasks, from being armed guards to clerical assistants, that serve the stable operative goals of control and maintenance. It has been less common for inmates to be involved in tasks associated with the more precarious goal of inmate betterment. When this has happened it has generally been the result of personnel shortages. Early education programmes in federal prisons relied heavily on inmate teachers and administrators. That meaning can be given to very long sentences is demonstrated in a north-eastern state where two men serving life sentences are full-time teachers in the state's reformatory where they live in staff quarters. An inmate at the Indiana State Reformatory, who was a college graduate with computer experience, was the principal initiator of an inmate-manned tabulating department which performs work for several of the state's agencies and local universities. This inmate was transferred to the state prison to set up a data processing system for the state's six institutions and after being paroled he was appointed Assistant Director of Classification and Treatment in the Department of Corrections. The potential of inmates in research programmes has been demonstrated by Douglas Grant⁶ and Hans Toch⁷ and, in Britain, was favourably viewed by the Advisory Council on the Penal System when considering the problems of the long-term inmate of high security prisons.⁸ Hans Toch, whose

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offender-participant study of violence will probably become a classic, writes: 'Penology stands in need of new approaches in persons who are currently stored in correctional institutions. Research participation can easily and cheaply serve rehabilitative goals'.⁹

These developments within correctional agencies represent the coming together of offenders' demands to be involved in betterment, sociological theory and the application of the milieu therapy ideology to penal settings. The lead in attempting to exploit these sources in a systematic way was, for a few years, taken by the California Department of Corrections. The department's best known programme was at Pine Hall in the California Institution for Men at Chino where a high degree of blurring of inmate and staff roles took place.¹⁰ That this and other attempts at the 'therapeutic community' were

short lived in California is a reflection of the neglect of the organisational context by those involved. These projects generated enormous interest in and outside California and two notable new careers projects developed from the Pine Hall experience. Seven Pine Hall graduates, all parolees, were hired by the state of North Carolina to staff a small open penal unit. The Research and Youth Development Centre at Chapel Hill had 20 young inmates who worked with the staff in developing new state programmes to combat poverty and crime. Only

one of the parolees remained with the unit and under his direction it was showing increasing strength in weathering crises at the time it was closed due to the cessation of state funding. The parolee who had been in charge went on to become deputy director of a counselling centre for delinquent youth in Kentucky. The Pine Hall experience also gave rise to the New Careers Development Project which was set up in 1964. Inmates from the California Department of Corrections, after undergoing a selection process, were allocated to this experimental programme and to a control group. The controls continued with their regular prison routine whilst the experimentals underwent a four-month

4. Garabedian, P. 'Legitimate and Illegitimate Alternatives in the Prison Community.' *Sociological Inquiry*, 32, No. 2, 1962, 172-184.

5. Wilson, A. 'Self-help Groups: Rehabilitation or Recreation'. *A.J. Corrections*, 31, No. 6, 12-18.

6. Grant, J. 'The Use of Correctional Institutions as Self-study Communities in Social Research.' *British Journal of Delinquency*, 7, 1957, pp. 301-307.

Grant, J. and Grant, J. 'Staff and Client Participation: A New Approach to Correctional Research.' *Nebraska Law Review*, XLV, 1966, 702-716.

7. Toch, H. *Violent Men*. Chicago. Aldine, 1969.

8. *The Regime for Long-term Prisoners in Conditions of Maximum Security*. Report of the Advisory Council on the Penal System. London, 1968, at para. 188.

9. Toch, *ibid*, p. 247.

10. Briggs, D.L. 'Convicted Felons as Social Therapists'. *Corrective Psychiatry and Journal of Social Therapy*, vol. 9, 1963, 122-127.

training course just prior to their parole. There were three consecutive courses and each involved six inmates. The original plan had been that they would be trained for programme development tasks within correctional settings but it became clear that such openings would not occur. As a number of federally funded anti-poverty programmes were starting at this time the training was focussed instead on job development programmes for the poor. All 18 men were felony offenders, seven had been previously incarcerated and almost all had prior arrest records and long histories of known delinquency. After being paroled they were found social service employment and they were given considerable support in meeting the demands of their new career. Three years after the programme one of the 18 was back in prison, four had returned to semi-skilled work and a sixth had become a college student. The remaining 12 were still employed by state and federal agencies and by universities where they occupied middle management positions with salaries ranging from 10 to 15 thousand dollars. The comparative follow-up results showed that the controls did less well than was predicted from their base expectancy scores, whilst the experimentals did better than predicted. It was also found that those who had the most going for them before, amongst the experimentals, were least able to make good use of this new opportunity. The 12 new careerists came mainly from ghetto backgrounds and an important source of support for them in their new careers came from the women they became involved with who encouraged them to think in terms of changing social institutions rather than merely being against them. Although the training project was short lived, for state funding did not replace federal support, it provides a good example of the contagious quality of these new career developments. Commenting on these 12 men, Grant has drawn attention to their activities in new career associations at local and national levels and to the impressive impact that they have had through these associations and in the course of their employment on legislatures and funding agencies. In his use of the word contagion, Grant has in mind more than the passing on of information and techniques to others but also 'passing on their conviction that they and other deviants in the culture could contribute to that culture's development; that change, though difficult, could be

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brought about by people like themselves; that there were no absolute truths to guide social action but only approximations to the truth which must be continually tested against experience'.¹¹

In the California Youth Authority there are several projects that involve training offenders as aides in betterment programmes with the possibility of full-time employment within the authority on discharge. Most of these are federally funded and the largest is the Aide Training Project at the O.H. Close School. The trainee aides come to O.H. Close School from the Youth Training School in Ontario where they have been for at least three months. They are between two and three years older than the O.H. Close boys with whom they work as teacher and recreation aides for the final six months of their sentence. The programme started in

January 1968 and at any one time there are 25 aides in training. The aides share the same living quarters and they wear their own clothes. In response to this project a new civil service class was created in California, the Correctional Programme Assistant which is open to aides on discharge. This entry level position combines practical and academic work and can be a first step for a career within the Youth Authority. At the present time felons can be employed in Youth Authority parole units but not in

institutions. A research study comparing boys who have been in the aide programme with a control group is under way and an early report on a six-month follow-up shows that whilst there was no difference in recidivism the employment position of the experimentals was significantly better and that eight of the 26 experimentals were in jobs related to their aide training, most of them in the Youth Authority.¹²

The Los Angeles Probation Department is also undertaking several programmes with considerable new careers potential. About 100 former probationers are employed by the department in various capacities and mostly under the title of community worker. In the largest of these projects, RODEO (Reduction of Delinquency Through Expansion of Opportunity), two community workers are attached to a probation officer and in most cases they are of the same racial group as predominates in the part of the city they are based in. There is at the moment no easy upward mobility. The

11. Grant, J. and Grant, J. 'Contagion as a Principle in Behaviour Change'. In *Unique Programmes in Behaviour Readjustment*. Edited by Henry C. Rickard, Pergamon Publishing Co., New York, 1970.

12. Webb, M.P. and Seckel, J.P. 'Evaluation Summary of Compensatory Education in the California Youth Authority, 1968-9. California Youth Authority, Sacramento.

next grade up is group supervisor and that requires two years of college and the grade of probation officer requires a further two years. It seems probably, however, that a decline in applications from college graduates will lead to modification of these educational requirements. Mention should also be made of the Los Angeles Police Department which, along with the police departments of Richmond and Philadelphia employs ex-offenders in community liaison work.

Official new career programmes for ex-offenders are not confined to the west coast. Examples could be cited from among others, such diverse states as Minnesota, Alabama, New Jersey, Kansas and South Carolina. A recent survey showed that some 40 states have statutory or administrative prohibitions against the employment of probationers or parolees and that many of these have prohibitions against ex-offenders who are completely free of supervision. In many states people with felony convictions are deprived of the right to vote and the official ventures into new careers in a nation where civil death can still be a reality are all the more impressive. Possibly the most committed agency to the new careers idea is the New York State Division for Youth.¹³ This agency was created in 1960 to provide flexible alternatives to the existing options available to the courts for the 15 to 17-year

old offender. It has remained remarkably free from bureaucratic restraint and would have a strong claim to be amongst the most innovative penal agencies in the world. Its new careers programme was initiated in 1963 and has made steady growth and a comprehensive evaluative study has recently been initiated. Twenty-five young men new careerists are employed by the division at present and they comprise about 10 per cent of the total staff. They include immediate graduates, past graduates and adults who are under the supervision of the New York State Division of Parole. Milton Luger, until recently the director, says that the goal has been 'to preserve the original sensitivity and empathy of the new careerist, while urging him to prepare himself realistically for movement up the civil service ladder'.¹⁴

The accumulated results of recent research projects should provide some pointers to the many unanswered

questions concerning selection, training and on tasks with the greatest potential. These research findings will probably do little, however, to reduce the wide differences in philosophy that separate some new career practitioners. The New York State Division for Youth has, for example, remained more selective than some other agencies. Luger stresses that he is looking for people with something to offer whilst others view the new careerist as the main gainer or lay stress on the need to change social institutions. As an aspect of the selection issue it would appear, that with a few exceptions, most of the programmes largely involve minority racial groups. These groups are generally under-represented on official agency staffs and over-represented amongst the clientele. To see the new careers movement, merely in terms of achieving a racial

balance would miss its more fundamental significance as a claim by the socially disadvantaged and dishonoured to have an important say in the determination of their plight in their relationship with official agencies.

Among the groups most resistant to the new careers concept are correctional workers. Luger has commented on the feelings of staff in his division who had not been directly associated with new careerists that 'their own professionalism was being threatened by the new-found

feelings of heightened pride and self-worth slowly being inculcated through the new careerists' important roles in our facilities'.¹⁵ It is not only notions of professionalism that are challenged by the very core of the caste-like relationship that staff and offenders conventionally share. The new careerist in fact crosses caste lines and, as one observer puts it, he finds a 'rite of passage' back from criminal to non-criminal status.¹⁶ A recent Louis Harris poll (conducted for the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training) found that 50 per cent of correctional workers rejected that new careers approach and a further 15 per cent were not sure. Workers in juvenile settings were on the whole in favour whilst those in adult settings, especially those in institutions, were largely against. One-third of administrators and specialists were in favour of hiring ex-offenders in their agencies whilst only one-seventh of line workers felt this

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13. Luger, M. 'Innovations in the Treatment of Juvenile Offenders.' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 381, 1969, 60-70.

14. Luger, M. 'Utilising the Ex-offender as a Staff Member: Community Attitude and Acceptance.' In *Offenders as a Correctional Manpower Resource*. Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, Washington, 1968, 50-59 at p.56.

15. Luger, M., *ibid*, p.53.

16. Empey, L.T. 'Offender Participation in the Correctional Process: General Theoretical Issues.' In *Offenders as a Correctional Manpower Resource*. Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, Washington, 1968, 5-21.

way. The greater the education of the staff member the more accepting of the new careerist, although even in the higher reaches this was far from complete. More than half of all staff thought that hiring ex-offenders would lower the standards of the profession and this view was especially strong amongst line workers. Those who were in favour cited the ex-offender's ability to empathise as his main contribution. Those against pointed to bad character, unreliability, maladjustment and security risks involved as his main defects. The Manpower Commission commenting on these findings, which were part of a general survey of staff views, state: 'Perhaps more than anywhere else in the survey correctional personnel expressed dissatisfaction with their own accomplishment in their negative reaction to the employment of ex-offenders. Rehabilitation they seemed to be saying has not been successful. We do not turn out the whole man. The ex-offender may be the next offender and we cannot trust him as we do another'.¹⁷ The findings underline the point that alterations to the caste relationship cannot be achieved by changes in the role of the offender alone. Equally important is the role definition of correctional staff and it is vital to ensure that changes do not reduce their security and satisfaction. Hans Toch writes: 'If programme development is likely to involve shifts in staff functions and roles — and it inevitably will — then it is important not only that staff be involved in the direction of the new programming but also that new career development opportunities be opened for them as well as for the offender group'.¹⁸ Grant has pointed out that other sources of resistance can be reduced by avoiding inadequate preparation and by building the new career concept into the organisation rather than having it tacked on as an optional extra.

There is a danger of the ex-offender's contribution in general being romanticised, and even amongst

those who have a contribution to make there is no reason for supposing that large numbers of them would wish to make a career in this direction. New careerists in the United States, however small a proportion of the total staff they remain, seem likely to make a significant impact on the agencies they work for, and for the offenders they come in contact with they provide continual and dramatic examples of breaks with recidivism. These attempts by official agencies to develop new careers for ex-offenders may, furthermore, be amongst the first clues of an emerging and radically new orientation to offenders. The offender is less likely to be seen as a passive recipient and preconceptions about what is best for him will give way to joint decisions by offenders and staff which will be determined by what seems relevant to them. These new career developments may then represent an early step in acknowledging that offenders, as the largest group in the correctional process, should have an important say in the shape and direction of decisions concerning how their time will be spent. Developments in Britain have still to reach this initial stage but it seems probable that considerably more notice than has been the case up to now will be given to the potential that some ex-offenders have as new careerists. Once these new career openings have been created for the ex-offender, further and more fundamental organisational adjustments can be expected by the official agencies in relation to the offender as distinct from the ex-offender. Adjustments to present arrangements may in fact be insufficient and increasing interest may be given to the task of developing new organisational models that will take into account and support increasingly high levels of participation by both offenders and lower level staff within agencies that have, as one of their goals, the betterment of offenders.

17. *Corrections 1968: A Climate for Change*. Report of a survey made by Louis Harris and associates for the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, Washington, 1968, 24-26.

18. Toch, H. *ibid*, p.238.