

## Campaign In Support Of Kevan Thakrar – by John Bowden

John Bowden 2015-01-19 23:48

**The abuse of psychiatry in pathologizing and punishing “difficult” prisoners has a long and disturbing history in the British prison system and is probably the worst example of human rights abuse suffered by some prisoners labelled “challenging” and “unmanageable”.**

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, especially, the role of prison system-hired psychiatrists in assisting in the suppression of rebellious prisoners became an established one and often an unlawful one too such as when administering tranquillizing drugs by force purely to assist guards in subduing “troublemakers”. The practice became known as the “liquid cosh”. For particularly determined prisoner “troublemakers” the spectre of maximum-security psychiatric hospitals such as Broadmoor and Rampton could quite easily become a reality and often did when psychiatrists were recruited to apply the necessary pathological labels and facilitate the “nutting-off”, or sectioning under the mental health act, of sane but “difficult” prisoners, Rampton, especially, acquired a notorious reputation for its brutal and inhuman treatment of prisoners, administered by prison officer “nurses” and punitive-minded psychiatrists, and was considered amongst long-term prisoners as the worst and most deadly weapon of all in the prison system's armourer of control and punishment.

An entry point for rebellious prisoners into the special hospital system (Broadmoor, Rampton and Ashworth) was an infamous psychiatric unit at Parkhurst maximum-security prison called “F.2”. “F.2” was managed and run by a prison psychiatrist called Dr David Cooper. Cooper's role was to “manage” and “treat” prisoners considered too disruptive and unmanageable for ordinary prison segregation/punishment units, and he did so with a regime that blended the forced drugging of prisoners with straight-forward physical brutality administered by a gang of prison officer “nurses”. Prisoners sent to “F.2” would in most cases be transferred eventually to Broadmoor or Rampton and most would suffer serious and irreparable psychological damage as a result of the experience.

Following an inquest into the death of prisoner George Wilkinson in 1989 who starved himself to death following a mental breakdown whilst being held in “F.2”, Cooper was discovered wandering naked one night in some woods close to Parkhurst prison. He would subsequently resign on health grounds. The Home Office would later succeed in preventing the publication of a book that claimed Cooper had received payment from a large pharmaceutical company for testing new powerful tranquillizer drugs on “F.2” prisoners.

During the 1990s the overt abuse of psychiatry in controlling and suppressing dissent in prison was apparently replaced by the introduction of the “Close Supervision Units”, brutal control-units with regimes of clinical isolation, solitary confinement and physical violence. However, prison-hired psychologists and psychiatrists continued to provide in put into the “behaviour modification” of “unmanageable” prisoners within the Close supervision Centres and their influence found expression in regimes based on a crude concept of “reward and pavlovian punishment”; “good behaviour” would earn a prisoner a graduated progression back to mainstream prison life, whilst “negative behaviour” would insure even worst treatment. So cruel and brutalising is the treatment of prisoners in the Close Supervision Centres that mental breakdown is commonplace and in fact psychologists and psychiatrists overseeing the regimes in the Close Supervision Centres are deliberately and actively complicit in the psychological torture and destruction of prisoners.

In 2010 Kevan Thakrar, a life sentence prisoner who is particularly hated by those enforcing his imprisonment because of his propensity to complain and confront abuses of power by prison staff, was placed into the Close Supervision Centre at Woodhill prison following allegations that he had seriously assaulted three prison guards at Frankland prison. In fact, Kevan had been acquitted at Newcastle Crown Court of assaulting the guards following a trial that heard that it was Kevan himself that had suffered physical brutality at the hands of guards and so severe was that brutalization that he now suffers with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Following the trial and his acquittal, the Prison Officers Association (POA) swore that Kevan would be held accountable for what they continued to insist was a completely unprovoked attack on three of their members. In fact, for some time there was evidence that prison staff at Frankland prison had targeted ethnic minority prisoners for abuse, victimization and violence, and there clearly was a culture of overt racism amongst guards at the jail.

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Kevan is of mixed race heritage.

Kevan's allocation to the Close Supervision Centre at Woodhill jail was motivated purely by revenge and it was intended that he would remain there forever on "level 1", the most de-humanising and psychologically damaging form of treatment inflicted on prisoners for the initial period of their stay in the Close Supervision Centre; most prisoners are expected to eventually "progress" to less punishing levels of treatment before their release back into the mainstream prison population. For Kevan however, there was not the slightest intention to ever "progress" him beyond a regime based on clinical isolation and psychological torture, and clearly the real purpose was to destroy him, or at least his propensity to ever question or challenge his treatment again.

If that was indeed the intention then it failed completely and Kevan's response to the inhuman treatment inflicted on himself and other prisoners in the Close Supervision Centre has been consistently determined and well-focused. Legally and politically confronting and challenging the treatment of prisoners in the Close Supervision Centre has been the focus of Kevan's struggle in the CSC, and he more than anyone else has shone a direct light on a place where serious and routine abuses of basic human rights have been carried-out for two decades by the prison system. He more than anyone else has forced the prison authorities to try and justify their abuse of human rights in the CSC system, and both by legal actions and by high-lighting through radical groups on the outside the inhuman treatment inflicted on "difficult" prisoners in the CSC system, Kevan has confronted the prison authorities with their crime and obviously made them rue their decision to have originally placed him in a CSC that had now become the focus of his extremely well articulated struggle.

Following a persistent litigation battle and the publication of a pamphlet exposing the treatment of prisoners held in the CSCs, Kevan was transferred to a "Specialist Intervention Unit" at the notorious Strangeways prison in Manchester. The purpose of the transfer was two-fold: to take the heat and focus off the CSC at Woodhill, and subject Kevan to a regime at Strangeways even more brutal and inhuman than the one he had experienced at Woodhill. The so called "Specialist Intervention Unit" at Strangeways was located in the prison's segregation unit/punishment unit and for the guards staffing it prisoners like Kevan were sent there for one purpose – to be completely subdued and broken psychologically. Both the physical conditions of the "Specialist Intervention Unit" (a decrepit and primitive part of the old punishment unit, which the treatment of prisoners in had provoked the 1990 Strangeways uprising) and the treatment inflicted on it's prisoners at the hands of guards steeped in a culture of brutality and violence, was intended to crush any resistance and generate only fear. Whilst there Kevan was denied even basic hygiene facilities and his food and that of the other prisoners in the unit was frequently adulterated with excrement. He estimated that whilst at Strangeways he lost something like three stone in body weight.

Kevan's response to his treatment at Strangeways was to organise a demonstration outside the prison attended by family and supporters. The response of the management at Strangeways was to transfer Kevan back to the Woodhill CSC.

For those supervising and enforcing the CSC system Kevan now represented a problem that was proving unmanageable within the parameters of the CSC system – expediency dictated his removal to somewhere where his destruction was not so closely associated with the system.

Kevan meanwhile continued to pursue his litigation war with the prison authorities, and his solicitor had commissioned an independent psychology report that stated Kevan's PTSD was being made significantly worse by the CSC regime. The recommendation of the report was that Kevan should be returned to a mainstream prison environment.

Never before having shown any duty of care for Kevan and shown nothing but contempt for his psychological condition, the management of the Woodhill CSC now decided that Kevan should be transferred to the notorious Rampton special hospital. This is now considered the finale remedy to the problem he represents, and once sectioned under the mental health act he will be at the total mercy of psychiatrists who perceive prisoners like him as suffering with a "dangerous personality disorder" that must be subdued in the interest of "public protection". The intention of the prison authorities is to consign Kevan to a place where under the guise of "treatment" and largely by the use of mind destroying drugs he will be silenced and effectively destroyed.

Yet again corrupt psychiatrists will assist in the destruction of a "difficult" prisoner. Kevan Thakrar has been an extremely brave voice in speaking out against the abuse of prisoner's rights and he has suffered terribly as a consequence. More than

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ever now he desperately needs the support of all those who truly believe in solidarity with the most oppressed, especially those of the oppressed who have the courage to confront state violence in its most undisguised and vicious form.

John Bowden, 6729 HMP Shotts

For more information about Kevan's case: [www.justiceforkevan.com](http://www.justiceforkevan.com) [www.facebook.com/JusticeForKev](http://www.facebook.com/JusticeForKev)

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Join the protest:

Monday 16th February, 12pm HM Prison Service Clive House, 70 Petty France, London, SW1H 9EX

If you can't make it to London for the protest please try to find the time to phone/fax the following places on that day (or another day if that one is not convenient).

Please write letters of complaint to:

Rob Davis, Governor HMP Woodhill, Tattenhoe Street, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK4 4DA Tel: 01908 722 000  
Fax: 01908 722 320

Alan Parkins (This is the main person recommending Kevan's move to Rampton) Head of Special Unit/CSC HMP Woodhill, Tattenhoe Street, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK4 4DA

Claire Hodgson, CSC Operational Manager HMP Woodhill, HMP Woodhill, Tattenhoe Street, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK4 4DA

Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Victory House, 6th floor, 30-34 Kingsway, London WC2B 6EX Tel: 020 3681 2770

Independent Monitoring Board Secretariat 9th floor, post point 9.52, The Tower, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ Tel: 0203 334 3265 Fax: 0203 334 3024

Your own MP or Kevan's (Ian Stewart MP). When writing to any MP the address to use is: House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA, or you can contact them on-line [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com)

Please write letters of support to:

Kevan Thakrar, A4907AE

Kevan was moved to HMP Full Sutton today (19/1/2015), we do not yet know if this is a temporary move or he is on his way somewhere else. Please check the links to his website and Facebook page above for his correct address.

**<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2015/01/519245.shtml>**