

EX-PRISONERS' HALF-WAY HOUSE UNDER ATTACK

In 1975 the New South Wales Prisoners' Action Group set up a half-way house for ex-prisoners in Glebe in the inner city area of Sydney. It was by no means the first attempt to provide accommodation for recently released persons. What was unique about Glebe House was that it was firmly grounded in a philosophy committed to decarceration. Autonomy, self-management were key features. It was avowedly not an extension of the social control network beyond the prison walls. This is not to say that there were not probation/parole officers to whom residents had to report, internal hassles about day to day survival and management. Until 1979 the House was substantially funded by donations of money and volunteer labour. More recently grants have been received from both the Department of Corrective Services and of Youth and Community Services with an inevitable encroachment on policy initiatives. However, the principle of ex-prisoner management has been retained.

In late 1980 a series of attacks upon Glebe House have been made by police, adopted by certain members of the judiciary and widely reported in the media. Significantly, there were in fact only two incidents before the courts involving former Glebe House residents which resulted in multiple press reports as a result of a series of adjournments. Judge Hicks of the District Criminal Court is reported as having said that the half-way house "would seem to provide criminals with a base for their criminal activities" and hoped that someone would look into Glebe House¹. Earlier, in the other incident, Judge Goran had apparently described Glebe House as a "chieves' kitchen".

Interestingly, two years earlier, Justice Nagle in his Royal Commission report², discussing the importance of after-care facilities, makes these remarks:

"Too often, promising projects such as half-way houses have failed simply because the community was not prepared even to tolerate them. They have been described as 'chieves' kitchens under official auspices. The Department should make greater efforts to win public support and understanding."³

The difficulties generated by the community intolerance referred to are only exacerbated by ill-considered statements such as Judge Hicks and Judge

Goran reportedly made.

The Nagle Report endorses the value of half-way houses and laments the lack of financial support given to date:

"On the material before the Commission, it is apparent that a lot of half-way houses could be improved by Government policy and support, mainly financial, and that these half-way houses should be placed in a position to make a significant attempt to provide financial and material support for newly-released prisoners. The evidence, however, suggested that adequate Government funding has not been forthcoming and the schemes are stifled through lack of money."⁴

The earlier criticism by Judge Goran appears to have been based on certain allegations by a detective in the Armed Hold-Up Squad. The gratuitous remark that Glebe House was a "chieves' kitchen", attributed to Judge Goran, could do ~~no harm~~ because of the enhanced credibility traditionally given to judicial statements. It is a lurid emotive phrase. A matter which has not received any publicity is that the detective was allegedly involved in a raid on Glebe House in late December, 1979 with a large number of detectives from the Armed Hold-Up Squad. It is alleged by residents of Glebe House who are not the subject of any charge arising out of the raid that they were subjected to abuse, assault and were terrorised at gun-point; that a considerable amount of property was unnecessarily destroyed; that issues of Jail News (a prisoners' newspaper) and other printed matter were seized and confiscated without cause. Complaints about these matters were made to the N.S.W. Ombudsman and are still being investigated.

Why has Glebe House been singled out for attack from the various half-way houses? Is it because it has a bad track record as far as recidivism is concerned?

Garth Symonds, barrister and Secretary of Glebe House Limited, wrote to the Sydney Morning Herald in these terms:

"If your report of criticism levelled by Judge Hicks at Glebe House (Herald, December 6) is an accurate reflection of His Honour's remarks, then that criticism reveals a lack of awareness of the role of Glebe House and other half-way houses for ex-prisoners in the prevention of crime and rehabilitation of ex-offenders. While some of the Judge's remarks were challenged by employees of Glebe House in your report, there are other issues raised by the report I wish to comment on.

Given the extraordinarily high rate of re-offending in general (of prisoners now serving six months or more in N.S.W. Prisons about 80 per cent are re-offenders), some ex-prisoners who are staying at Glebe House or who have stayed there will undoubtedly re-offend. Since August, 1975, up to September, 1980, however, of some 563 ex-offenders who have been helped by Glebe House, 160 or some 28 per cent have re-offended. Thus the record of Glebe House in comparison with the general recidivism rate is excellent.

Detective Tees is reported to have said in referring to Glebe House: 'I can't say a good word about it.' Lest it be thought that such a view is representative of the police, a class of about 30 police officers I teach, almost without exception, consider half-way houses for ex-prisoners to be of great value.

I conclude by quoting from a letter of September 2 to the Minister for Corrective Services from Messrs. Briese and Anderson, chairman and deputy chairman of Stipendiary Magistrates respectively: 'That project [Glebe House] affords great benefits to society in the aftercare of prisoners and detainees. It is a facility highly valued by magistrates endeavouring to administer the criminal justice system with compassion.' "5

Why then did Glebe House, with a significant success rate in prisoner after-care, attract such vilification? The answer, it is suggested, is straightforward. Ex-prisoners at Glebe House are attempting to take control of their own destiny. Employees of the House have frequently articulated criticisms of prisons, police, the judiciary and the Department of Corrective Services. By adopting such an approach they continue to court threatened withdrawal of funds and further police/media harassment. It is not the first time that Judge Goran has attacked prison activists.

In April, 1975 he was the trial judge in a case involving several prisoners allegedly involved in the Bathurst Gaol riot of February, 1974. While the trial was part-heard the judge attended a Conference at the University of New South Wales attended by the press organised by the Academy of Forensic Sciences. During this conference he is reported to have stated "I would call the action of some 200 men within the confines of a prison wall to burn down the prison and perhaps break out - I would call that terrorism to achieve a cause". Given that the population of Bathurst Gaol at the time of the riot was some 200 men it was fair comment that the judge appeared to have prejudged the central issue of the trial over which he was currently presiding. This was improper despite the contention that he was not the final arbiter as far as the facts were concerned. For present purposes other remarks reportedly made at the same time are of greater significance. After referring to the Council for Civil Liberties and identifying its then President, Ken Buckley, Judge Goran indicated that C.C.L. members were the dupes of persons who

espoused the terrorist cause. The innuendo was taken to refer to Tony Green at that time President of the Prisoners' Action Group and a C.C.L. committee member. Both the P.A.G. and C.C.L. had been active in calling for a Royal Commission into prisons in N.S.W. The judge's unsubstantiated remarks were vigorously rebutted⁶. However, considerable damage had been done.

The current attack on Glebe House has remarkable similarities. It is crude, unsubstantiated and yet bears the imprimatur of high judicial office. The vigour of the attack and its newsworthiness appears to be in direct proportion to the political activity of ex-prisoners at Glebe House.

While the judges who do not bother to visit Glebe House to see for themselves vilify it as a "thieves' kitchen", its occupants and employees will continue to seek employment and shelter for ex-prisoners, to ease the passage into a hostile community for persons often brutalised by long-term institutionalisation and to campaign for a public enquiry into the most recent injustice perpetrated upon prisoners in N.S.W., the Parramatta Attack of October, 1980.

Notes

1. Sydney Morning Herald 6.12.1980.
2. Report of the Royal Commission into New South Wales Prisons, N.S.W. Government Printer, 1978 (The Nagle Report).
3. Neagle Report, p. 337. Note that the footnote references relied on by Nagle J - namely Tom Clayton, *Men in Prison*, 1970, p. 27 and Report on Corrections by the U.S. National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, 1973, Washington, D.C. - have been omitted from the quoted remarks.
4. Nagle Report, p. 340.
5. Sydney Morning Herald 10.12.1980.
6. See letter to the editor, Sydney Morning Herald 21.5.1975.

GLEBE HOUSE A REFUGE FOR EX-PRISONERS



Glebe House before it was restored

128 GLEBE PT RD GLEBE NSW

SOMETHING ABOUT GLEBE HOUSE

Glebe House was established as a welfare function of the Prisoners action Group who recognised the need to assist ex-offenders in a practical way to re-establish themselves in society by providing short and medium term accommodation and board at minimum or NO cost....during the first critical month of freedom..

Situated in an old house, owned and renovated by the Federal Government in Glebe... our 'Halfway House' has been in existence for a little over five years, firstly at 28 Derwent St, GLEBE and now from our present premises since December 1977.

The house built and designed by Edmund Blacket Snr. in 1863 has been restored to original condition by the Federal Government.

Glebe House is a large, ten room house situated at 128 GLEBE POINT ROAD, GLEBE. There is accommodation available for up to sixteen people. Apart from kitchen and dining facilities, there is a lounge with colour TV, pool table and facilities for outside relaxation...BBQ and garden furniture. It is expected of ALL residents coming here that they keep their own quarters clean and to help in keeping the 'common' areas clean and tidy. There is also a modern laundry with automatic washer and dryer.

HOW IT'S FINANCED

GLEBE HOUSE receives some funding from the Department of Social Security as it is classified as a "Homeless Persons Assistance Centre"... the bulk of the House funding now comes from several NSW Government departments although for several years most funding came from donations made by both companies and individuals interested in assisting a worthwhile charity. There still exists a need for donations from this source to provide many of the extras to make this house a family type home and to provide replacement furniture and fittings, bedding etc.

Glebe House is a registered charity and as such all donations are tax deductible.

Additionally (and to cope with usual shortfalls of funding) because of strained finances a scale of resident's contributions was introduced.

UNTIL RECEIPT OF FIRST REGULAR	ALL MEALS PROVIDED
SOCIAL SECURITY CHEQUE FREE

WHILST ON SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS \$10 p.w.

WHILST IN EMPLOYMENT \$20 p.w.

WHO'S ELIGIBLE

All ex-prisoners, young offenders, convicted people or those charged with a criminal offense...or in any danger of above without any age limits are welcome. Although we are limited in terms of assisting persons with chronic drug problems we will accept them under special circumstances. Glebe House exercises no form of discrimination as to who it accepts and the only criteria is based solely on need.

LENGTH OF STAY

Based on the experience gained over five years Glebe House does not find it necessary to impose an arbitrary LENGTH OF STAY. Experience has it that most stay only six to eight weeks at Glebe House before moving back to the community and thus all cases beyond that are judged on their merits. If it is necessary for one person to need Glebe House for six or more months then that need is recognised.

HOW IS IT RUN ????

The house is intended to be run on a share-house principle much the same as many in our locality where people can live together in a caring and relaxed environment. Residents assist in the shopping and share in the running of the house. It is meant to be as close to the family home environment as possible.

The House can also offer back up facilities in helping to find employment, legal advice, medical advice, help with Social Security and CES via special contacts. It is also hoped that where possible residents help each other at all times.

WHO RUNS GLEBE HOUSE 7777

Glebe House is staffed by 'EX PRISONERS' who are both qualified and motivated to help in realistic ways the problems of persons coming here, and who are supported by a wide range of qualified persons who assist the House in a voluntary capacity.

The administration of Glebe House is supervised by a committee of management which includes two ex-prisoners, a ~~REPTEN~~ ^{SOLICITOR} ~~LEGAL SERVICE~~ solicitor, a barrister, two law lecturers, an accountant; who are all actively involved in prison reform and visit the house regularly.

HOW TO GET THERE

If arriving by train from country jails leave the main entrance and walk down to Broadway bus terminal opposite Sydney Tech.. Use any of the following services 431 (GLEBE POINT ROAD), 433 (BALMAIN) or 432 (ROZELLE via Glebe Pt). Ask for the Glebe Post Office (cnr Glebe Pt Rd and St John's Road). If in any doubt ask a local or ring the House.

CONTACTS

Because of the pressure of numbers in need of accommodation it is advisable to let us know well in advance, if possible as to when you might need to stay here. Ask a Parole officer or welfare officer to ring here for you.

No social history or any other detailed background information of potential residents is required. This is not an institution and as such people are accepted on the basis of their behaviour only after arriving at Glebe House.

For further information....or to reserve your accommodation contact: **PIP BROWN or BRETT COLLINS**

GLEBE HOUSE

Telephone: 660-3449

Box 215

GLEBE N.S.W. 2037