Alternative Criminology & Prisoners' Movements: Partnership or Rip-off?

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Recently a number of Western Countries have witnessed the phenomenon of close co-operation between prisoners' groups and academics, particularly sociologists and criminologists, in efforts to bring changes in the penal system— or its abolition — and in developing an alternative approach to the study of crime. Indeed, to the extent that many prisoners and former prisoners have written about, or discussed in the media, their experiences, the old hawker's cry 'you can't tell the players without a score-card' is rapidly becoming fact. [2]

Australia has become a paid-up member of the club as a result of the formation of the Prisoners' Action Group, the coalescing of an alternative criminology group and the establishment of the Alternative Criminology Journal. It appears that it has been assumed by those involved that there can and ought to be a partnership between prisoners' groups[3] and concerned academics, and the latter in particular have asserted that there is value in it on both sides. That view is a reflection of the self-conscious commitment amongst academics who are not official-mainstream criminologists, rather a new style of criminologist which first surfaced in America, highlighted by the Becker-Gouldner debate. The new approach shifted to the United Kingdom and has recently appeared in Australia.[4] There can be little doubt of the need and value for academics (and members of prisoners' groups) to consider consciously their moral responsibility in pursuing their activities and to maintain a continuing monitoring relationship with those likely to be directly (and indirectly so much as is possible) affected thereby.[5] In consequence of that view, it is important at this stage to consider the implications of partnerships between academics and prisoners in order to make more obvious the problems involved and to suggest bases on which it can move ahead.

The first point, which I think is crucial, is that the prisoners' movement is and must remain a prisoners' movement. Academics are entitled, as members of Australian society, to set up their own movement, or to join other traditional penal reform movements. However, I would argue that since they have not 'paid their dues', they are not **entitled** as of right (moral) to join a prisoners' movement. The basic rationale for this is that academics have a privileged position in their university community and therefore can never have the same 'set' – physical, psychological, emotional – that prisoners have. By this, I mean several things: first, the prisoner has a gut commitment to change that the academic does not have and it would, in general, be unfair to hitch those two levels of commitment together; second, the prisoner has been labelled as an outsider and the academic has not, therefore the prisoner must – on his own be given the chance to prove something, as he determines it, to himself and the world (which is in a reflexive way part of proving himself to himself); third, the prisoner hasn't the safe refuge of an academic sinecure to fall back on if things go badly wrong, as does the academic. One could elaborate on this theme, but the issues are fairly clear, and have been discussed all over the world in other contexts: minorities struggling for social justice, or Blacks, Irish and others struggling for national liberation. The basic argument is that the non-oppressed cannot liberate the oppressed from the chains – physical, mental, political – of oppression: it can only be done by the oppressed themselves.

Some years ago in Dar es Salaam, Stokeley Carmichael told a group of whites in a black audience listening to him talk on the subject of Black liberation in general and in Africa specifically: 'The place of the White man in the liberation struggle is in his own community – that is your power base'. His point was clear and simple: Blacks can only liberate themselves, but a part of this struggle may be to change the power structure within which they operate, and that can only be done by Whites working within the heartland of White power. However, when pressed by Whites arguing the need for mutual aid, Stokeley did concede that Whites could struggle with and among Blacks for Black Liberation if they were prepared to follow and not attempt to play White-father leading his Black children to freedom. There is, I think, in Carmichael's analysis an important lesson to be learned for both academics and prisoners.

Although a prisoners' movement is for prisoners, there may be room for academics to make a significant contribution under prisoner leadership. The Australian partnership seems to be developing along lines consistent with that policy.

The potential problems of an alliance between academics and prisoners may not be so clear to some at least of those who are, or who might be consider being involved. It would seem propitious to outline some of the problems and dilemmas that are latent in any situation of this kind i.e., where there is a primary group with a need for social justice and liberation from oppression, and a secondary group with expertise and sympathy for the aspirations of the primary group, but at least one leg in the camp of the oppressing society. The first set of problems of partnership relate to the possibilities of a rip-off – the use of access to the prisoners' movement as an opportunity to enhance one's own ego, career or pocket book. In its academic variety, exploitative rip-off occurs when the academic treats prisoners as objects, to be studied in a unilateral relationship for his own purposes, often without full disclosure of those purposes, and therefore without the informed consent of his 'data'. Very often it is difficult to know what the purposes are or how they can benefit anyone except the academic; as with most penal research it is likely at the sole benefit accrues not from the substance of the results but from having done it, published and gained a reputation therefrom.[6] Indeed, it is hard to think of any penal research that has been of any real value to prisoners: most of it is rubbish, with what Cohen and Taylor call high 'WDP' (Window Dressing Potential). I In the last decade resistance to this kind of rip-off has become strong, both within the academic community and amongst the 'objects' of concern. Nevertheless, so long as academic institutions are based on present principles, the pressure towards such exploitation, because of career rewards especially, will be strong. Of course, it is not only academics who can be guilty of this kind of rip-off. In a recent paper, Matt Peacock discussed the media as penal parasites;[8] others have accused writers such as Truman (**In Cold Blood**) Capote of ripping-off prisoners.

The other side of the coin would be the manipulative rip-off, wherein unwitting outsiders – academics or others – are 'conned' by the prisoners, or some group of prisoners, into working for their benefit, again without full disclosure. I am not alleging that this has in fact happened, and certainly I can think of no specific instance where it has. Nevertheless, I believe it to be a possibility that prisoners, like others, have the potential to 'play games' with others for selfish purposes that would not be acceptable to those whom they have manipulated. Of course, this kind of rip-off is often alleged to have happened to social scientists working outside prisons. It would be surprising if it did not, because any social scientific research is an intervention in someone else's life. Intervention means some degree of change and loss of privacy, perhaps dignity or integrity are not too strong terms. There is the well known story of the American anthropologist who collected accounts of the secual behaviour (or lack thereof) amongst a community of people living on a small island off the Irish West Coast. From his distorted data, the pompous American derived some extraordinary 'insights' into rural Irish life. And why shouldn't the people have gulled him? What business was it of his how that small group of people related to each other in the privacy of their own homes? More relevant perhaps, is the allegation that the study **Prisoners' and their Families**, by Pauline Morris, was heavily biased because some of the young university girls who did most of the interviewing were led up the garden path by at least some of the interviewees. Of course, it is difficult to see how that could make any difference to the general picture of prisoners' families drawn by the author; no book could adequatley describe the appalling situation of prisoners' wives in England, or elsewhere for that matter. But whether the manipulative rip-off was justified in a specific area on the grounds that it did no harm, or it was no business of the investigator, is not a matter I wish to argue here; it is the existence of the possibility of rip-offs on both sides which should be acknowledged

Action on the part of anyone to bring about change is productive of moral dilemmas, and academic intervention, of whatever sort, in the prisoners' struggle, even in a secondary capacity is no exception. Here I am assuming there is no rip-off operating on either side, and that academics and prisoners are working together in an ongoing, co-operative enterprise based on mutual respect, support and learning. Nevertheless, a number of questions suggest themselves as potentially troublesome to the academic: how much change and at what speed is he in favour of in principle, and how does he relate this to the immediate needs and desires of prisoners inside? Once having committed himself, is the academic free to determine when, where and to what extent shall he contribute? By whom and how, should his impact be assessed? Can he remain aloof from actions which may affect him personally because of their illegality, but which may be very effective weapons in the fight to arouse the public to a more favourable response?

What is his position regarding such activities if he himself will not take part in them? These and many other questions will be familiar to persons who have been involved in activist movements outside the academic cloisters. But perhaps the most important and most specific question is Becker's, 'Whose side are we on?'. Becker was addressing himself to the issue of bias and subjectivity in social science and, admitting that he was biased and subjective, suggested he was on the side of the underdog. But if an academic is on that side, does it mean that he takes up that position without reservations, without conditions, totally without exceptions? In writing of the radical social scientists commitment to the people with whom and out of whom research is generated, Dick Atkinson has rightly argued that as an intervention affects its subject matter, there is an obligation of the social scientist to work with the people. He then continues, "He should also help them, as they helped him in his study by submitting to his presence, questions, and theories. That is, he must point out the unseen consequences of their actions, help them in their appointed task, help them to achieve their values, and so to control their own lives more fully". [9] But suppose, as is likely to be more often the case than many of us would care to admit, the prisoners' movement contains a sizeable number of self-serving, right-wing, sexist, racist elements? To the academic the question must surely arise: what is the point of helping these people? Certainly they are oppressed, and one can sympathise with them and understand how their social reality has distorted their vision of themselves and humanity. But does the fact of their being a prisoner - or ex-prisoner - make them sufficiently deserving of the kind of support that Atkinson writes of? And even more important, should the academic 'help them in their appointed task, help them to achieve their values'? There are certainly many thousands of others in Australia who have suffered equally, whose values would be more humane, and who can also use support and encouragement. Furthermore, there is little reason to believe that prisoners of the kind hypothesized (particularly perhaps the 'innovative capitalist' or 'cool hedonist' in Cohen and Taylor's usage, i.e. the organised and professional criminals) [10] would be likely to have or develop, except in unusual circumstances, the political consciousness that would bring them into a wider struggle for the more general radical changes which are needed to substantially alter the penal system. [11]

There is then for an alternative criminologist a trap of sentimentality: total acceptance of and identification with prisoners and prisoner values simply because they emanate from prison. Thus, well-intentioned academics will need to assess their own values, to measure these against those of the prisoners, and to consider the direction toward which their joint efforts point. Such an evaluation may raise very difficult problems sometimes bordering on the choice of the 'lesser -of-two-evils'. For radical political criminologist' there will likely be real conflicts : how to support and assist the general prisoners' struggle whole-heartedly yet selectively in a manner which indicates one's commitment not only to ending oppression in the penal system , but more generallythroughout society. The dilemma can arise in a number of ways, but consider the following: should brutal and corrupt policeman not be put in prison? If it were possible , should we not put ' slum lords' , or the hardened men they use for their dirty work, in prison ? Again, if it were possible, should we not imprison those who profit out of racism, or out of employees forced to work in unsafe conditions ? Does one wish to abolish all prisons when there are Fascists robbing banks and attempting to blow people up in this country ?

The prisoner also faces dilemmas, although they seem less clear, possibly because of his position of powerlessness which carries with it no luxury of clear moral choice. Yet, his dilemmas may be more fundamental than those of the academic. Clearly, the first and most fundamental is whether to get involved at all. There is much to be said for not permitting the vulnerable prisoner on the inside to put himself in a position where he will, inevitably, be made to suffer for his actions. Nevertheless, there are probably more and better arguments the other way, stemming from the need of prisoners to feel involved in asserting their own rights and integrity. For despite the dangers involved and the odds against them, prisoners throughout the world have taken the decision to fight for their rights, and that decision must be respected; After the direct physical and psychological dangers to which he is likely to be exposed if he participates in any reform movement inside a 'total institution', the prisoner's next problem is the extent to which rectification of past personal injustice must be set aside in the interest of obtaining positive future gains for the larger group. This really raises the more fundamental question about the nature of reforms demanded and worked for - should they be short-term ot long-term. If put another way, it becomes another question: should the prisoners' movement be radical-reformist or revolutionary? Of course, the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the form of organisation and tactics may be, and once an individual has been identified with one kind of struggle, it is more difficult to switch to the other because of the perseverance of the painfully constructed social reality of authorities in opposition, as well as perceptions and expectations held by colleagues. Another problem for the activist 'inside' is the variable response of prison authorities. Anyone who has been in a position to observe the methods of any organisational authorities responding to pressure for change will know that short of, or in addition to, normal physical and psychological abuse, 'cooling out' the 'militants' is a favourite technique, and a highly effective and penetrating one at that. It can include a variety of things: corruption, either financial or psychological (co-opting), or simply the erecting of various hurdles, accompanied by time-wasting, which result in loss os stamina and the emotional commitment to do battle. Again, the promise of a 'half-a-loaf', coupled with dire warnings about 'making things worse if you keep on with it', presents a serious dilemma to the prisoner - reformer with his heart on his sleeve. Perhaps a prisoners' movement, like Mr. Whitlam's Ministry, is no place for that sort of individual.

The working relationship with academic allies may also present problematic situations for the ex-prisoner. To what extent and with what knowledge can academics be trusted? To what extent will academics bear up against the inevitable pressures if they become actively and publicly involved? To what extent is it justifiable to submit them to such pressures? Or to involve them in activities which may do them harm? In another vein, to what extent should aid, even leadership be accepted, and if it is acceptable, in what kind of enterprises? Furthermore, the ambivalence of the ex-prisoner's personal situation presents problems, a fundamental one being whether to continue to accept publicly the label 'ex-prisoner'. To what extent is one's activism likely to be toned down unconsciously by a desire to remain - or become at a later time - anonymous, to forget the rotten business of the past and settle down to a new life unencumbered by the ex-prisoners' label [12] The problem of the nature of the campaign, short-term or long term, reformist, or radical, or revolutionary, alternatives or abolition, can be particularly acute especially when it appears that some degree of reform or the pretence of reform is likely to satisfy 'the audience' that something is being done.

Another potential problem is the scope of the campaign: is it to extend to attacking the conditions that result in certain people being put inside, or is it to be restricted to the penal system itself? An important problem, but one not likely to arise soon, is the question of acceptable sources of funds: does the movement have to be self-financing or can it accept funds from outside sources? If so, what are the criteria for determining whether acceptance is advisable? Are there methods of funding which are unacceptable (e.g. bank robbery). Also are there people who are not acceptable within the movement, e.g. certain categories of illegal activity which are repellent to most members of society. The last problem indicated raises a basic problem for all in the partnership: what, if any, is the fundamental theory of criminality which the movement is to adopt? Would it be liberal: 'prisoners can't help it by and large, they are the unfortunate but inevitable casualties of our political-economic system' (an appeal to what is still perhaps the basic conventional wisdom of the layman but which also denies integrity to the prisoners) ; alternate: 'prisoners are the same as the rest of us, just unlucky to be caught' (this has an intellectual appeal, but is threatening to those with a lot to lose); radical: 'prisoners are a part of the world's oppressed, help the. to liberate them and liberate yourself' (an appeal unlikely to convince those not already convinced). Probably all of these theories are optional in Australia today and there would be some, possibly minimal, response to each. But for any activist movement to grow, survive and be successful, there is a need for a unifying theory. [13]

At this point I want to discuss specifically the substance of the evolving partnership between the prisoners' movement and the movement for an alternative criminology in Australia. First, the prisoners' movement; the PAG consider the present system in need of substantial reform because they see it as as expensive, ineffective method of further oppressing the economically oppressed, and ware-housing those who have become visible social problems and whose crimes are, for the most part, victimless, e.g. vagrants, drunks and other street offenders. So far as can be determined from reading literature prepared by the Prisoners' Action Group, there are perhaps three levels of demand to which, to a greater or lesser extent, the movement is committed. First, the changes of what we might call a functional variety, most of which could be considered short-term goals, i.e. changes which relate to the manner in which prisons function, particularly regarding general living conditions, discipline and security/control. Included here would be such goals as the abandonment of solitary confinement; granting of conjugal rights; free and open access to the gaols by people - politicians, lawyers - and organisations - the media, trade union representatives, and presumably, PAG representatives and therefore the cessation of censorship; the provision of full educational, recreational and work facilities. Second, the ideological changes, which might be considered middle-term goals. These changes relate to issues related to prisoner integrity and its expression in comprehensive, formal self-determination. Such changes would include the abandonment of uniforms and numbers, (possibly an overlap with the functional aims here); the right to union membership and political activity; the right to develop an inmate system of governance. Third, the abolitionist aims which assert that no new gaols should be built, i.e. complete abolition of prisons is the ultimate goal. While this program is comprehensive and forward looking, it should be noted that it is still essentially reformist, for as the Group says itself, it was set up 'to agitate for a change in the present prison system'. [14]

The movement for an alternative criminology in Australia appears to have developed fairly recently, some time after the prisoners' movement came into being . [15] It began to coalesce as an informal network, arising out of personal contacts established at official-mainstream criminology conferences where it became clear that Australian criminology was being channeled into the Empiricist heartland of social control-Positivism. The alternative movement is then a direct academic challenge to those who operate and maintain 'the hierarchy of credibility' upon which social control rests. The first public step towards establishing a formal movement was perhaps Dale Todd's initiative in writing and circulating a formal paper inviting like-minded persons to join together. [16] As that paper indicates, there is perhaps no unifying ideology within the movement for an alternative criminology in Australia, but as common denominator there appears to be a commitment to challenging official-mainstream criminology and thereby demystifying it. Additionally, there seems to be a general commitment to partnership with the prisoners' movement, presumably for the purpose of providing general academic and other forms of support, and assisting in various ways to put pressure on the system and in society for change.

IS THIS TRIP NECESSARY?

No doubt some people will argue that a program of reform such as the prisoners have put forward - in the short-term decriminalisation, humanitarian reform inside prisons; longer term assertion of prisoners' rights, leading ultimately to abolition of prisons and reliance on alternatives - could be supported by adherents to official-mainstream criminology. And furthermore, it might be asserted, it is only if pressure is brought to bear through 'proper channels' and with official-mainstream backing, that change will result. That line of thinking, which I reject, raises two further questions: what is the difference between the subjective and objective nature of belief, and what is the nature of alternative criminology? The answer to the first I shall put briefly and by example; official mainstream criminologists who would argue that they can accept the aims of the prisoners' movement may honestly, subjectively believe that this is so. Nevertheless, looked at objectively, that is in its actual effects, the very enterprise they are engaged in prevents the realisation of those aims. For official mainstream criminology needs prisoners to study, to make their own position important and secure, to justify their own elitist and positivist image of 'the criminal', and not least important, to do their share in shoring up the status quo of society in general, an aspect of their work which has increasingly come under scrutiny in the past few years. Thus, radical reform of the present system is inimical to official-mainstream criminology and so threatening to those who control the 'proper channels', that such reform cannot be expected to result from supplication in that direction.

If the prisoners' movement is to look to an alternate criminology for intellectual support, which is perhaps the main contribution academics can make, what are they likely to find? Alternative criminology is a vague concept, and as Dale Todd has indicated in her paper, at present it means different things to different people, for there is no unifying ideology.[17] The present need is to give the concept some meaning, so it can be used to assist in contructing a sound alternative program of use to the prisoners' movement, and so criteria can be developed to operate as contraints against those persons and activities which appear to be drifting into the official-mainstream. Without some concrete understanding of alternative criminology and its fundamental purpose, which I would suggest is nothing less than social justice, then there remains ever present the danger that alternative criminology will evolve into a new conventional wisdom or, equally bad, will deteriorate into a trendy academic staircase for personal advantage, remaining peripheral to the quest for social justice.

To the extent that alternative criminology has been spawned by interactionist criminology, perhaps primarily influenced by Becker, Lemert and Matza in the United States, and Cohen, the Taylors and Young in Britain, it is important to understand the essence of interactionism to determine the extent to which there is an identity of interest between *
alternative criminologists and the prisoners' movement.[18]
Of course, it must be remembered that over time both alternative criminology and the prisoners' movement are likely to change and therefore the extent of identity of interests is unlikely to be static.

Interactionism as developed in the study of deviance, including criminality, would embrace at a minimum the following ideas which represent the main thrust of the work of Becker, Lemert and Matza: that the categories of crime are socially constructed and therefore problematic and dynamic; that a significant determinant of criminal behaviour is the societal reaction officially organised through agencies of social control; that the offender must be 'appreciated' as having a substantial degree of understanding of the situation within which he exists, and therefore we ought to impute some meaning into his behaviour. Such an approach to criminality has persuasive value in an era of ambiguous, changing values and norms, and widespread, well-publicised government, corporate and 'respectable' criminality. While interactionism has been a very effective introductory perspective for students - because of its demystifying impact and apparent pro-under-dog stance - and a short-term rallying point for academics dissatisfied with official-mainstream criminology, it has been thoroughly criticised by a number of writers,[19] including some former adherents.[20] Some of the dangers which interactionism presents as an ideological base for an alternative criminology * are implicit in that criticism,[21] the main thrust of which as seen from a radical perspective, is as follows: first, that the interactionist perspective is relativistic and suffers from tunnel vision due largely to the influence of Becker and Matza, all anti-social behaviour becomes eligible for 'understanding' and sympathy; and it lacks a base in a comprehensive social theory. This subjectivism, together with its tendency to focus on the visible, pocitive, lower and middle level 'labellers' of social control (primarily police, but also t teachers, psychiatrists and bureaucrats) prevents the interactionists from coming to grips with the political facts of life: that concentrated power, acting through the political and economic structures of society, causes more, and more heinous, anti-social behaviour than all the prisoners inside (or their 'labellers' for that matter).[22] Second, and correlative to the first, interactionism can easily accommodate itself to the social democratic welfare-reformism of the Australian Labour Government.[23] Indeed, it can prosper as the conscience of the liberal elements of society who believe the system is fine but tend to agree that the police are sometimes 'over-zealous'.[24] Thus, as 'facilitators of awareness', interactionists become enmeshed in a never-ending single-plane crusade for 'understanding' of various oppressed groups without confronting the structures of power. Thus, it becomes a dog-chasing-its-tail. Third, interactionism tends to concentrate on those areas of deviant behaviour which are most problematic and, in a sense, peripheral to the exercise of power in our society. Thus, it is concerned mainly with social phenomena such as mental and physical illness, homosexuality, prostitution, use of drugs and other issues which are not directly related to the question: how is wealth in our society created, distributed and protected?[25] It is to these issues concerning the determinants of social justice, which some of the American and British criminologists are turning. Certainly we should join them in disregarding parameters of criminological enquiry established by official-mainstream criminology. Because of these and other limitations, an alternative criminology based in interactionism,[26] while useful in raising issues and suggesting new perspectives on social control activities, does not provide the basis for a radical long-term challenge to the present system of criminal justice and penal administration.

AN APOCRYPHAL STORY

It would be presumptuous of me to suggest a program of action for a prisoners' movement, even from the perspective of an academic ally, since I am a newcomer to Australia. Indeed, Dale Todd has warned of the problems foreigners may have in relating to the Australian experience.[27] However, it may be useful to describe an experience of which I was a small part in another country. Academics like to use models for explaining things. Normally they are artificial constructs -- an ideal or extreme type against which to make comparisons. However, I shall use a real model but one that is so extreme when seen from here that it can be treated as if it were a model constructed for comparison. The model is the internment camp of Long Kesh in Northern Ireland [28] (now referred to by the British as a prison for detainees and convicted prisoners). Inside that appalling concentration camp over the last four years, thousands of self-declared political prisoners have been held, mainly without trial, for periods ranging from some weeks up to nearly four years. Some of them I have met outside, some I have met inside while teaching there. I have no doubt that the vast majority are ordinary men who in other circumstances would be considered law abiding citizens by the authorities. Some of them have become legendary in their own country and, I suspect, all of them are heroes to their family and friends. I believe they include bombers, gunmen, bank-robbers, hijackers, arsonists and perpetrators of all manner of illegal activities, many of which, but not all, would be considered criminal in other countries. It should be emphasised that the inmates also have included amongst their number many who have been detained for no reason other than their religion, associates, street address and the like.

For our purpose, the important features of the internment camp are the extent to which the prisoners have been able to seize control of their situation, the use to which that control has been put, and the manner in which outsiders were able to contribute, first, in getting educational programs established and, subseguently, in staffing them.

The inmates live in groups of approximately 120, divided amongst three or four Nissan Huts set in a compound of perhaps one-fourth of an acre. High wire mesh fences separate the compounds and access roads, and the men remain in the compounds (except for visits, serious medical treatment or other special details) where they sleep, eat and organise their recreation and other activities according to their interests. Prison warders generally remain in small huts outside the group compounds except for the occasional strolls inside, and when specific duties require them to go inside. For the most part they are simply there to lock and unlock the compound, to raise the alarm if necessary - the Army maintains general 'security' at the periphery of the camp and inside the compounds if called for - and are for the most part ignored by the prisoners. The main physical features that make the place dreadful are the weather - cold, rainy and windy (the site is an abandoned airfield) much of the time - and the huge size which means that the food provided is often cold when it arrives at the compounds. What strikes the visitor initially upon entering the camps is the oppressive and extremely tense atmosphere caused by the injustice of any system of emergency detention and the hostility between the British Army Security Forces and those detained. But what one begins to realise is that much of the feeling is one's own reaction, for the morale in the camp was, so far as one could tell, reasonably high most of the time. (It seemed to vary with political events outside as well as inside, and, of course, with such things as the weather and season of the year.)

From my own and others' observations at Long Kesh, it is clear that the prisoners have a high degree of control over their own lives, control which has been established through unity amongst factions which are at war on the outside. Through that unity and discipline, much of it self-imposed, they have wrung many concessions from the camp administration. Inside the compounds the men are organised in military fashion; they have been segregated according to their own demand, into the various groups to which they belong outside or with which they have sympathy. Thus, there are separate compounds for Provisional and Official Republicans

(each having a political wing - Sinn Fein - and a military wing, the Irish Republican Army), and for the two main Protestant para-military groups, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force. In each compound there are 'officers commanding' (chosen sometimes by vote, sometimes according to rank held outside), and a hierarchy of positions of responsibility. The prisoners determine the normal daily routine, within the constraints of meal times, and the allocation of duties, sleeping arrangements and other daily activities. They also have their own system of discipline, exercised through a system of rules and sanctioning procedures both formal and informal. There is also a joint camp council with representatives of all compounds which negotiates with the camp Commandant (officially known as the Prison Governor) in order to resolve conflicts and obtain relief from grievances.

The prisoners in Long Kesh have been able to establish their privileges through militant united action, very often involving strikes. While I was teaching at the camp they struck against the poor food - every tray was tossed on the ground; they struck against the poor laundry - all bed sheets were tied to the fences and flew in the wind; they struck against harassment of visitors - by refusing visits until guarantees were given against abusive behaviour by the Army. They were usually successful in their protests, and no little credit goes to the families, friends, clergy and organisations on the outside who also went on strikes, blocked traffic and generally 'stirred it'. The media, of course, was an extremely important factor in keeping events at 'the Kesh' in front of the public.

The riot has also been used as a potent weapon at the camp; indeed many people perhaps know of the place mainly as a result of its being burned to the ground in October 1974. Some of the riots, and that one seems to have been an example, have been in protest at the Administration's failure to take appropriate action on grievances, or to take sufficient action quickly. Other rioting has been in response to harassment and provocation by the Army. As in regular prisons, riots have occurred frequently as a result of the upsetting of the status quo. For example, when an Army unit wishes to establish its 'tough image' at the beginning of a tour of duty at the camp, or when it wishes to give the prisoners 'what for' as a going away present at the end of an onerous, boring and unpleasant stint, the prisoners may be subjected to a period of severe harassment and abuse.

The control possessed by the prisoners was not only used for internal house-keeping, self-defence and related purposes. One of the main functions the camp performed was educational.

First, there was, without any doubt, a great deal of time spent in learning tactics and techniques of guerilla warfare. This phenomena, of course, parallels the 'training in crime' or contamination effect which most commentators have suggested occurs in regular prisons. Second, political education was a 'major' subject on the syllabus. It included such matters as the strategy of national liberation, basic courses in Marxism and Irish history with particular reference to the great socialist thinker and revolutionary James Connolly, and even for the Protestants – British Imperialism. The prisoners won the right to possess literature of their choice and each compound soon had a library well stocked with subversive literature from every tendency. There were also refresher courses on 'the Organisation' (military) and 'continuing education' in the political programs of the political organisations involved in the struggle outside. Thus, there was an on-going seminar on the strategy, tactics and implications of insurgency in the struggle for national liberation. This type of education parallels that of the Muslims, Panthers and other Blacks in American prisons in the 1950's and 1960's and that of liberation movements throughout the world. [29]

A general education program was also established by the prisoners. It was mainly non-vocational rather than the normal prison fare of 'trade training' such as it is. Most of the prisoners were working class and either had a job or trade, or wouldn't expect to get either (expecially the Catholics) and therefore there was little pressure for vocational training. Perhaps even more important in that respect, many of the prisoners considered themselves still 'on duty' as the many organised escapes, attempted escapes, riots, demonstrations and a constant barrage of messages to the media have shown – again emphasising their unity, discipline and close relationship to the outside community. Thus, any time taken for individual 'vocational' purposes was used in the making of symbolic souvenirs (carved wooden harps, embroidered lace with revolutionary or other inscriptions) for sale outside. The proceeds of these sales normally went to a 'Prisoners' Dependants Fund'. Many of the souvenirs were sold through Peoples' Co-ops set up in the working class ghettos; indeed, one and possibly two co-ops were planned inside and set-up outside after some prisoners were released. The general program was essentially in three streams:

1. General primary and secondary schooling, provided by the Education Authority with full time, paid teachers;
2. University degree work, provided by the Open University with part-time paid teachers;
3. General studies, provided by a group of volunteers, mainly University lecturers, on a part-time unpaid basis.

These programs were all fought for and secured, after considerable delay and evasion, by prisoners and their supporters on the outside.

The first was a straight forward program and of little special interest, but the second and third are of considerable interest here. As most of the prisoner-students rejected what they considered (rightly) the heavily 'liberal bourgeois' bias of most of the Open University social science material, the subjects covered in the second and third educational streams tended to overlap and did so not only with each other but with the internal political education courses. Thus, the purpose and function of this part of the educational experience was to enable the prisoners to articulate their developing political consciousness and to do so in an environment conducive to learning with the guidance, support and stimulation of a group of teachers consisting mainly of academics committed to social justice, mainly through socialism. The courses run by Cohen and Taylor in Durham's maximum security wing and described in their excellent book[30] would appear to be somewhat similar in pedagogical structure although the Irish prisoners were learning about 'the system' rahter than (directly) about themselves. They were highly politicised, and in the main had moved to Marxist analysis as the only one capable of making sense out of the situation in which they had been more or less involved. Thus, unlike the prisoners at Durham, the Irish prisoners were not working towards an understanding of their specific situational predicament for they saw themselves as martyrs, prisoners of war in a sense and in no way 'outsiders' rejected by society. And one was impressed by their understanding of their 'universal predicament' (outside). Indeed, George Jackson's words might just as well have been written about 'the men behind the wire' at Long Kesh:

> Believe me, my friend, with the time these brothers have to study and think, you will find no class or category more aware, more embittered, desperate or dedicated to the ultimate remedy – revolution. [31]

The Long Kesh education programme was a mutual project from beginning to end (it was suspended after the October 1974 burning). Prisoners and academics each brought something to it; there was a sharing, an on-going dialogue in which ideas, theory, experience was exchanged, analyses developed, views modified. The prisoners experience became part of the academics' reality; academic theory and insights became then – and later – part of praxis. It was, quite simply, the best of teaching experiences. There was no rip-off on either side; most of the moral dilemmas were avoided. Discussions centred, in effect on 'what is to be done?'; unity of purpose and dedication to cause tended to make the enterprise self-regulating.

There are perhaps lessons to be drawn from the total Long Kesh experience, some obvious, other less so, and perhaps all are not relevant to a movement for penal reform and social justice within contemporary Australian Society. But the memory of a highly organised, disciplined, almost self-governing group, strongly supported on the outside, radically restructuring in their minds the very society that had oppressed them and then imprisoned them for struggling against that oppression — that is a memory. And how long would any 'normal' prison system survive such formidable resistance?

TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL CRIMINOLOGY

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. The first step toward such a goal is demystification of what Becker termed the 'hierarchy of credibility', but which could more appropriately be termed the 'hierarchy of hypocrisy'. Becker was referring to the creation of deviant images by groups who, because of their position of power at the top, are heard and believed, while others lower down are not. The former determine the way in which society generally percieves the latter; criminality is a characteristic attributed to those at the bottom by those at the top. Only if the hierarchy is challenged will the hypocrisy of the double standards operating in society concerning anti-social behaviour be exposed and subjected to analysis.

A second function of an alternative political criminology is the explication of the political nature of crime, thus revealing the myths of those in power. Crime is political nature

myths of those in power. Crime is political in its essence because the categorisation of behaviour is the result of a series of decisions and non-decisions, whereby certain values are incorporated into law. These are political decisions/non-decisions, and arise out of a structure which has as its fundamental bench-mark the ultimate value of property. Indeed most crime is directly or indirectly related to that value whether it is the unlawful taking (theft or related) the failure to possess, (vagrancy) behaviour which results from not having or rebelling against the need or pressures to have it (drug use of various kinds), behaviour which results from obsession from it (various forms of gambling and speculation), behaviour which results from an inability to separate the concept from social relationships (rape) and so on Crime is a political concept in other ways, too: (a) substantively, only some kinds of (mis) use of property are considered criminal; (b) procedurally, only some kinds of property (mis) users are considered to be criminal. The main 'screening' criteria used in the political processes which determine issues of criminalising behaviour and groups of people is the amount of power held by that group which is again determined by its relationship to the fundamental value: property.

Sutherland's work on corporate illegality, and the flood of recent British and American work on the differential use of the legal process is ample evidence that this is so.

Crime is also a political concept in that it serves political functions: first, the fact of criminal behaviour expecially towards property, is sued as evidence of man's basically selfish and acqusitive nature, and therefore, paradoxically, crime under capitalism becomes proof of the 'naturalness' of capitalism which is based on selfish and acquisitive motivation; second, the existence of crime shows the necessity for the state and for its protection; the existence of a stage army of convicts illustrates the power of the state to enforce its rules against 'trouble-makers' and thereby creates self-doubt and hopelessness amongst the population generally. In the achievement of the latter there develops, particularly amongst the working class, self-regulation based on ideas of fate and luck and look-after-number-one. Thus, are the chains forged which bind too tight for a radical challenge to the system.

CONCLUSION

An alternative criminology which is to serve the prisoners' movement, and thus society generally, must focus primarily on the political aspects of criminality, and do so in a radical way: not only by exposing the myth of non-politicality, but by emphasizing the need for and possibility of substantial change in the political structure which creates the values and norms with which we are all imprisoned.

FOOTNOTES

1. For reasons of space many of the detailed footnotes accompanying this article have been omitted -Ed.

2. I would agree completely with the following comment,

   'We probably learn more about prison, the experience of imprisonment and the place of prison in the wider society from the literary accounts of Victor Serge, Solzhenitsyn, Genet, Oscar Wilde, Dostoyevski, Brendan Behan, George Jackson, Arthur Koestler, Robert Adamson, Jim McNeill, Bobby Merrit, and many others, than from any criminological study' in David Brown 'Criminology and Prison Research : Who Benefits' (paper presented to the Prisoners' Action Group Conference, Sydney, May 1975, p7. Hereafter I shall refer to the PAG Conference).

3. By the use of the term 'prisoners' i mean to include prisoners and ex-prisoners unless otherwise indicated.

4. See e.g. Dale Todd, 'Criminology in Australia' (Typescript, circulated privately, April, 1975) 'Minority Statement at Recent Australian Institute of Criminology Workshop; The Economic and Social Consequences of Crime' (Appendix to Brown, op. Cit.).

5. See Brown, op. cit. for a general discussion of these issues. For work relating to other disciplines or 'professions', see M. Stiles, 'Architecture and Prisons' (paper presented to the PAG Conference); J. Older, 'Danger to Freedom from the Helping Professions : Psychiatry, Psychology and Social Work' 10 Aust. J. of Soc. Issues (1975) pp26-34; M.R. Haus and M. B. Sussman 'Professional Autonomy and the Revolt of the Client' 17 Social Problems (1969) 153-161

6. Consider the experiement described in S.H. Lovibond 'Is Meaningful Prison Reform Possible? (paper circulated at the PAG Conference)

7. S. Cohen and L. Taylor, Psychological Survival : The Experience of Long-Term Imprisonment (Penguin) 1972, p 205

8. 'The Media : Penal Parasites' (paper presented to the PAG Conference)

9. Orthodox Consensus and Radical Alternative (Heinemann, 1971) p277

10. See generally Ch 7, 'Identities, biographies and Ideologies' in Cohen and Taylor, op cit.

11. Numerous writers attest, however, to the general possibility of development of political consciousness amongst prisoners, especially Black Americans, e.g. see Joe Johnson, 'Behind the Prison Revolt' Int. Socialist Review (May 1972) pp8-15

12. Green comments succinctly, 'I want to sound a warning to anyone thinking of attempting to take a hand in changing the present barbaric prison system. I'm not talking to the half-hearted but to the serious ones. Be prepared to be vilified, have your character and integrity attacked, your motives questioned, your patience tested and your energy

taxed ....', A. R. Green, 'The Politics of Reform' Paper presented at the PAG Conference.

13. In the short term this is perhaps not a fundamental question but in the long term I would argue with Lenin, that for revolutionary change there is a need for theory.

14. Prisoners' Action Group Information Sheet and Membership Application (1975)

15. For the general background see Todd, op cit, and Brown, op cit,

16. Todd, op cit

17. Ideology would have referred to the combination of values, beliefs and strategy that a group develops to deal with what it conceives to be a fundamental problem. Thus, it is wider than a theory about how that problem has come to exist. As implied in the test prior to this, a unifying idealogy developed without a unifying theory would create dissonance in an activist group.

18. For a discussion of interactionism, see Edward and Wilson 'Social Deviance in Australia' Cheshire 1975 and the Critique of Interactionism by D. Altman in the same volume, pp 264-77

19. Altman, op cit

20. Compare the first volume with the second from the National Deviancy Conference, S. Cohen, Images of Deviance (Penguin, 1971), L. Taylor and I. Taylor, Politics and Deviance (Penguin, 1973); see also Taylor, Walton and Young, 'The New Criminology' Routledge, 1973

21. While I consider Altman's critique one of the best available, I have a number of reservations about it. Perhaps the most important, for purposes of this paper, relates to his tendency to sentimentalise deviants as a group with 'revolutionary potential' - a view arising perhaps from his own membership of a minority which he and others, falsely, in my view, see as a radical threat to the structure of the society, see Altman, op cit, esp. 273-274.

22. There are many ways of illustrating this point; I have discussed it in the context of the 'urban terrorism' (struggle for national liberation) in Northern Ireland. Thus, the 'industrial terror' which continues decade after decade on

the shop floor in the form of death, injury and illness is seldom even mentioned in a press at times nearly hysterical over a guerilla war whiah every year takes fewer lives than does road traffic. G.H. Boehringer, 'Sociology, Social Problems and Social Control' 3 Social Studies (Irish J. of Sociology) (1974) pp 349 - 380.

23. Labor Governments like to give the impression of reforming society and bringing about greater social justice. Whatever the case may be on the outside, there seems to have been little progress under any party inside the NSW prisons in the last 60 years, See P.A. Alliston, 'Prison Reform in NSW at the Turn of the Century - Official Attitudes' (PAG Conference)

24. Contemporary concern about State and Commonwealth Police powers and illegality should not give rise to optimism about substantial reform in policing methods. Governments of whatever party are likely to be strong supporters of the police and all reforms will invariably tend toward 'professionalisation' (including legalistic structures of control). Important issues concerning police policy and methods will remain hidden, unreviewed unreviewed and unreviewable.

25. It is here that Altman's critique falls short, op cit. While I agree that it is important to consider generally the exercise of power in determining what values are given legal status in society, I do not think such studies, particularly relating to sexual morality, are much advance on interactionism. I believe that studies of what capitalists actually do as a class are more likely to lead to a radical political criminology than studies of moral oppression, e.g. H. and J. Schwendiger, 'Defenders of order or guardians of human rights? 5 Issues in Criminology (1970) pp 123 – 157.

26. Edwards and Wilson (op cit, esp. 279 – 85) argue, in effect, that interactionism is just as politically oriented as any other approach approach to deviance because it can be. Nevertheless, they admit (p 281) there wasn't a single political study available for inclusion in their collection of interactionist papers on social deviance. Nor is there likely to be, since interactionism, as

Paul Rock has pointed out, is based on micro-sociological analysis (in Deviant Behaviour, Heinemann, 1973, pp12 –16. Furthermore, as Edwards and Wilson have shown, it is highly subjectivist, an approach which inevitably leads away from fundamental questions about political power and its use, into a frustrating relativism. Indeed, Rock's work, used in support by the authors, is a prime example of the failure of even sophisticated interactionism to deal adequately with criminality not only as a social construct but polital fact, op cit, esp. esp. Ch 3.

27. In Criminology in Australia, op cit, p 1.

28. Most of the descriptions which follow are based on my experience as a teacher in Republican compounds during the summer of 1974, but it is supplemented by discussions with teachers who visited both Republican and Loyalist compounds, and by conversations with 'the men behind the wire', past and present. I do not use the terms Catholic and Protestant here because they are to some extent factually inaccurate, but more important they are political labels which conceal the fundamental nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

29. Johnson comments 'Prison experience is an important part of the African-American experience and the lives of the oppressed minorities. It is no accident that MalcolmX gained and developed many of his ideas and received his basic education in prison. It's an aspect of the prison experience that a person has time to think, to read and to discuss... there are underground systems for...education in the prisons. This...is on a high political level and grapples with the problems of Black prisoners and the Black community in a more thorough way than the education they had access to in the school system, ' op cit, p 15.

30. Psychological Survival, op cit, Ch 1.

31. G. Jackson, Soledad Brother (Penguin, 1971) p 30. Johnson's cautious view on the effect of such radicalisation is of interest here, 'Prisoners, like students, are not in the position, unaided, to make a socialist revolution. But they are in the forefront of the fight for a just society. Their struggle to be treated as human beings is a giant step toward the time when we will all be free', op cit, p 15.