

George Zdenkowsky

EDITORIAL

The reaction to the first issue of the A.C.J. was generally favourable. As was explained in the first editorial, we are attempting the difficult task of providing a radical journal that will appeal to academic criminologists, workers within the criminal justice system, and prisoners. Academic and *professional* reaction welcomed the change in format away from the usual subjects and formality of *official* journals. The reaction from prisoners was enthusiastic, but with the comment that it was still a little too academic.

We want at this stage to continue with our general aim, even if the result is that we tend to fall between different stools. The development of a unified, critical theory and the development of an *alternative* or *critical* criminology in Australia is not an overnight task, and we are not yet at the stage where we can afford to be dogmatic or sectarian in our choice of material for this journal. Hopefully this journal will be instrumental in the development of a critical theory and practice, for example through a discussion of the sort of problems raised by Gill Beohringer in his important article in the first issue. However, it would be destructive at this stage to pretend a unified theoretical approach where one does not exist.

Thus we will continue to print a range of material, from the reformist to the revolutionary. Hopefully contributions will have a *political* dimension, for we agree with Boehringer that *alternative criminology must be political criminology if it is to make a fundamental contribution to the goal of radical change in the Australian system of criminal justice and penal administration*. However it should be clearly understood that those connected with the production of this journal do not necessarily agree, in whole or in part, with all of the sentiments and arguments expressed by contributors in the pages of this journal.

For example in this issue we include the controversial address by Barry York, spokesman for the Victorian Prisoners Action Committee, delivered at the P.A.G. Alternatives to Imprisonment Conference held at the University of NSW in May of this year. Those connected with the production of this journal would disagree with Barry York over aspects of his speech, and in particular with his assessment of the long-term aims. We see the long term aim as being the abolition of prisons and a fundamental change in the whole basis of our present social order to create a society in which there is not material need to criminalize deviance, a society of socialist diversity. We do not argue, as does Barry York, merely for the *liberation* of prisons and their refilling with a different variety of class criminals, appealing as that inversion may seem. We would argue for a society that is more than a mirror image of the one we have at present. Thus we would argue for the eventual

abolition of prisons, and importantly, for a maintenance of this abolition perspective to combat future developments after the actual abolition of prisons. For as Mathiesen notes:
there is no reason to expect any terminated condition of final abolition, for example, no country can count on attaining a terminated condition of final revolution The maintenance of an abolition implies that there is constantly more to abolish, that one looks ahead towards a new and still more long-term objective of abolition, that one constantly moves in a wider circle to new fields for abolition.

Thomas Mathiesen: The Politics of Abolition pp211-212

Interestingly a motion substantially in the words of the title of Barry York's address was passed on the last day of the PAG conference, which was open to all members of the public, when attendance was down to 50 people. It is unlikely that it would have been passed on the two previous days when attendance was much higher. While perhaps predictably, the Sydney Morning Herald headlines that followed, *Uproar as Action Group votes for jail revolts* were, as the usual insignificant retraction the next day acknowledged, in error. Had Mr Waddy desired to attend with 25 friends he could have passed a motion calling for the execution of all prisoners. Would this also be portrayed as a decision by the Prisoners Action Group? Newspapers and politicians no doubt have difficulty comprehending the concept of open public forums.

It is worth nothing that this claim has been dragged out again in the controversy following the recent disturbances at Maitland and Parramatta, in the ritual witch-hunt for scapegoats to draw attention away from the real issue which is the state of the NSW prison system. Let us be very clear about this: the provocateurs in this situation are precisely those people in positions of authority who refuse to acknowledge the fundamental malaise underlying the NSW prison system, who in a hundred and one petty ways deny prisoners any effective channels for the expression of legitimate and deeply felt grievances, who make such idiotic and inflammatory statements as *NSW has one of the best prison systems in the world and there's nothing wrong with our prisons that some bricks and mortar won't cure*. As a Bathurst riot prisoner stated *It's like trying to talk to a brick wall. They just turn their back on you. Doing what they're doing (burning jails) is the only way to get you point across*. It is sheer fantasy to attribute riots to a minority group of troublemakers inside or penal reform *agitators* outside. Riots are a direct and inevitable consequence of the extremely oppressive nature of penal institutions, and of the failure of the authorities to acknowledge that fact.

This Issue

This issue is fifty per cent larger than the first and has a wider range of material. It contains poems, letters and articles by prisoners and ex-prisoners. In particular there is a report from the inside on the Maitland

strike and disturbance. It contains as well Barry York's address previously mentioned, and the second part of Jim Staples speech to the PAG conference. Readers will probably have read of Staples recent removal from the maritime jurisdiction of the Conciliation and Arbitration Court in what prima facie appears to be a disciplinary move by the Chairman, Mr Justice Moore, after Staples had made some comments critical of BHP's tactics (God forbid) in a maritime dispute over which he was presiding. In a similar vein those few lawyers who attempted to see that the Bathurst riot prisoners obtained what the authorities were concerned to deny them, namely proper legal representation, were subjected to a disgraceful attack by the NSW Commissioner for Legal Aid in a section of his Annual Report to State Parliament, which we reprint, together with the immediate response from the secretary of the NSW Council for Civil Liberties. There is also a major article by Dale Todd on Psychologists in the Criminal Justice System.

Finally we note that the level of subscriptions, while sufficient to sustain the first year's production of the journal, is not sufficient to guarantee its further existence after that time. We urge readers to persuade friends to subscribe. The journal is free to prisoners, so if you are inside and want a copy, drop us a line, or if you have used up your letter allocation for the week, pass the word.

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