

“*A little touch of Harry in the night*”

Trevor J. Gadd

Governor, H.M. Prison, Wakefield.

Governing in the past

‘I am writing to confirm formally that it is proposed to post you in your present rank to take charge of Wakefield Prison in succession to...’ Such was the memorandum I received from P7 Division in March 1986 (i.e. 1986 BFS—Before Fresh Start). Having already been an in charge governor at two previous establishments, I viewed my appointment to Wakefield Prison as a reasonably logical, if somewhat flattering step in my career. By then I believed I had a clear idea of the role of an in-charge governor in the Prison Service and the kind of style required to carry out such a task effectively.

For those of us who came into the Prison Service in the two decades immediately following the Second World War, the shadows of ‘A.P.’ and Sir Lionel Fox, the Chairman of the Prison Commission for most of that period continue to dominate the ethos of the Service. This ethos contained within it a clear concept of leadership with an emphasis on individualism, personal example and a total commitment to the task to be done, if necessary at the expense of personal circumstances. It is probably not surprising that such a Prison Service inevitably attracted to it highly indi-

vidualistic, at times eccentric, people who saw an opportunity to exercise a style of leadership and command particularly suited to their own temperament; an opportunity rarely available in other professional jobs outside of the armed services. It was, therefore, perhaps no mere chance that the majority of governors of that era came from an armed services background. It was this concept of governorship which I inherited and carried into my own perspective of the governor’s role.

It is perhaps necessary to have experienced this phase in the development of the Prison Service personally, before one can understand and appreciate fully what this style of governing had to offer in terms of motivating prison staff in the achievement of the perceived objectives of the organisation. This goal was primarily enshrined in Rule 1 of the Prison Rules, clearly orientating the Service to a rehabilitative function, whilst creating a closely knit hierarchical and familial environment for staff: an environment in which they could identify with, and work towards, the widely accepted aims of the Service. I believe that the highly individualistic style of governing during that period was peculiarly suited to the situation. Looking back in time,

I recognise now that much, perhaps too much, was invested in the person and personality of individual governors; governors who could, and at times did, exercise a despotism, not always benevolent, over both inmates and staff in the furtherance of Rule 1 and the maintenance of a hierarchical and disciplined service. Lest I should be judged a harsh critic of this system and style of governing, let me say now that it appeared to work remarkably well in achieving a willing commitment from most grades of staff, who contributed to a consensus view of what they were in the Prison Service to do.

Thus Prison Standing Orders setting out the statutory duties of governors clearly underlined the personal responsibility and ubiquity of governors in carrying out their command function. Above all, this necessitated a close interface as contact between governor and staff, so that both supervision and direction emanated from a personal relationship based on mutual respect and professional competence. It is perhaps worthy of note here that this mutual respect was established during that period when a significant proportion of prison governors came into the Service as direct entrants. That

this did not appear to provoke the resentment of uniformed staff to any great extent, itself indicates both the high quality of the governors recruited into the Prison Service and the symbiotic relationship between newly recruited junior governor grades and the uniformed grades, wherein each recognised the role they had to play in, and the contribution they were able to make to, the Service.

It is a commonplace saying that the Prison Service is in the people business. It is an organisation comprising widely disparate groups of people amongst both staff and inmates. In prison the product is a human one and no prison can be a viable community unless prison staff show the kind of leadership which can draw together the many different, often conflicting threads, sometimes in a 'conspiracy of co-operation', which constitute the living anatomy of a prison. Such leadership can only effectively have its genesis and driving force in the person at the apex of authority and responsibility—the governor. This in my view, requires a significant measure of personal and direct contact between the governor and his staff to be fully effective. Ultimately leadership has to be direct, not vicarious, if it is to motivate staff to achieve the recognised objectives of the organisation. Equally, the objectives of the organisation need to be clearly understandable and attainable, and will be more likely to motivate staff if they are also inspirational. It is not, I believe, unrealistically nostalgic, in looking back at the immediate post-war period to see it as a time when the confluence of Rule 1, the method of the recruitment of governors, and the individualistic qualities of such governors, contributed to a highly motivated prison staff who believed that some of their rehabilitative work at least was crowned with a measure of success.

Governing Now

I am mindful that much has been written on leadership in many scholarly books and articles over the years and I do not intend to intrude into this much trodden and academic field of study. I would, however, like to enlist briefly the aid of our greatest playwright who, 400 years ago, expressed my concept of leadership in its most succinct and elegant form. On the eve of the battle of Agincourt, King Henry V walks through the camp of his anxious army

to find out for himself the state of morale of the men upon whom his destiny and life will depend the following day. Shakespeare describes the scene thus—'For forth he goes and visits all his host; Bids them good morrow with a modest smile ... (they) beholding him, pluck comfort from his looks ... His liberal eye doth give to everyone ... **A little touch of Harry in the night.**'

Now we have experienced our own exodus from the immediate post-war period and, like society at large, have been wandering the social and moral wilderness of the 1960's and 1970's, emerging into Fresh Start! With Mount Sinai and C.I 55/84* behind us, we see the hills of the promised land on the horizon. What Mosaic laws for governors have both tradition and the new beginning brought? Have we conceived a new concept of leadership building on what has been tried and tested in the past, or are we shedding what is perceived as a threadbare cloak for new garments? What do we now mean by leadership in the Prison Service of the 1980's? Have we moved away from the belief in the essentially direct symbiotic relationship between the governor and his staff in order to achieve a viable and purposeful prison community? Is it no longer appropriate, in this age of financial control and current management theory, for leadership to be exercised in an individualistic, paternal, even eccentric, manner in the Prison Service of this decade and the future?

These are questions easier to pose than to answer. Whatever answers are attempted, they must be sought in an understanding of the changes in both society and the Prison Service over the past thirty years; changes which have almost certainly shifted the focus of purpose of the Prison service. The passage of time and a greater understanding of the changes in society have undoubtedly brought the view that Rule 1 is no longer an appropriate or attainable objective for our organisation. It may be that the concept of positive custody is more relevant to our present circumstances and that C.I. 55/84 will probably command respect as a more realistic, if somewhat bland and systems-orientated, statement of the aims of the Prison Service. It is to the attainment of these new objectives that governors must now address themselves, recognising that leadership must operate within a clear context of cost-effectiveness and management accountability.

Governing in the Future

What then is the governor of the 1980's and into the next century to be? Is he to be the managing director, cum accountant, of a public organisation, chairing a board of managers, who implement his command function and directives in organising the work force? In the present re-organised Prison Service can the governor only effectively carry out the policy of the Prisons Board vicariously, through subordinate managers, isolating himself from the detail of the routine work of the prison and problem solving so as to remain relatively free to plan and direct in a more coherent and organised manner? Is he to conform to current management theory that he will be at his most effective if his span of immediate supervision and direction is limited to a handful of his subordinates?

If so, I gaze upon such a governor with a sense of unease. Not because I necessarily challenge the fundamental concept of a new management theory in the Prison Service, but because I fear that the practical application of it may be interpreted too literally and narrowly, and may fail to meet the level of leadership that the Prison Service still requires. No doubt, if released from the everyday pressure of what is now seen as routine work and problem solving, a governor may well be able to focus more of his attention on the wider strategic aspects of effectively managing a modern prison establishment. There is, however, a price to be paid for this if a correct balance is not struck between managerial remoteness and the personal involvement of the governor in relation to all his staff. That price is amorphous management, lacking in inspirational direction and personal example.

I look at two aspects of governing to try and illustrate the paramount importance of governors retaining a direct contact and involvement with staff and inmates: there will be others which this article does not have the opportunity to explore. There is a current view that governors should no longer be required to carry out the formal daily round of the prison and the personal conduct of adjudications. This view tends to see such functions as routine and more appropriate to senior managerial grades short of the governor himself. I will not deny that from one viewpoint such functions can be seen as routine in a mechanical sense, but I would wish to argue that it is important how, and by whom, they are executed. I have no doubt that

there is a clear expectation from both staff and inmates that these are two important areas where direct contact should be made between the governor and the staff/inmate community of the prison, and that this community judges the quality of leadership at such points of contact. If the selection and promotion of governors to command is efficient, then the governor has to be the most professionally experienced, and dare I say wisest, officer of the prison. Staff and inmates have this expectation of the governor and look to him as the ultimate authority and source of understanding of the prison community. Not only mutual respect, but trust also, are bonds which must bind together the governor with the prison community and trust will not flourish without personal contact. Thus a member of staff must have the opportunity of contact with the governor, both formally and informally if this sense of trust and confidence is to be maintained. The daily round of the prison offers such opportunity, limited though at times it may be in practice.

Similarly, we must recognise that prisons are not perfect organisations of efficiency, fairness and justice.

Because of this, the governor's awareness of his prison must rest on more than a vicarious knowledge. He must retain direct contact at two important points at least; the personal hearing of applications where practicable, and the execution of the ultimate disciplinary authority through the adjudication procedure. These are two of the critical throbbing pulse-points, the touch of which can tell the governor much about the state of his prison. Through applications, inmates can appeal to the highest authority in the establishment and, by and large, are prepared to accept decisions at this level. Equally, staff are aware that an inmate's direct access to the governor ensures that they must maintain high professional standards of conduct in their dealings with prisoners. In the case of adjudications, the governor is again given the opportunity to set his standards of conduct for staff, as well as for inmates, and in doing so to establish the tone of the establishment in the discipline and control context. Additionally the governor not only sets, but maintains, a consistent approach to control and discipline, and from his own professional experience defines the limits of tolerance or

mitigation as appropriate. The increasing judicial scrutiny of adjudications has now made it increasingly important that these are carried out with the highest standards of professional thoroughness and natural justice.

I have set out here some personal reflections on the past, present and future roles for the prison governor. I have no monopoly of wisdom and others of greater and wider experience may well wish to mount some counter-arguments to the conventional views expressed here. For me, however, the Prison Service will continue to require the style of leadership I have argued for and which I believe to have served our organisation well. I do not see my role in the new era of Fresh Start as being limited to the leather upholstered chair of the managing director in the board room. Nor do I believe that what I call 'chateau generalship' has much to offer the Prison Service — (1914-1918 were not seen to be vintage years for high leadership). If Fresh Start is to be our St. Crispin's day, then we remain in sore need of 'a little touch of Harry in the night'. ■

* Circular Instruction 55/84: Management in the Prison Service.

INITIAL THINKING — *continued from page 6* and suggestions to Headquarters.

The implementation of Fresh Start has had many hiccups but I think the experience has enabled us to learn the value of good communications from Headquarters to Regional Office to the Governor, and the importance of the Governor as the key communicator between Headquarters and the Institution. Cascading (I hesitate to use the word!) through the institution should be easier using the clearer lines of the new management structure with a clearer identification of roles and responsibilities. Communication has always been, and will always remain, a key part of the Governor's role.

Equally, leadership must always be the prime role of the Governor. Because the Governor no longer carries out his role in the same way does not mean that leadership is not central to his role. I have tried to illustrate that the leadership role is quite compatible with the defining of objectives and targets to provide a sense of purpose and direction for the establishment and its managers, the allocation and control of resources, performance monitoring, acting as an interface between the establishment and Head-

quarters and exercising a personal role with staff and inmates. There is still room within these skills and techniques for personal style and the exhibition of personal qualities of leadership.

The de Frisching group attempted to clarify the command role of the Governor and his subordinates within the establishment and to distinguish it from the day to day management of the establishment. This is another example of how there is a need in the more complex institutions for the Governor to be able to delegate responsibilities, in this case to the Head of Custody. It does not remove his overall responsibility for incident control but does delegate the command of small incidents to the Head of Custody and the command structure. Clearly, where there is a very serious incident, such as a hostage or a major inmate disturbance, the Governor needs to take personal control; but more minor incidents should be, and can be, dealt with by the Head of Custody.

There is no doubt that the Governor's role has become far more complex and the need for management skills accordingly far greater. The wide range of responsibilities the Governor

now carries would have been alien to the Governor of 10-15 years ago — financial management, race relations policy, detailed contingency planning, target setting and so on. The Governor can no longer as an individual do all these things personally but must rely on the team working at senior management and intermediate management levels to ensure the implementation and delivery of all these policies. How he uses his time is a key to this and the initiative of Fresh Start gives us an opportunity to free up the Governor from the old rituals and routines, the old paternalism, and change the attitudes of intermediate staff that the only way to make decisions is to have personal access to the Governor. I believe that the new role of the Governor can enhance the personal style of the Governor, the personal leadership of the Governor and his personal role for staff and inmates. The aim of the new management structure linked with team working, effective delegation, definition of objectives and allocation of resources is to enable the Governor to 'steer the direction of the establishment and to create a sense of purpose and commitment.' ■