

Letters

Dear Sir,

During one of my rare appearances on night duty I picked up an Autumn 1991 copy of PSJ which I had not previously seen. My attention was drawn to an article from Alex McCrystal on his/her experience of the accelerated promotion scheme. As I read the first three paragraphs I thought 'This could be me writing this article!' I too was a little daunted at the new levels of acceptability into the scheme, I too thought about constantly looking over my shoulder and thinking 'what if?' So I decided to give it a go.

From here onwards however, the story changes. Alex had the wing PO staff officer (with a six page report, no less!) and finally the Governor himself, all assisting with his preparation. Myself, along with five fellow officers from Lincoln did not even warrant a 'well done' a word of encouragement or any preparation whatsoever. Our attendance at the interviews went either unnoticed or unmentioned by senior Management - we all duly received a scrap of paper informing us that we had failed; no feedback, no word from the Governor, nothing at all.

'Sour grapes!' Do I hear? No Sir; 1991 came along and I qualified for another try at APS along with one colleague from Lincoln. Once again, barely a word from management other than being set a draft

proposal for a community service programme which was a G5's task and which he then picked over to add any salient points from ours, to his own paper to the Governor I.

Better prepared this time, through my own efforts, I set off for the interviews where I honestly thought I had fared well. Meanwhile I had passed the SO exam., applied for a board and been refused. Here I was with a possibility of being accepted as potential G2, yet not considered suitable to gain so much as an interview on an SO board. It could only happen in the Prison Service!

I was duly informed of my failure, as was my colleague and another officer who had recently joined us on transfer. I eagerly awaited the promised 'feedback' an improvement on the first year at least. When the great day came I was called up by the Governor and I approached his office wondering if I had failed on general knowledge, written work, interviews, reports from my establishment or whatever.

What happened next was like a bomb dropping. I was told I was woefully short of the required standard - not to bother re-applying: the board members thought (and the Governor agreed) that I would struggle with both the training and the job. Suddenly, after a series

of very varied and successful employment posts, here I was at 41 years old being told officially that I was a thick bastard!

I am still no wiser as to why I failed but for once I was virtually speechless as I listened to the tirade of negatives coming from across the table.

The interview ended with a little sweetener, that I was to be 'positively encouraged to pursue promotion through the normal channels' so now I eagerly await the chance to do so by hopefully getting a board at the next available opportunity.

If any officer is thinking of trying for APS my advice is to go for it, do your best and be yourself. It is a difficult and highly pressurised four days, but despite my disappointments I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge (if not the results) and the experience will hopefully prove useful to me in the future.

**Gordon March,
Officer, HMP
Lincoln.**

Dear Sir,

Derrick Walker was most upset that his article was rejected by the Prison Service Journal Editorial Board - I guess all authors feel the same!

He asked if there is a policy to reject that kind of article and, if once rejected, is it rejected for all time? I

said I would ask.

F Abbott, Governor.

Editor: Articles and letters are welcomed on any subject which has a criminal justice focus, a short note to the editor would be useful before committing yourself so that guidance can be given on length, style and subject. It may be that as in the case of Derrick Walker the subject had been covered sufficiently in recent issues in which case some discussion might be helpful in either trying a new angle, considering a later issue or putting the article to another journal.

Included in this issue is a note of guidance to contributors.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.

Dear Sir,

I thank you for publishing my response to the article Black Workers in the Prison Service, by Robin Alfred.

I should like to point out, since reading and responding to Mr Alfred's article, I attended a Race Relation Liaison Officers course at the Staff College, Wakefield. I now realise that my original response was wrong and has probably caused many of my black colleagues offence, for this I apologise.

I was fortunate enough to speak at this year's Prison Service Conference 2-4 November

1992. The following is the speech I made, I hope you will publish this in its entirety thereby allowing me to 'set the record straight'.

Let me introduce myself, and give you a little of my background. My name is Sam Ellis. I joined the Prison Service in January 1974 at HMP Liverpool, I have since served at Parkhurst and Garth, I am currently a Principal Officer serving at HMP Camp Hill. I am also Race Relations Liaison Officer at my establishment.

Why then did I agree to speak to you today, and why do I believe, I am qualified to speak to you?

I was born in St Asaph, North Wales in 1945 to white parents, I was joined six years later by a white sister, I married my wife in 1965 and we have three white children.

I realised at an early age that I was 'Different' when I was called names and poked fun at, the most hurtful, was being told by my school friends that I must have been adopted because I was a different colour to my parents and sister, this continued into my adult life, I am sure you can imagine the looks and nudges when my wife and I stepped out with our children.

When I returned to HMP Liverpool following my training, I stood out like a sore thumb, not necessarily because I was the first non white officer, no, I was also the first officer to arrive in a powder blue uniform.

To tell you I did not

face racial harassment would be a lie, however, at this stage in my life I had realised how best to deal with the problem, I did this in two ways, firstly, I knew I had to prove to my colleagues, that I could do the job as well as, if not better than them, and, if there was an alarm bell, I made sure I was first on the scene. Secondly, I dealt with racist remarks then as I did until recently, I ignored them. I will come back to this in a minute.

First, let me give you one or two examples of the racial harassment I suffered: being totally ignored by some of my colleagues, telling racist jokes whenever I joined their company, finding racist cartoons in the locker room, having my Annual Staff Report marked down, despite protests from my Reporting Officer, being accused by inmates of joining the Prison Service to try to make myself white. Finally, many years ago, I was arrested by three Police Officers from the then notorious A Division in Liverpool. I was quite severely assaulted, I tried to explain that I was a law abiding citizen and that an uncle of mine was a Detective Chief Superintendent in the neighbouring force, their response was further physical and racial abuse, like, we don't have niggers in the Police, imagine their horror when they found I was indeed telling the truth.

What you may ask, can I tell you about equal opportunities that you do not already know?

" I suffered: being totally ignored by some of my colleagues, telling racist jokes whenever I joined their company, finding racist cartoons in the locker room, "

Several months ago I read an article in issue 86 of the Prison Service Journal entitled *Black Workers in the Prison Service* by Robin Alfred, I was so appalled by what I read, I felt I had to respond to anybody and everybody that would listen, I must tell you, the response was immediate and from the heart.

How then do we get the message across, what must we do to educate all of our staff?

Firstly, I believe the Prison Service Race Relations Policy, cannot in itself change the attitudes of the disbeliever, but, we can certainly influence behaviour, which just might, eventually, alter attitudes. As much as we have the Policy statement, I do not believe Managers have enough time to give proper attention to it. It does not appear on their list of priorities, because they are not judged on Race Relations issues.

Race Relations training should be compulsory. Establishments should be allowed to close down their regimes for a couple of days, or, RRLOs should be given the time away from their normal duties to get the message across. To let staff know their

position, ie, that once they have been trained, they personally can be held accountable to tribunals, etc. They can indeed be the one paying damages, not the Prison Service. I feel sure, if staff were aware of this the attitudes of the few disbelievers would change dramatically, unfortunately, their attitudes would be ruled by fear, that though, must surely be better, than the few, ruling those in their charge by fear.

Secondly, we could move towards local recruitment, particularly in places such as London, Leicester, Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester to name but a few. We cannot continue the disgraceful practise of recruiting young ladies and gentlemen and then posting them to the other side of the country, where they know nobody, and where the cultural differences can be so great, it is not long before they resign. To get through the selection process means they have special skills, it costs the taxpayer a considerable amount of money to train them. To waste that money by staff resigning simply because they are posted away from home is nothing short of a scandal, particularly in the current economic climate.

Equal Opportunities is not just about the colour of your skin, or whether you are a male or female, certainly not, it has far reaching implications.

Let me use the Isle of Wight as an example. The Island, for those of you who have not visited, is not the

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hustle and bustle of Cowes week that you see portrayed on television, certainly not. The Island is made up of very many sleepy little villages. It has a high population of senior citizens and believe it or not there are many residents who have never travelled to the mainland. Two examples, when I was at Parkhurst some years ago there was a Senior officer there who only left the Island once a year to visit relatives, that same Senior Officer, never left the prison estate, he had a hairdresser and a tailor come to his home, that you may think is the extreme, only the other week one of my staff informed me, he had taken his wife to see a show in London, he expressed his fears about going again because of the amount of people and the speed of the traffic, he was an Officer in his twenties, brought up on the Isle of Wight and never having visited London before.

Dealing with the fears and expectations of new prison officers, can you imagine the culture shock to a young officer, joining the Prison Service on the Isle of Wight and being posted from the College to Birmingham, Liverpool or Durham.

Similarly, imagine how Island people react to Brummies, Scousers or Geordies, many of them have little knowledge of these

places, however, they do have their preconceived ideas, stereotypes, ie, all scousers are football hooligans, I don't even like football.

What is equal opportunities? Is it achievable, if so how?

For me, equal opportunities is exactly what the title implies, treating others as you yourself would wish to be treated, AS AN EQUAL, irrespective of colour, gender, service or back-ground.

Is it achievable? Unfortunately, I do not think so, certainly not in my lifetime, I see equal opportunities similar to the problems in Northern Ireland, yes, of course there is a solution, however, to reach the solution means you need both sides to accept, firstly that there is a

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problem, secondly, by realising legislation is not necessarily the answer, some people rebel against legislation, just for the sake of it.

How then is equal opportunities achievable? How do we get both our staff and those in our charge to treat others as they themselves would wish to be treated? Why did I say earlier, I dealt with racist remarks then as I did until recently, I ignored them? A couple of months ago I attended a RRLO course at the Staff College Wakefield, the two Tutors Mr Rogerson and Mr Lawson were

excellent. They actually believed in what they were teaching, they unwittingly taught me that I had gone through my life actually believing that I was different, inferior, most importantly without any dignity. Yes, the colour of my skin is different, However, I am certainly not inferior and I do have my dignity. It has taken me a very long time to realise, I do not have to put up with racist comments just to be accepted. No, accept me as I am your equal.

The Tutors proved to me that I can ignore racist behaviour no longer, both staff and inmates require education and information, not Legislation, I see my role as RRLO, as being the focal point of the education/information process, this has to be the way forward, hence my call for Race Relations training to be compulsory in all establishments.

Finally, let me read from the evidence of a Black Police Officer against his Chief Constable, this more than anything made me wake up to what had been happening to me.

Glen Williams giving evidence in:
Surinder Chima Singh - v - The Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Constabulary

'Sir there are certain ways that as a black person you have to deal with it. You either ride with the jokes or you confront it. The CID tends to be a very close working group.

'Now imagine the situation where a black man in a predominantly white office who for quite a while everyone saw as 'Good old Glen, he hasn't got a chip on his shoulder, he's one of the lads, I don't see him as black man', that sort of attitude. 'He is just Glen.' It wasn't until the point when I actually started saying 'I don't want to listen to these remarks any more, they are offensive. I don't want to hear them', the atmosphere and attitude of the people towards me suddenly changed.

'The reality is, Mr. Weitzman, that if anybody who refers to a black man as 'a nigger', 'coon', 'a spook', whether it be in jest or not, if that person went up to some ordinary black guy in the street and said that to his face, he would be looking at a fist in the mouth, never mind a grin or a smile or an acceptance.

'Regardless of whichever way I might have dealt with those particular comments being made, I dealt with them in a way which guaranteed my survival within the CID.

'Unfortunately for me it also meant losing my dignity and I reached a point where I could not take that any more.'

**S. Ellis, PO,
HMP Camp Hill.**

PRISONS - PRIVATISATION - RACISM

Dear Sir,

I wish to outline my

personal views on privatisation and racism within the prison system as they affect visible minorities and society as a whole.

I address the above issues as a black (or 'coloured') member of the Prison Board of Visitors (a watchdog body - the preserve of the white middle class). In my experience minorities are expected to identify wholly with the aspirations of the majority often against their principles, cultural backgrounds and even at the risk of alienation from their origins and groups. To survive and to continue to hold diverse views is a miraculous balancing exercise. Consequently the low recruitment and retention rate of minorities in the police, prison and other public services is not surprising. This must be inconducive toward building dignified multiracial society.

The UK prison population is composed of 17 per cent black males and 28 per cent black females. These figures are clearly disproportionate to the overall 4.5 per cent non-white population of the land. In my opinion this is a sad reflection of the majority's unequal and unjust treatment toward the politically weak and disadvantaged blacks.

For my own interest and in my official role, I have visited several prisons all over the world including those in the UK and Northern Ireland. Contrary to its declared policy, Britain's 'Universities of Crime' have been allowed to practice inhumanity and

racism by a society that purports to have achieved 'civilisation' through Christian values.

Excellent judicial inquiries as recently as last year by Lord Justice Woolf recommended proposals to end this barbarism, restore dignity and rehabilitate inmates for a better tomorrow. Her Majesty's Government have consistently given lip service to reports commissioned by itself after a riot or crisis but do not find it politically expedient to prioritise action. As a consequence of this inaction, the system continues to create embittered institutionalised cabbages rather than nurture the wealth of human resources that continue to stagnate in prisons.

Regrettably, society's perception is still conditioned to the old theory of retribution or traditional gunboat tactics as a cure for all crime, whether related to drugs, sex, terrorism, etc. The need to examine the underlying causes of criminality or to benefit from the experiences of other countries is not seen as necessary.

Reports of my prison research overseas have been circulated as well as published in some journals to no avail. Judge Steven Tumim, Chief Inspector of Prisons, also toured prisons abroad and I endorse the views expressed in his current annual report in which he has particularly identified basic items such

as sanitation, diet hygiene, meaningful work experience, vocational training, family ties, etc, as being superior elsewhere as compared to British institutions. The Inspectorate's recent discoveries at the filthy Lewes Prison and elsewhere is yet another example of gross inadequacies that exist in the system.

In these dire circumstances, I welcomed the government's privatisation plans with delight. I had personally observed the success and cost effectiveness of such privatisations in the United States whereby private prisons are required to comply with the same terms and conditions as the state. Privatisation there has

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encouraged the state systems to 'get on their bikes' and put their house in order to catch up with the reforms in the private sector. As a pragmatist I thought that it may do the same trick here! A body of opinion in our prison service, BOV's and other reform groups opposed this policy. They considered it immoral and possibly illegal to profit out of incarceration, irrespective of the end result.

However, the gov-

ernment awarded a 'contract' to a private company, the terms of which remain a mystery. Subsequently, Britain's first private remand jail opened at Wolds, North Humber-side, last spring in a cloud of secrecy. Recent requests for visits have been met with negative responses. Rumour has it that although this jail is operating at only half its capacity, there are severe operational problems. Hence one can only conclude that there exists a conspiracy to cover up the mismanagement of this venture. The overcrowded and underfunded state prisons are open to some scrutiny - why not at this private one too?

Amongst all this dubiousness about the new Wolds we now read press reports and other rumours of race riots there. We are told that these riots were forcibly suppressed and the Rastafarian perpetrators put into solitary to 'quieten' them down. We hear that the contractors are to leave what they call 'these disruptive elements' segregated indefinitely. One does not know the underlying causes of this riot or any attempts to address their grievances. It is said that the contractor finds the Prison Service guidelines on race relations, although accepted nationwide, as cumbersome and unimportant and is overtly ignoring action in this area. Likewise he has rebuffed advice from individuals and organisations with an active

interest in these matters.

On this occasion I must agree with Mr John Bartell, Chairman, Prison Officers Association, that the troubles at Wolds must be just the tip of an iceberg of an ill-conceived privatisation or a deliberate ploy to put profit before defenceless unconvicted people. In the light of all this evidence it is utter arrogance for the vested interests to assert that the Wolds is a trouble-free model for future privatisations.

Despite these concerns HMG is forging ahead with further privatisation of prisons as in other parts of the economy. Might not we halt commitment to this disastrous experiment until such a time that we have some independent evidence of success. An input from other countries, notably the USA, may prove worthwhile. Needless to say, and in the public interest, the whole truth must be available. Prisoners who persistently suffer humiliation, racism and abrogation of human rights do not have the freedom to express their frustrations as do the public at large. Of course they may complain to the Board of Visitors but regrettably, at present, boards lack credibility and have no executive powers in the face of a difficult management structure.

**Anver Jeevanjee,
Board of Visitors,
H.M. Prisons.**