

it was a considered and honest foundation stone to build upon representing squarely and honestly the views of management as agreed with the POA. It had to be this because it was what prison officers had voted on, it was what they had placed their trust in and therefore, should have stood as a monument to Fresh Start.

Management of the Prison Service however, were unable to take advantage of the situation. Unable to lead, able only to provoke within months of Fresh Start a ballot by prison officers securing a majority of 3 to 1 in favour of taking industrial action. And why? Because Bulletin 8, the foundation stone was so riddled with inaccuracy, it's promises meaningless and coupled with total confusion and misunderstanding over proposed recruitment plans. Industrial Relations were again back at rock bottom followed once again by the predictable churning out of propaganda passing blame like some sore ridden buck from one side to the other resulting in another round of trench warfare and total loss of what should have been a new found trust. It is, in my opinion, about time that Her Majesty's Home Secretary if he cares at all should know the facts, know that prison officers were willing to commit themselves, that prison officers were willing to start afresh, but also that undeniably they were told lies. What we saw as clear agreements have been reneged on.

We kept our side of the bargain. We accepted changes in working practices, we accepted economy regarding manning levels, we accepted the concept of greater efficiency in return for better pay and time off but we also accepted that what we had been told would be the objectives and rules governing implementation of Fresh Start were honest and well-founded. It was not so.

We were promised a level of recruitment that would ensure success of Fresh Start without having to accept

dangerously low manning levels. Having accepted Fresh Start, proposed recruiting numbers were reduced.

We were promised unification. What we in fact have is an undeniable split between, on the one hand, Grades Five and above, and, on the other, Grades Six and below. With one set of rules and conditions for the one, denied to the other: the gap becoming wider as the so called framework agreement progresses. There also occurred the creation of what seems like a Board of Directors consisting of Grades Five and above, and a shop floor of Grades Six and below, coupled with an absence of a co-ordinating works manager (the old Chief Officer) responsible for liaison between the Board and the shop floor. We were promised a 'Pride in Ownership' of the Service brought about by increased job satisfaction and motivation. We find in fact very little of either. Civilianisation, we are told, will release prison officers to do the work they are best at — face to face work with inmates. We see the ultimate result as being face to face with stress, more and more turned into guards. Regimes are already contracted, workshops are almost a thing of the past. Even further reductions in manning availability brought about by the erosion of contract hours must inevitably cause even further restriction of regimes. This along with the loss of job variety which goes hand in hand with increased civilianisation presents a very bleak prospect to prison officers at ground floor level. The option of Fresh Start being merely a code name for financial restriction becomes an increasing reality.

We were also promised other things, mainly via Bulletin 8, such as ability to arrive at locally agreed working systems for Fresh Start, best reflecting the ability to meet local needs. It was not to be. Instead we have had forced upon us a multiplicity of working systems, which, as time

progresses, will do very little to meet local needs. We were promised an ability to reach local agreements governing implementation, again best suited to local needs and in the mutual interests of both management and staff. No such agreements exist unless they are seen by Regional Directors and Home Office Officials to comply with their interpretation of the rules. Certainly there is no local autonomy. While there is no trust and confidence mutually expressed between the Home Office Prison Department and the POA, there also does not seem to be much between the HOPD and the Governors.

Once again it comes down to Bulletin 8. If it had been properly considered, worked through to remove all ambiguity, and left as a clear statement of agreed principles; then local agreements would have been easily and amicably reached.

At the time of writing, it would appear that it's another fine mess we find ourselves in. However, we must conclude that it is never too late. Although we have now balloted to accept a course of industrial action if it proves inevitable, we sincerely hope that it will not, and that common sense and sanity will eventually prevail. If it does, then let's hope that, finally there will come into being a realisation that there must be mutual trust. There must be a commitment to honour agreements, and management must accept responsibility to ensure that they get all their facts right. They must be certain of their facts before they make offers to the members of the Prison Service, because anything less must result in conflict.

We do, I think, have a history in the Service of rarely getting things right the first time; remember the common working agreement? So let's set our sights on Fresh Start Mk2 and let's hope for all our sakes that we get that right. ■

## READERS Write

THE EDITOR  
*Prison Service Journal*

Dear Sir,  
Your last issue concentrated upon gender and imprisonment. As a member of a board of visitors with experi-

ence of both male and female parts of the system, I would like to add several points about the meaning of imprisonment to women.

Whenever the Courts are in doubt as to whether to imprison a woman, what criteria do they consider? Is it not often that the middle class, good wife and mother escapes custody; unlike the woman who is poor, single, promiscuous, battered, homeless and over-proportionately black who so positively attracts it? Whereas society continues to accept the sharply esca-

lating male criminal population, female offenders are frequently seen as being women of positively abnormal nature.

Frequently Courts face the dilemma of securing adequate accommodation for those known to be seriously disturbed and/or mentally ill. Though it is accepted that prisons were never intended as depositories for such cases, all too often there is simply no practical alternative. Women still tend to attract custodial sentences for less serious offences than do men. The present female prison population

includes 15% of women with a degree of physical disability and in excess of 20% with some mental defect.

With the enforced separation and consequent disruption to family life, feelings of increased isolation and utter futility are common. Many women in custody are mothers and if any bond existed prior to imprisonment, considerable care must be taken to build upon this and so retain and improve the mother-child relationship. Similarly, those who have experienced only poor maternal ties must be positively helped to foster deeper and more meaningful bonds.

The medical requirements of women prisoners are surely more than those of their male counterparts, if only on account of their biological needs. As a result of depression, and a host of emotional fears and anxieties, 1 in 6 women prisoners self mutilate as opposed to 1 in 100 of the male population.

Women serving sentences within

a mixed prison may be grossly disadvantaged. Whereas some male presence within women's establishments must be maintained, and, indeed, encouraged, it remains a sad fact that almost all of women's prisons are governed by men. Women must support women.

Through-care for women in prison largely remains a myth and feelings of increased isolation are common. Improved behaviour are patterns most noticeable when staff motivate their charges with care and co-operation as opposed to sheer dominance.

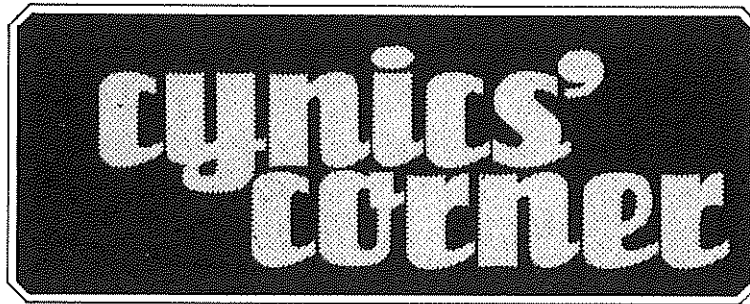
Some possible progressive trends must include:—

1. More life skills courses.
2. Increased help from Governors in importing professional people into prison to advise on such things as outside support schemes, housing and legal services.
3. Well run women's clinics must

4. be incorporated into the system. Hostel accommodation for the newly released must be made more readily available.
5. Communication by telephone between mothers in prison and their families should be increased. For foreign inmates, the latter point becomes one of urgency due to their often total lack of family visits.

With the limited range of establishments suitable for women, and their continued management within a traditionally male organisation, imprisonment remains an increasingly alarming prospect and one we must all endeavour to improve as well as giving serious thought to minimising its use.

SALLY BROWN.  
*Chair  
Board of Visitors  
HMP Durham*



Bulletin No. 97 should have been published by the time you read this Journal and I thought it was time for a simple guide to Fresh Start—and who better to write it than a simple man. Read on if you wish to join those who are **really** informed.

## The Purpose of Fresh Start

1. To save everyone's time by getting rid of those one act farces, which sometimes developed into grand operas, the plot of which consisted of the local POA Committee demanding an additional officer in the bathhouse because an inmate in 1890 had forgotten to switch on the cold water tap and had scalded himself. The underlying theme, which all the audience understood, was based on the equation "additional task equals increased overtime".
2. Related to paragraph 1 above: repair some of the damage done to establishments over the years by Manpower "Management" Teams whose motto appears to have been "The Team that likes to say yes".
3. To find a solution to the problem of Assistant Governors who, if I can remind the reader of a piece of history, had been introduced to Borstals as glorified scout leaders, later placed in prisons because they were the only people who could be trusted to write decent parole reports, but have never been given a spot in the Management Structure because some of them wore sports coats and sandals.
4. To give Principal Officers who, as a result of the activities of the POA and Manpower Teams (see paragraphs 1 and 2 above), had grown in numbers to the point where the PO's team room was needing an extension, a real job to do rather than:
  - (a) Acting as decoration on the end of the Wing and the Centre.