

EDITORIAL

Here we are, rather late, with an issue that marks the end of the second year of the ACJ's existence. A lot has happened since the last issue, Bob Jewson's background analysis and summary of the Royal Commission treatment of the Bathurst 1974 riot.

The over-riding structural context, the backdrop against which these events and daily struggles are played out is the contemporary 'depression', 'recession', 'crisis' in late capitalism, and the massive upheaval and 'restructuring' in economic, social, political and ideological relations currently taking place. A discussion of the position of crime and criminology in Australia, against this structural backdrop is found in Dave Brown's article in this issue.

This Issue: Women, Kids

In this issue the particular focus is on women and on kids. While there have been items in previous issues by and about women (see Sandra Wilson pamphlet Vol 2 No 1) most articles have been oriented to men, and male prisoners, in particular. While this reflects in part the overwhelming preponderance of male as against female prisoners, it also reflects the largely male composition and orientation of the Prisoners Action Group.

In this issue articles by Sandra Willson, Wendy Bacon and Denise Beal, Glenys Pernu, Margaret Wallace and Denis Reinhardt, examine a range of issues in connection with women and crime, and women prisoners.

In N.S.W. increasingly in recent years women from the anarchist-feminist oriented Women Behind Bars have been in the forefront not only of the specific women prisoners' struggle, the Sandra Wilson campaign etc., but also the Close Katingal Campaign, the Royal Commission Action Group, and the Stop Police Frameups. In addition their impetus is felt within the gay movement, and within the women's movement in general where they oppose the militant anti-male separatism of sections of the radical feminists and attempt to connect particular anti-gay actions by police and others with a wider critique of the state.

Foucault's Discipline and Punishment¹ draws attention to the historical development of a close inter-connection

between a whole network of agencies concerned with normalisation, the "multiplication of their exchanges", (p.306) allowing the 'recruitment of major 'delinquents'" and "organization of disciplinary careers" (p.300). "Thus although it is true that prison punishes delinquency, delinquency is for the most part produced in and by an incarceration which, ultimately, prison perpetuates in its turn.... the delinquent is an institutional product" (p.301).

One of the clearest examples of this is the link and interchange between prisons and so-called 'welfare homes' for children. The N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics Study One Thousand Prisoners showed that 36% of all long term prisoners in N.S.W. (i.e. serving more than 12 months) had passed through juvenile homes.² Before the Royal Commission into N.S.W. Prisons a welfare officer estimated that approximately 75% of all prisoners would have had some contact with juvenile homes:

Homes/prisons for children are major training grounds and supply centres for adult prisons. We partly remedy our neglect of this connection with two articles on kids and crime, both by activist collectives attempting to develop alternatives at a daily level to the degrading and stigmatising practices 'unwanted' 'unruly' and 'undisciplined' working class kids face from state coercive and welfare agencies.

The Royal Commission and Beyond

Since the last issue of ACJ the long awaited Nagle Royal Commission Report has been handed down (31/3/78). Hailed by some as a "great penological triumph", it has serious shortcomings. It fails to analyse critically the causes of crime and ignores totally the abolitionist position which was forcefully put by the P.A.G. in a 300 page written submission supplemented by oral argument. Further, despite the fact that the report rigorously catalogues the sustained illegal brutality at numerous institutions and the attempted condonation and cover-ups by the administration, the Royal Commission coyly refuses to make recommendations affecting the persons or institutions concerned (apart from the sacking of Commissioner McGeechan and the institution of disciplinary proceedings against a prison officer for making non-violent homosexual advances). Perhaps

the only benefit will be a relaxation of certain strictures imposed on prisoners and, even here, the impact is likely to be marginal. (see generally Zdenkowski in this issue for a discussion of some aspects of the Report).³

The Wran government's performance in implementing the recommendations has been abject. The closure of Katingal following an intense campaign is a definite victory for prisoners and the prison movement but many inmates have been transferred to the "tracs" (intractable sections) of the Parramatta, Maitland and Goulburn, and recently the Grafton "tracs", the hell-hole so devastatingly condemned by the Royal Commissioner, have been re-opened.

Further, it is proposed to build a 13 million dollar maximum security monstrosity at Parklea (Western suburbs of Sydney) despite the recommendations in the Report regarding de-escalation of building programmes.

Meanwhile the "trivial" bread and butter, cheap easy-to-implement recommendations as to bans in mail censorship, improving visiting conditions etc. are buried at the bottom of the priorities list. Small wonder then that the riot at the Central Industrial Prison (see report this issue) erupted over what Gordon Hawkins recently described as "remarkably innocuous" demands.⁴ Any student or prison revolts will see that it is not only at Attica, Bathurst or the recent C.I.P. riots that the demands are reasonable, mundane, yes, "remarkably innocuous". It is the characteristic refusal by the authorities to acknowledge those demands, to frustrate their transmission, to distort their terms to the unknowing community and finally to respond viciously behind closed walls to the protagonists of those demands (even after a Royal Commission) which require analysis and responsible comment. If the prison authorities believe that the heat is off now that the Royal Commission Report is drifting into oblivion and it's back to business as usual, they must be seen to do so knowing full well that they are igniting the next flame.

The Prisoners Action Group

The most significant development within the PAG since the last issue of the journal has been the birth of a regular two-weekly 8 page newspaper: Jail News, which has appeared regularly for 8 issues at the time of writing. This paper

was started after discussions within the PAG over the unsuitability of the rather irregular and infrequent Alternative Criminology Journal as a forum for the day to day news and political interventions carried out by the PAG. No sooner would a report or article be written for a future issue of the journal than it was out of date, superseded by new events.

Jail News has largely overcome this problem, and has been enthusiastically received by prisoners and their families. Problems of distribution persist, and anyone prepared to sell Jail News outside the jails or in work places etc., or distribute it should contact the PAG (128 Glebe Pt. Road, Sydney Ph. 660-3449). The age old problem of the prisoners' right to receive it, Royal Commission recommendations notwithstanding, persist, with screws at several jails ripping up copies in front of prisoners in recent weeks. So is the truth feared.

It is hoped that inter-state cooperation with the recently resurrected Victorian PAG (see advertisement this issue) and a newly formed Brisbane PAG will result in Victorian and Queensland news and comment and distribution: a promising development. It need hardly be said that developments within the prison system of one state have obvious ramifications and repercussions in others, as do other struggles such as those against police corruption and frame-ups, the attempt to suppress and nullify the Beach, Lucas, and Nagle reports etc.

One effect of the launching of Jail News is that the ACJ will thus tend to move towards longer, background articles to supplement the regular up-to-date news and comment contained in Jail News. People wanting to be fully informed of immediate and longer term developments should subscribe to both. This does not mean that there will be a shift in focus in the ACJ away from prisoners, indeed in this issue we reprint, without addition, alteration or comment 2 communiques posted to the editors of this journal by groups outside prison explaining direct actions they have taken in support of the prisoners struggle, as well as the enterprising leaflet, Daily Telegraph mock up, The Real Brutes, which appeared in Sydney in April. Merely that we are looking for longer, more theoretically developed articles now that Jail News is covering prison developments regularly.

David Brown
George Zdenkowski
20/9/78

1. Michel Foucault. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Pantheon 1977. Allen Lane 1977.

2. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics. One Thousand Prisoners. Report 16. p.10

3. For other comments on the Royal Commission report see Jail News Vol. 1 Nos. 1-5.

David Brown: 'Who are the Criminals' Tribune May 10th 1978 and 'Nagle's Navel' Australian Student Unity No. 2. May 1978.

Tony Green: Nagle Report lets off Bashers Tribune, April 12, 1978.

Zdenkowski: 'The NSW Royal Commission into Prisons Report'. Legal Service Bulletin Vol. 3 No. 3, June 1978. Sydney Morning Herald Editorial. April 13, 1978.

4. Gordon Hawkins: The New Penology in Kamenka and Tay (eds) Law and Society: The Crisis in Legal Ideals. Arnold. (Aust) 1978 p.125. For a useful review of this book see S. Ross Australian Book Review (forthcoming) Some brief and critical comments see Brown: Some Notes, in this issue.

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