

THE TARTAN CON

The Rants of an Ex-Prisoner

Where I realise that I don't think the MOJ will be offering me a position anytime soon.

Welcome to my new monthly column in JailMail. This is my second rant in Jail Mail, the first can be read in November's issue.

Over the coming months I will be writing (more like ranting!) on the issues surrounding our prisons today.

If however, there is any issue that you think maybe of interest to other readers, please do contact JailMail and I will endeavour to write a piece on your subject.

I am an ex-prisoner, recently released. I choose to write under a pseudonym as I want the subject of my writings to be the topic of conversation not my identity. What I write, is a personal opinion and if I offend then I apologise, but everyone is entitled to their opinion, are they not?

So with that in mind here's this month's offering!

There has been much in the media recently about the state of our Justice System and in particular to the state of our prisons.

The Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt. Hon Elizabeth Truss MP issued her tome on Prison Reform and Safety this month, just days after a full scale riot at HMP Lewes and the killing of a man in Pentonville Prison.

This was also a week after the worst figures on record for prison safety were issued.

At the time of writing, HMP Bedford has had a full scale riot involving over 200 prisoners and HMP Pentonville seems to have confused two mannequin dolls as two prisoners and those two chaps have gone on the hoof, one to be later found hiding under his sister's bed.

Now I don't want to go off on a rant here but;

I was recently asked by a Prison Governor if I felt that it was her doing of something she inherited (after all she has only been in the post 4 months, succeeding Michael Gove).

My answer was rather lily-livered I am ashamed to report and I conceded that it was that she inherited the problem. I retract that here and now.

This is her doing. Her predecessor was unceremoniously removed from his position when Theresa May became Prime Leader. In saying that, I was no stalwart supporter of Mr Gove and certainly not a fan of his predecessor Chris Grayling.

I was a serving prisoner under both of them and felt the impact of some of their draconian measures (banning of books, removal of own clothing to name but two). The problem is that Ms. Truss has simply done nothing to stem the disparity, violence and drug taking that is rampant in our prisons today.

I have written often and much about the issue of under-staffing and the results waiting in the wings due to this. I have written about the effects upon the prisoners themselves when a prison is understaffed.

I have written about the assaults on staff and on inmates that occur during these periods (over 35,000 this year alone). I am not unique in bringing this to the public's attention. There are other people out there far more qualified than I to write upon the cause and effect.

However what I can write about is the devastating statistics that I wrote about above.

I can quote from the governments own

figures and ask you to gasp in horror and despair when you read that since 2007 over 750 people in prison have taken their own lives and that in the same time period over 36,400 people have self harmed in Her Majesty's prisons.

Not all the current Secretary of State's problem you may say and you may have a point. However, she said something twice on Thursday when she presented her White Paper "The Secretary of State's job is to ensure that there are sufficient places to house our criminals" I am not an angry man, but I have never felt such contempt for any such individual as I did at that point. The Secretary of State is an elected Member of Parliament.

Elected by society but appointed by her leader into the role. She therefore represents society, does she not?

The society that sent the offender to prison and to punish him by depriving him of his liberty promises him that it will aid him in his rehabilitation. It does not condemn him for life (unless his crime demands it) to live in a dangerous, volatile, drug ridden den of inequity.

It promises him that it will give him the tools to become a better person and see the error of his ways. I am no psychologist, probation worker or expert on what each individual needs in order to rehabilitate but I am fairly sure that locking them up for 23 hours per day is not widely recognised as addressing offender behaviour.

The Secretary of State says she will increase the staff levels by a further 2,500 to help eradicate the violence and make the prisons safe.

These new prison officers may well be joining the service in order to help those less fortunate than they and I hope that they are; I really do. I worry that their training course will last only 9 weeks and

they will be taught only how to resolve conflict, not how to manage a prisoner's expectations.

No two prisoners are alike and they all have their own issues to deal with. I do not for one minute think that the officers should be trained psychologists but I do believe that the role plays they undergo during their training should have a realistic tinge to it.

I was shocked to learn recently after giving a presentation to some new prison officers that I was the first ex-prisoner they had met. S

urely they should interact with prisoners/ex-prisoners prior to being let loose on the wings in order to better understand a prisoner's point of view?

However, upon reading the White Paper we discover that level will not be achieved until 2018. So what happens until then?

Ms Truss talks about more sniffer dogs, drug testing and perhaps eagles! But at which point in the paper is she specific about what will be done to address offending behaviour?

I can't find it, can you? Where is the extra money for rehabilitation courses? Where is the money to train prisoners in a vocation that could help them gain employment when they leave?

Regrettably her white paper does not affect any reform whatsoever; it purely tries to stem the flow of the repercussions her government has imposed on the prison estate.

I lay the blame solely at the feet of those in charge of prisons and by default that must be the holder of the highest office that regulates them. I lay the blame at our feet for not doing something about it.

Who am I?

I was sentenced to 7yrs and 6 Months imprisonment and was released at the half way period.

I was resident in 3 prisons during my time in Custody and tried to be of some use.

I witnessed not only shocking events but saw first hand the sheer bureaucracy that the prison service faces at the hands of those so very ill-equipped to handle the prison estate.

I was a high profile individual, though not that I wished to be! It is for that reason

that I opt to remain in the background for as long as possible.

I wish for my blogs and points raised therein to be the focus of attention not my profile. I hope that you, dear reader(s), understand and respect that.

I plan to write a monthly blog on what I, as an ex-prisoner, see both wrong and right about prison life.

You see I am not a prison hater nor am I anti-establishment.

I just hate to see good people being railroaded into oblivion (both staff and inmates alike).

My thoughts and ramblings are just mine and any fault with them should be laid at my feet and no one else's.

So if I offend with any of my writings then the blame is upon me and for that I apologise.

The Blogs are just the ramblings of an old fool and are my opinions.

But hey, everyone is entitled to their opinion are they not?

You can read more of the Tartan Con's blogs at:

<http://thetartancon.blogspot.co.uk>

If there are any issues which you would like the Tartan Con to rant about, please write to us at:

Tartan Con - Jail Mail
PO Box 10419
NOTTINGHAM NG2 9QF