

The Writings Of John Bowden



"If the prison authorities are determined to detain me, even unlawfully, unless I compromise my basic human integrity by never questioning or challenging their abuses of power, then I am prepared to die in here." – John Bowden

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Histories of resistance

John Bowden was imprisoned for murder in 1980 with a life sentence. He has now served 34 years, in prisons across England and Scotland. In that time he escaped for 18 months in 1992 and again in 2008 for a few months before recapture; he has held an assistant governor hostage for two days; and received countless beatings, solitary confinements and many other tactics of HMPs to quell dissent and resistance. Throughout, he has maintained fierce resistance, never backing down and for this - despite the parole boards admission that he should now be in open jail, if not released - the Prison Service still keep him inside.

In recent months it has now become fully that he is being held due to his opposition to the prison system. They admit that he poses no threat to the public, yet his continuing work highlighting the denial of prisoners' rights and the inability of the prison system to live up to even its own rules, means they will not release him. Still he does not back down and capitulate to their wishes.

'I remain imprisoned long beyond the length of time stipulated by the judiciary and twenty years after the release of the two men imprisoned with me, not because I continue to represent a risk to society but because the prison system or some of those enforcing it believe I should be detained indefinitely because of my activities during the 1980s and 1990s in organising prisoner resistance and creating struggle in prisons.'

His prolific work from inside the prison system in terms of organisation, solidarity, support and writing, details the course of his own time inside. Through his news, updates and analysis of other cases and events, he provides a rare history of the UK prison system, tracking changes, responses to uprisings and threats of privatisation, to name a few. He predicted in 1997 the rise of the secret

control units used against troublesome and non-compliant prisoners (FRFI - 'New control unit opens at Woodhill'), which today we see in the Close Supervision Centres at HMPs Woodhill, Wakefield and Whitemoor and Specialist Intervention Unit at HMP Manchester and other temporary units at HMPs Frankland, Full Sutton and Belmarsh. He has done much to expose the abuses meted out in these shadowy institutions where bullying, racism and mental health abuse are the order of the day. This is just one example of the ways that John has monitored the continued and ever increasing brutalities of the UK prison system and is part of his fervent work to maintain a network inside and outside of the prison walls of resistance, that unfortunately since the 80s, and the policies of Thatcher, Howard, Straw and now with Chris Grayling - especially with the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme - is more and more difficult to keep alive.

This publication is thus a collection of some of his writings over the years, from articles published in *FRFI (Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!)*, *Inside Time* (a national monthly newspaper for prisoners), online, from letters and other means of getting out information such as an interview with the publication *From Here On In*. It is intended to bring together key articles from his large volume of work introducing/reminding the reader of what has been going on inside and to highlight again John's situation - reiterating the call to get him out - asking people to write letters, sign petitions and contact him.

Starting with an introduction from Mark Barnsley his comrade and one time cell-mate, then with an earlier article from Nicki Jameson, what follows are all John's writings, ending with a petition he has asked people to sign, and information about addresses to write to and links for further information.

Free John Bowden

Extract from *Tear down the walls*, 2007:

Initially my fight against the prison system was extreme and direct. It reflected a personal belief that I would probably die in prison anyway, so had absolutely nothing to lose by creating situations that would provoke the system into a murderous response. As I saw, witnessed, and experienced

it, the prison system was terrorizing prisoners and imposing regimes designed to destroy us. I decided to terrorise it back and engage in actions that would unnerve and demoralise those employed to administer prison repression. In January 1983 at Parkhurst maximum-security prison I took an assistant governor hostage and held him captive in his office for almost two days. Armed police laid siege to the prison and my access to a phone resulted in the close interest and involvement of the media in what was going on. Eventually my demand that my legal representatives and a journalist of my choice be allowed access to the prison to hear and record my complaints against the prison system was conceded and I released the governor unharmed.

I was charged with hostage taking and given an additional ten years, and then buried in solitary confinement for four consecutive years. During those four years the prison system made a serious and determined attempt to physically and psychologically destroy me and pushed me to the very edge of human endurance. Apart from being held in almost clinical isolation in brutal and austere punishment/segregation units, I was also moved around every 28 days or so between jails in an attempt to keep me constantly disorientated and unable to settle. This was intended to keep me in a permanent state of stress and grind me down mentally. I was also subjected to frequent physical assaults and beatings, and made to feel at the complete mercy of my guards. Far from destroying me, however, I was made immeasurably stronger and more resilient by what was being inflicted on me and I came to feel like a soldier in battle, capable of enormous endurance and psychological resourcefulness. The harder they tried to demoralise and dispirit me the greater became my will to survive and somehow fight back.

From FRFI, 1991:

"There's brutality; they transfer you from one prison to another one and you get it there. If you stand up for yourself you get a bad name and no matter where you go after that they make sure you pay. If you fight them once, you fight them all through your sentence."

John Walker (Falsely imprisoned for 16 years) interviewed by John Bowden April 1991, asked about the British prison system.

We must fight to free John Bowden.

June 2014

Twenty years ago this month, while out with my youngest daughter, who was then just a six-week old baby, I was set upon by a large gang of drunken, middle-class thugs, and very badly beaten up. I was then arrested and charged with attacking my attackers! The evidence in the case meant nothing; the statements of numerous witnesses, the forensic evidence, the proven perjury of the complainants, or the sheer absurdity of the prosecution case. My prosecution was politically motivated, and pursued without any moral scruple. I was sent to prison for 12 years.

In the years I spent in jail, in 20 prisons and the same number of segregation (punishment) units, of the many friends and comrades I made, nobody stands out as a beacon of strength, integrity, and political struggle more than John Bowden.

Like many working-class people, myself included, John Bowden first came into contact with State repression as a child. Because of the crime of being born poor, he was locked-up in 'children's homes' and units, and subject to even greater punishment and security when he escaped. So it is that many young people fall into the clutches of the State, and by increments small or large, have their lives stolen away from them.

Locked-up for most of his childhood and adolescence, John gravitated to the company of older, heavy-drinking, petty villains with a certain inevitability. One night, in a drunken row over a game of cards, in which a knife was pulled, John killed a man. Together with two older men, he was given a sentence of life imprisonment, in John's case with a 'tariff' of 25 years.

By the time I was fitted-up by a vindictive police force and corrupt judiciary, with his co-defendants already free, John Bowden had already spent nearly 15 long years being literally kicked round segregation units and punishment blocks. But in the State's darkest dungeons, John Bowden had been transformed. As he describes in his essay *Unbroken!* in the pamphlet *Tear Down The Walls!* (available in PDF form online):

"Quite soon after my imprisonment however, I began to become politicized; to emerge from the hopelessness, violence, and rage that had

characterised my life thus far. Ironically, prison provided me with the time and opportunity to read, study, and think; and recognise a common interest and humanity with my fellow captives. I'd always possessed a certain degree of class consciousness, always identified with and felt part of a poor underclass. I'd always felt an instinctive hatred of the rich and powerful, and believed in a vague concept of class struggle and revolution. In prison for life, I was now able to intellectually develop and grow, and in a strange sort of way, discover a freedom of heart and mind that I'd never before known."

I certainly know from personal experience how the prison system responds to any challenge to its authority, and so John's politicization, and his championing of prisoner's rights, was certainly not welcomed by those who run and administer Britain's punishment gulags. John was viciously beaten and brutalised time and time again, and held for extended periods in what can only be called torture units, such as the notorious Wakefield Control Unit. In spite of the long years of brutality, neither John's political integrity, nor his sheer humanity, were crushed. He developed into an articulate and eloquent prison writer, speaking out against injustice in all its forms, exposing Prison Service impunity, and acting as a unique voice of the struggle behind bars.

Time and again, the enemies of freedom have tried to silence John's voice, no doubt hoping that like all too many prisoners, John would eventually succumb to the slow murder of incarceration.

John has had contact with the Anarchist Black Cross for decades now, and this contact with the outside world is also seen as a threat. Some years ago, a now discredited stooge psychologist, Matthew Stillman, manufactured the claim that the ABC were a 'terrorist organisation' in order to try and smear John and extend his incarceration. After a protracted campaign, Stillman was exposed as a liar and political tool, but John is now being targeted because of his challenge to the hierarchy of 'professionals' like Stillman, who are locked in an abusive relationship with the prison system, in which prisoners are the victims. It is now years since there was any pretence that John Bowden was being held in prison because of

any concerns over public safety. His incarceration is being extended year after year because he continues to WRITE ARTICLES, and because he continues to make complaints, which are then upheld. Aided and abetted by the verminous Brendan Barnett, whom you will read about in this pamphlet, by compliant quacks, and by a spineless Parole Board, the State are now saying openly, that they will be satisfied with nothing less than the absolute BREAKING of John Bowden.

Throughout the hard decades of incarceration, through all the beatings and punishments, John has maintained his integrity and humanity. It is an absolute tragedy that this lion of a man rots in a prison cell, and that the State and all its pathetic minions feel that they can act with impunity. I have counted John Bowden as a close friend and comrade for around 15 years now, I have shared prison blocks with him, faced organised Prison Service violence alongside him, and experienced the warmth of his company and spirit. I KNOW that he will not be beaten by the cowards and petty tyrants who hold him prisoner, and that he will continue to resist and maintain his integrity until the last drop of life is squeezed from his body. It should not come to this though.

We are currently living in times of great repression, when, as in similar periods in the past, we are seeing the true character of our movement. Tragically, while the poor are hit harder than ever in recent

memory, many of our erstwhile 'comrades', often those who once had the loudest voices, have chosen to jump ship, aided by enhanced hand-outs from mummy and daddy, Such people never had any understanding of how an ordinary man or woman, all too many of us, end up in prison, and they have always been confident in knowing that prisons are places that their CLASS never go to. With so many of the sons and daughters of the rich and privileged infesting the movement, is it any wonder that it is devoid of all genuine revolutionary character, and that prisoner support is a joke?

John Bowden has been in prison for close-on 35 YEARS. His continued incarceration is nakedly political, and should be unacceptable to anyone. As a movement, we should be fighting for his release, and for an end to the system that has kept him in chains for most of his life. There should be no place whatsoever for prison apologists within our movement, and prisoner support should not be the preserve of a tiny number of people within that movement. Anything else is shameful.

We must fight to free John Bowden.
Always in struggle.

Mark Barnsley



Free
John
Bowden



Hands Off John Bowden!

July 2007

On 18 April 2007, after nine months in an open prison and shortly before a parole hearing to decide his suitability for release after 25 years in prison, John Bowden was placed in solitary confinement. The next day he was moved to a closed prison. NICKI JAMESON writes:

On the day of John's transfer the Dundee Courier's front-page headline proclaimed 'Castle Huntly killer has terror links'. The article begins: 'A Castle Huntly prison social worker fears a brutal killer, due for parole in two weeks, has links to terrorists. A report by the social worker claims that low-security inmate John "Ginger" Bowden is in continual contact with "eco-terrorists or paramilitary members" and has received visits from "people involved in terrorism".'

The 'social worker' in question is Matt Stillman, whom John describes as 'a right-wing American entrenched in punitive ideas about the role of the parole and probation system', and who appears to have been chosen specifically for this reason for the task of writing a vital report for consideration by the Parole Board panel that will determine if John is to be released.

The alleged 'terrorists' are in fact Brighton Anarchist Black Cross (ABC). ABC is a longstanding organisation, with small but active groups in many countries, dedicated to supporting 'class struggle prisoners'. FRFI has worked with ABC groups for many years, united by our shared understanding of the importance of the struggle within prison. ABC's main activities are writing to prisoners, organising benefits to raise funds for prisoners' welfare and supporting or organising solidarity pickets of prisons. To label Brighton ABC as 'terrorist' is ridiculous and easily refutable; however this attack on John Bowden and ABC is intended to send a message to prisoners in British gaols that they stand up for themselves and others at their peril, and to prison support activists to back off or risk being blamed for decisions not to release. Neither John nor ABC are bowing to this pressure and are fighting the attack politically. All FRFI readers in and out of prison are encouraged to support their campaign.

John Bowden was imprisoned for murder in 1980, and has been in contact with FRFI since

1983. In 1984, following a trial resulting from a protest at Parkhurst the previous year, he wrote: 'I was banished from open society for a serious infringement of criminal law – yet here I am deprived of any legal or civil protection from the murderous intentions and actions of a barbaric and antiquated penal system...I shall continue the struggle in every way possible to tear down that cloak of state secrecy and reveal the gross inhumanity that it seeks to hide.'

John has been good to his pledge, taking every opportunity that has presented itself to organise, educate and empower prisoners, to encourage political activists outside prison to be interested in and understand the use of prison as a weapon of oppression against the working class, to write for radical publications and to correspond with political and politicised prisoners around the world.

During this time the prison system itself has undergone many changes. John has always been quick to seize the opportunities presented by 'liberal' moments but has never been taken in by the promises of reform. In 1989-91 John worked within Long Lartin maximum security prison to organise a series of forums at which outside speakers, prisoners and prison staff would openly debate aspects of imprisonment. The prison responded well initially, allowing John and others to invite in guests who would never ordinarily have been permitted, including representatives of FRFI, but, just as the first and biggest forum was about to take place and the prison was basking in the reflected glory, the 'liberal' governor had John ghosted to Winson Green prison, where he was viciously assaulted by screws. The forum went ahead without him and John later successfully sued the Prison Service for the attack.

After the 1990 Strangeways uprising, John wrote a manifesto for prisoners' rights, which he and other Long Lartin prisoners submitted to the Woolf Inquiry into the revolt. He also contributed to Larkin Publications' 1995 book on the uprising: *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance*, writing:

'Within a prison system that had relied so heavily on brutality and an institutionalised denial of basic human rights, the Strangeways uprising

represented an eloquent statement that things would never again be quite the same...Prisoners had shown that even one of the most brutal gaols in England, a true bastion of screw power and authority, could be reduced to a burning wreck if and when prisoners said enough was enough. The lesson was certainly not lost on those who manage and administer the prison regime... The liberal façade of Woolf was coupled with a hidden agenda motivated by revenge and a determination to eradicate protest on the scale of Strangeways for ever more.'

Indeed, between 1990 and 2000 the British prison system was completely overhauled and hundreds of new divide-and-rule measures introduced, with the aim of preventing resistance on the scale of Strangeways ever occurring again. This attack has had a significant degree of success and by 2000, when Turkish prisoners were on hunger-strike, and John and Mark Barnsley were attempting to initiate solidarity within the British prison system, the smallest of group actions had become something many prisoners would shy away from for fear of loss of privileges, bad reports and ultimately denial of release.

In this climate John continued to operate politically, organising where possible and talking at length with younger prisoners, encouraging them to read about and understand the alienating and oppressive situation they found themselves in. At the same time, he began to prepare himself for his own possible release. Prior to April he had spent two years working unsupervised in the outside community as a volunteer on projects for the mentally ill and socially vulnerable, and had qualified as a literacy tutor for people with learning difficulties. He had been allowed frequent home leaves. As he wrote recently: 'The two fundamental criteria determining a life sentence prisoner's suitability for release, the expiry of the recommended period of time served in the interests of retribution, and the absence of any risk to the public, were both sufficiently established in my case'.

However, two decades of exposing and confronting the reality of British prisons were not going to be forgiven. John writes: 'The truth is that my treatment is politically motivated and inspired by a determination to continuously punish me for having fought the system in the past and encouraging others to do so, and also

by a determination to render me intellectually and politically compliant and submissive. As far as the prison system is concerned, the imperative now is not about negating any genuine risk that I might pose to the community – that stopped being an issue many years ago – but primarily about eradicating my political identity and spirit. From this point on, therefore, my continuing imprisonment is nakedly political and centres wholly on what I continue to represent to a prison system ever fearful of a politically awakened and militant prisoner movement.'

Nicki Jameson



Why prisoners fight back

June 1990

The Strangeways uprising, distinguishable for its intensity and duration, has generated a plethora of interpretations and analyses about what are perceived as the current ills of the British prison system and placed prisons as an issue close to the top of the political agenda. Unfortunately, none of the discussions about the cause and the rationale of the uprising, which acted as a catalyst for generalised unrest throughout the entire prison system, went much beyond the usual superficial and non-contentious issues of overcrowding, staff shortages and, of course, the existence of a ubiquitous minority of 'subversive' prisoners hell-bent on disrupting prison life for purely gratuitous reasons.

The terms of the Strangeways-inspired debate have been set by spokespeople for the prison system itself, and the 'respectable' prison reform pundits have done little more than collude in shifting the focus of public attention away from grievances raised by the Strangeways prisoners themselves (essentially complaints about physical and psychological brutality) and onto issues more palatable to the establishment. Inevitably, factors like gross overcrowding and a denial of basic facilities contributed to the uprising at Strangeways, but its true origins lay in the behaviour of the prison staff that distinguished Strangeways as one of a group of prisons

(Wandsworth, Leeds, Winson Green and Lincoln sharing this group) renowned for its brutal and inhuman treatment of prisoners.

Essentially, the disturbance at Strangeways was an act of resistance on the part of the prisoners to a regime based on a long tradition of officially sanctioned violence and overt intimidation. In view of the complete absence of any grievance or effective procedure for dealing with prisoners' complaints and the almost total lack of legal accountability as far as the behaviour and activities of prison staff are concerned, the uprising was both understandable and inevitable. If the state is prepared to sanction the unlawful brutality of prison officers and virtually allow them a free hand to do as they please with prisoners in the interests of ensuring so-called 'good order and discipline' in hell-holes like Strangeways, then prisoners have a right to defend themselves and protest in whatever manner and way they consider to be most effective.

The system itself in its treatment of prisoners has dictated the terms of conflict and struggle in prison and can therefore hardly be surprised when prisoners adopt a strategy of direct action as a means of both highlighting their predicament and defending their basic human rights. In that sense the uprising at Strangeways was primarily a response to the far greater institutionalised violence of the prison system and very much an authentic front-line of resistance against an instrument of state repression that over the last ten years in particular has been wielded with enthusiasm against the social consensus and the victims of Thatcherite Britain. The Strangeways prisoners are therefore to be applauded for their courage and audacity in fighting back against a system that attempts to dehumanise and brutalise them, and deserve the recognition and support of all those outside prison committed to the wider struggles against injustice and oppression.

The current economic and social crisis pervading British capitalist society is finding its most explosive points amongst the most marginalised and dispossessed (it's probably no coincidence that Strangeways ignited during the same weekend that the huge anti-poll tax demonstration in London became transformed into a pitched

battle with the police). The constituency of poor and oppressed people with no representation in capitalism's political institutions or protections in bourgeois law, the savagely disadvantaged who compose the underside of a class-ridden society in terminal decay. Conditions at Strangeways prison before the uprising were a microcosm of life for the poor in Thatcherite Britain, and the rebellion prefigures the sort of struggles about to assume form in society generally within the next decade; recent 'disturbances' in the prison system indicate that prisoners will be close to the forefront in these struggles.

Predictably, in its wake the uprising at Strangeways has produced promises from the government of increased repression in prison and 'tougher' legal sanctions against those prisoners who dare to resist - it represents a message that prisoners are well-accustomed to; submit or you will be crushed. The most enduring image of the Strangeways uprising will surely be the unbroken defiance of the last group of prisoners to descend from the prison's rooftop - it symbolised well the unbroken spirit of resistance that exist amongst the poor in prison, and it will survive no matter what techniques or methods of repression are employed against it.



Long Lartin - Liberal no more

Feb 2000

Over the last five years the regime at Long Lartin maximum security prison in Worcestershire has been an accurate barometer of the radical diminution of prisoners' rights under first Michael Howard and now Jack Straw.

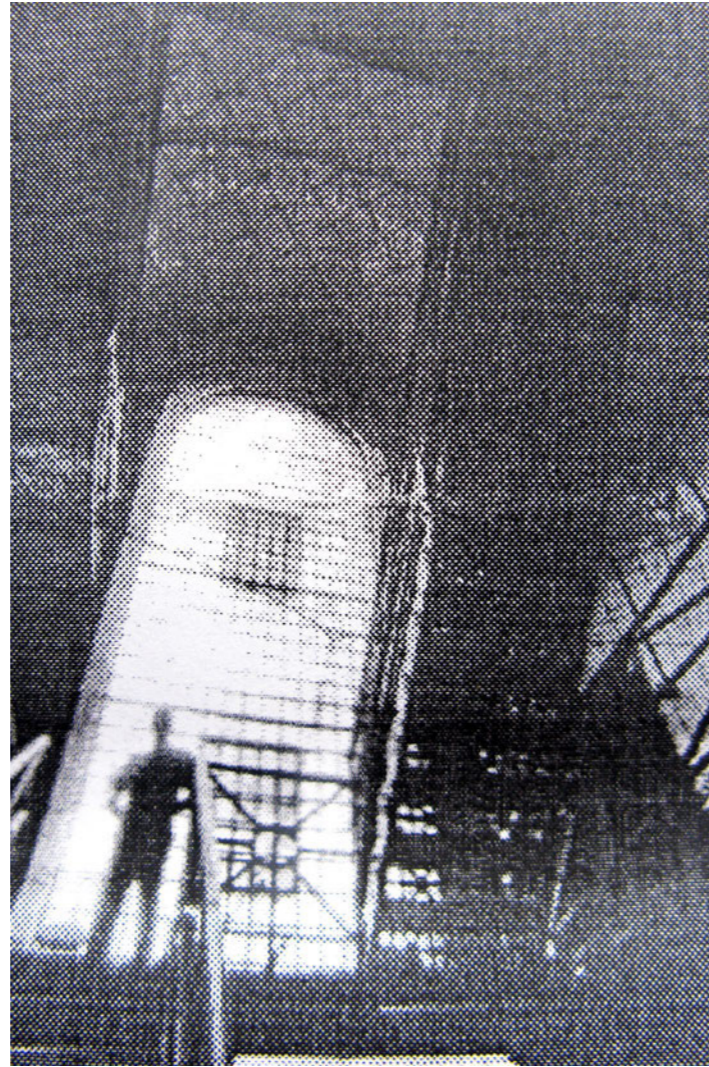
Opened in 1973 as a liberal showcase gaol for the treatment of long-term prisoners, until the early 1990s Long Lartin enjoyed a reputation for enlightened, progressive ideas, albeit in the face of constant opposition from the Prison Officers Association. Its regime reflected a certain balance of power fought for by prisoners throughout the long-term system during the 1970s and 1980s and a high degree of solidarity and collective organisation among prisoners at Long Lartin itself.

The backlash under Michael Howard transformed the gaol into a testing ground for crude behaviour modification methods and psychological brutality, zealously pursued by screws eager to exact revenge for the years when prisoners had possessed a degree of empowerment and autonomy.

A significant dimension in the enforcement of a more brutal regime was the gradual removal of governors with a hint of liberalism and their replacement by screws in suits, hard-line and thuggish individuals rapidly promoted to governor grade positions.

Today Long Lartin operates as one large control unit with a graduated regime of punishment and discipline very obviously based on US prison regimes. Level One is the segregation/punishment unit. In 1999 a brand new segregation unit was built with accommodation for approximately 50 prisoners. The new unit came complete with 'anti-dirty-protest cells', CCTV-monitored strong-box cells and a regime deliberately designed to induce maximum psychological tension. Any protest is inevitably met with maximum force and the emphasis is solidly on persuading prisoners dissent is pointless and simply invites even greater pain and distress.

Given such power over prisoners, screws in the segregation unit routinely abuse their authority and engage in 'wind-up' sessions, intended to inflict even greater psychological stress, as well



as providing entertainment for the perpetrators.

Most prisoners in the segregation unit are not there for any specific offence against prison discipline but simply because they are deemed to have a 'bad attitude' and have shown insufficient respect towards prison staff. They are segregated 'in the interest of good order and discipline' (Prison Rule 45) and often spend months in segregation or solitary confinement with no access to due process or a fair hearing.

Recently the administration at Long Lartin has attempted to deflect criticism of its arbitrary use of Rule 45 by the creation of a so-called Rule 45 Board. This meets every 28 days to 'review' the segregation of prisoners and is composed of prison officers, a probation officer, psychologist, doctor, member of the Board of Visitors, and an assistant governor. Its procedures are a mockery of natural justice. Prisoners are 'invited' to attend and given about three minutes to explain why they

should be released from segregation. Following their 'contribution' they are immediately handed a photocopied notice informing them of the decision the board had already reached to extend their segregation for another 28 days. Every prisoner is given exactly the same reason for his continued segregation. It is to the eternal shame of the so-called 'specialist staff' on this board (doctors etc) that they willingly allow themselves to be a party to this charade and compromise their integrity so irreparably.

The board is usually chaired by a low-grade governor who is operational head of the segregation unit. Three years ago he was a senior prison officer in the old segregation unit, during a period when claims of brutality and maltreatment against prisoners were rife; his influence is apparent in the behaviour of his staff in the new segregation unit.

Prisoners who finally leave segregation are moved to Level Two- the 'Basic regime' wing. Created in 1995 as part of the new Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (devised to divide prisoners by a system of reward and punishment),

the Basic wing at Long Lartin was originally used to punish prisoners who refused to work. Since 1995, however the reason for removing prisoners to 'Basic' have become extremely elastic and staff now use it arbitrarily to discourage defiance and as a form of unofficial punishment. It is to all intents and purposes an unofficial segregation unit, without the theoretical procedural safeguards supposedly governing the ordinary segregation of prisoners. Conditions are austere, with prisoners confined to their cells for 22 hours a day. Any expression of individual protest inevitably results in removal back to Level One and the imposition of collective punishment on everyone else, usually in the form of 24-hour lockdown.

Prisoners usually spend 28 days on the Basic wing; however this is often extended indefinitely at the whim of the staff, usually for the most petty and spiteful reasons. The purpose is to break the prisoner's spirit and instil a deep-seated disinclination to question authority. Any complaints are forwarded to the segregation unit governor, who is also in charge of the Basic wing, and are inevitably ignored.

Level Three is 'Perry Wing', a prison officers' paradise of strict control and discipline, where prisoners know their places and screws behave like petty tyrants. No defiance is tolerated and a submissive demeanour towards staff is expected at all times. This is a model that will be reproduced throughout the long-term dispersal system unless prisoners organise against it. Unfortunately, for the moment the system at Long Lartin is encountering no resistance whatsoever and the administration's attitude is characterised by arrogant triumphalism. Their view is that the organised resistance of the 1970s and 80s has now been defeated to the extent where prisoners will suffer an abuse or insult in silence. A malaise of quiet rage has now replaced open protest.

Unless prisoners mobilise and organise to defend their human rights, they face a future of unimaginable oppression and cruelty, and the sadistic use of control unit regimes will become standard practice throughout the system.



Close Dartmoor prison once and for all!

April 2002

'Dartmoor has a large segregation unit (46 cells) in a forbidding granite-walled wing, described by the present governor as "medieval"... [Prisoners] are exercised one at a time in what all staff refer to as "pens". At the time we were there, if they were distressed or suicidal and needed to see a Listener (a Samaritan-trained prisoner)... they were locked in a "Listeners' suite", which was in fact a cage: a wire enclosure with a Perspex square through which they could communicate their problems. Both the pens and cages were degrading and more appropriate for dangerous animals than for potentially suicidal medium to low risk prisoners. When we reported our concerns about the cage, we were told that the Governor had instructed that it be closed some weeks previously...

'There was frequent use of control and restraint and special cells... We followed a particular incident [in which a] mentally ill prisoner who had threatened an officer was being moved within the segregation unit to a special cell... Other prisoners in the Unit were clearly shaken and frightened... We believe that there may have been excessive use of Control and Restraint in this incident, and that more officers than necessary had been directly involved. Among them were seven officers wearing Control and Restraint equipment. A Health Care officer and a Governor had been in attendance... After all staff had left the cell the prisoner was left lying naked on the floor'.

Report of the Chief Inspector of Prisons into an Unannounced Follow-up Investigation of Dartmoor Prison, published November 2001.

The recent Chief Inspector's report reveals the shocking conditions at Dartmoor prison, but its publication and the response to it follow a familiar and almost choreographed pattern. Highly critical reports are followed by feigned concern from senior Prison Service bureaucrats, which is followed by standard denials from the Prison Officers Association, which is followed by nothing changing.

Two questions are immediately raised by the Dartmoor report: the role of the prison senior medical officer in allowing disturbed and suicidal prisoners to be caged like animals, and the responsibility of the prison governor

for allowing such inhumane practice to prevail. The governor's claim that he instructed that the cage be permanently removed long before the inspector's visit, yet had been ignored by staff, raises an even more fundamental question about who was running Dartmoor and who had the final say in how the prisoners were treated. It was obviously a question that didn't particularly perturb the governor who, prior to the publication of the report, hadn't felt compelled to inform Prison Service headquarters about a crisis of management.

The reality is, of course, that everyone at Dartmoor was aware of what prisoners were being subjected to, and no-one spoke out or went against the grain.

There are obvious parallels here with Wormwood Scrubs, where prisoners were routinely beaten in the segregation unit, and all levels of staff conspired and colluded to keep the lid on it.

Dartmoor has always been designated as a punishment prison for 'difficult; and 'awkward' prisoners, as well as for a disproportionate number of black prisoners. It is a stick wielded by the prison system and everyone at Dartmoor knows what is expected of them. The prison has a long established culture of brutality, which is so prevalent that officers didn't even bother hiding it from the inspectors: 'This attitude on the part of some staff continued throughout the week with prisoners being variously described to us as the "shit" or "rubbish" of the prison system, or as "these people" or "coloureds"... Prisoners were told that this was "the end of the line".'

Whenever it is confronted with such unambiguous, unequivocal evidence of a denial of human rights in prisons like Dartmoor and Scrubs, the Prison Service inevitably attempts to push the blame onto a small minority of 'rogue officers' who operate clandestinely. The truth is that where such a minority does operate, it does so in the confident knowledge that it has the tacit support of the system which will never blow the whistle on them. In a gaol such as Dartmoor, all levels of staff collude in the brutalisation of prisoners, and in a wider political climate of retribution and revenge, all feel confident that the backing emanates from the very top.



Smoke pours out of HMP Dartmoor during the 1932 riot

Dartmoor was built by and housed French prisoners of war from the Napoleonic Wars in 1809. It was first used as a civilian prison in 1851. In 1959 a government White Paper declared that it was near the 'end of its serviceable life', and when Albany prison on the Isle of Wight was commissioned in 1961, it was intended as a replacement, however Dartmoor remained open. In 1979 the May Committee again recommended closure, describing the isolated, insanitary, cold buildings as 'nowadays simply against nature'. Following the wave of revolt that swept through British prisons in 1990, the Woolf Report said that Dartmoor should be given a 'last chance'. A year later a Chief Inspector's report called Dartmoor a 'dustbin', but again said it should be given a 'final chance'. As that report was issued, police were investigating a racket whereby desperate prisoners were paying £250 to prison officers to arrange transfers to other prisons.

In 1991 the Prison Reform Trust, usually known for the mildness of its criticisms, called for Dartmoor to be closed: 'It is isolated and rundown and for 200 years has been dominated by a culture of barbarity and punishment. That culture is all-pervasive and repeated attempts to change it have produced nothing but failure'. It is now 2001, and the new Chief Inspector, Anne Owers, does not even enter the 'final chance' territory. Instead her conclusion is even more pathetic: 'Dartmoor

needs to find a positive role supported by a new culture... It needs to be a part of a regional and national strategy for the dignified and decent treatment and resettlement of prisoners.' What makes her think that after two centuries of as the punishment block for the prison system and copious reports into its failings, last chances, final chances, recategorisations and reclassifications, Dartmoor and the staff who run it will change now?

In the final analysis there is no liberal reformist solution to the existence of brutality and maltreatment in prisons, no piecemeal way of changing something that is so intrinsic to the system. The bottom line is that prisoners only ever achieve a significant improvement in treatment and conditions when they themselves organise and fight for it.

Instead of meaningless debates about how prisons might be made 'better' and thereby more legitimate, the focus instead should be on how prisoners can be supported and empowered in their struggle for human rights. There is no middle ground in the struggle for prisoners' rights: either we campaign and fight for the complete abolition of prisons as instruments of state terror and social control, or we accept their existence and the power of the state to dehumanise a certain section of the working class population.

Uprising at Shotts prison

Feb 2003

On 2 January at least 80 long-term prisoners at Shotts maximum security prison in Scotland staged a mass protest by seizing control of two wings of the gaol for 19 hours. A negotiated end to the 'disturbance' eventually took place, indicating a recognition by the authorities that the use of physical force to end the prisoners' protest would encounter fierce resistance, although the source of the prisoners' rage remains unresolved.

Throughout the protest the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) maintained a conspicuous silence on exactly what had fuelled the prisoners' action, while the media's reporting of the protest focused almost solely on the alleged injuries received by two prison officers who, it was claimed, had been hurt while trying to intervene and stop a fight between rival prisoner gangs. This was a total lie as it turned out, and eventually the prisoners hung a banner from a window, saying 'Leave our visitors alone', indicating that the protest had been sparked by the treatment of prisoners' families. An earlier uprising at Shotts in the late 1980s was provoked by the strip-searching of prisoners' families, including old people and small children.

Less than a week after the protest on 2 January, a second 'disturbance' broke out at Shotts. This time in a special unit for 'difficult' prisoners, and again the media focussed exclusively on the injuries allegedly sustained by prison officers, while the SPS maintained its usual silence on exactly why Shotts was so clearly in a state of turmoil and open revolt. The impression deliberately created was one of violent and unmanageable prisoners attacking and injuring prison staff without reason or cause.

In reality, Shotts as an institution is intrinsically designed to provoke bitterness and confrontation, and since its creation in the early 1980s, its regime has been based on the principle of completely disempowering prisoners and denying them any opportunity or right to peacefully resolve their differences with the administration. It is a gaol purpose-built for repression and brutality.

Since 1987 there have been at least five major uprisings at Shotts, and for much of the gaol's history prisoners there have experienced a virtual

lock-down regime. In 1995 prisoner John Brannan described to FRFI something of the atmosphere prevailing at Shotts:

'Each Hall is divided up into six sections, each containing 20 prisoners who are caged as a group into a tiny self-contained area that is sealed almost the whole time by locked grille gates. The screws remain beyond the gates, entering the sections only to lock us in our cells. We only leave the cells for work and are made to walk in strict single file to and from the work-sheds. The atmosphere of intimidation is something that you're up against here day and night. Tension within the living sections is really bad and prisoners just pace up and down all the time, full of anger and paranoia. The screws obviously feel safe and in control with everyone locked up on the sections and have dished out so much shit that they're now too frightened to open up the gates and deal with us as a larger group, face to face. People here are being seriously damaged mentally and I think that few of us will ever be able to readjust to normal life again.'

John Brannan's description clearly illustrates how the administration at Shotts was and is itself responsible for creating the conditions for revolt and rebellion.

In 1995 the Scottish Inspectorate for Prisons strongly criticised the SPS for its treatment of prisoners at Shotts. In 2002 the Inspectorate again criticised conditions at Shotts. Unfortunately, the SPS has never been particularly receptive to even official criticism of its methods, and the continuously repressive and confrontational nature of the Shotts regime is indicative of this.

The protests and disturbances will therefore, continue at Shotts because of two related factors: the unwillingness of the administration there to treat prisoners with human dignity, and the proven ability and determination of long-term prisoners in Scotland to organise, resist and fight back with courage and tenacity.

Organise against brutality

April 2003

The segregation unit at Full Sutton maximum security prison in York is once again the focus of complaints concerning staff brutality. This raises questions about the treatment of long-term prisoners in segregation units throughout the dispersal system. John Bowden, currently at HMP Durham, reports:

Since 1994-5, when the Prison Service insitgated a deliberate policy of increased repression against long-term prisoners, the nature of segregation unit regimes throughout the maximum security dispersal system has become brutal and dehumanising. In gaols like Long Lartin, Frankland and Full Sutton control over prisoners in segregation is maintained by physical violence and fear. Staff use a strategy designed to create maximum stress, which in turn is used as a justification for physically attacking prisoners pushed to the very edge of psychological endurance and self-control. Dr Bob Johnson, a doctor for 42 years, and one-time employee of the Prison Service, said in a report concerning the recent beating up of prisoner Charles Bronson in the segregation unit at Full Sutton: 'Perhaps most troubling, there is the suggestion of an under-culture of physical brutality which may run something as follows - if a prisoner smashes property, then the staff are expected to smash the prisoner.' This strategy of mentally winding prisoners up and then physically beating them when they react is a strong characterising feature of all dispersal segregation units at the moment.

In 1994 FRFI highlighted the complaints of prisoners in the Full Sutton segregation unit who were experiencing what amounted to a regime of terror. A gang of eight to ten prison officers were routinely dragging prisoners from their cells and systematically beating them, largely as a form of group enjoyment. The police are currently investigating fresh claims about staff brutality in the Full Sutton segregation unit, which prior to any investigation of their own, the prison authorities have predictably refuted.

During the early days of the dispersal system some of the most high profile rebellions (Parkhurst 1969, Hull 1976, etc) were provoked by ill-treatment of prisoners in segregation. The cumulative effect of those uprisings was the principle factor in achieving fundamental changes to the running of segregation units in long-term

prisons. Since 1994-5, however, and as a result of home secretary Michael Howard's massive onslaught on the rights of prisoners, prison staff have seized back the power to run segregation units as places of fear and gratuitous brutality.

Prison officer culture has always been imbued with the view that control should be maintained by the threat and use of physical violence. In the hidden world of the segregation unit that view is given open and free expression. In some segregation units so all-pervasive is the violence that prisoners literally live in fear for their lives.

Following the arrest and conviction in 2000 of prison officers for brutalising prisoners in segregation at Wormwood Scrubs, Director General of Prisons, Martin Narey publicly declared that in future such behaviour would be rooted out and punished. In 2002 I spoke with Narey and described to him the behaviour of staff in the segregation unit at Long Lartin. He did absolutely nothing about my complaint. In her most recent report on Long Lartin, the Chief Inspector of Prisons Ann Owers absurdly praised the 'professionalism' of staff running the segregation unit. This despite a recent successful legal action by prisoner Billy Whitfield who was awarded thousands of pounds in compensation following repeated beatings in the Long Lartin segregation unit. The establishment obviously measures prison officer 'professionalism' by the degree to which they're able to subdue 'difficult' prisoners.

During the 1970s and 1980s a high degree of solidarity and organisation amongst long-term prisners ensured that segregation unit staff were ever mindful of the potential for collective unrest and were therefore, to a degree, circumspect in their treatment of prisoners. Today that wariness has gone and abuse is widespread and routine.

It took long-term prisoners in Britain decades of struggle and sacrifice to shift the balance of power slightly in their favour and stop the brutalistaion and murder of prisoners in segregation. That struggle must be pursued again by the current generation of long-term prisoners if the thugs and sadists who now run places like Full Sutton segregation unit are to be stopped.

Indefinite internment without trial

March 2012

'If they come for me tonight they will come for you in the morning.' Angela Davis

In Britain today there are a group of men held in prison without trial or any form of due legal process, and they are being detained indefinitely. These men have committed no crimes in Britain and are being held at the behest of a foreign state, the U.S., whilst their extradition to that country has been ruled unlawful by the British courts. Their continued imprisonment, in breach of the most elemental civil and human rights, has clear implications for every citizen in the U.K. because if the rule of law is suspended in the case of any unpopular minority then dangerous precedents are set that will eventually be used against anyone or any group viewed as worthy of 'special measures'.

There are currently seven men, all of Middle Eastern and Asian extraction, being held in a small isolation unit at Long Lartin maximum-security prison in Worcestershire, some of whom have been there for almost ten years. Originally designed and used as a prison punishment unit, the Detainee unit is very much a prison within a prison and its inhabitants are kept strictly separated and isolated from other prisoners in the jail. Methods of small-group isolation and control are applied which over a prolonged period of time are known to have a seriously damaging effect on the mind and personality. In June of 2011 the Chief Inspector of prisons, Nick Hardwick, was extremely critical of the situation of the prisoners confined to the Detainee unit and in a report on the unit wrote, "The Detainee unit at HMP Long Lartin is a prison within a high-security prison. It holds a small number of individuals suspected but not convicted of involvement in international terrorism and held under immigration or extradition law. Some have been held for many years as they fight removal from the UK and all are held in the highest security conditions. We have previously raised concerns about holding a small number of detainees, who already inhabit a kind of legal limbo, in a severely restricted environment for a potentially indefinite period. The risks to the mental and physical health of detainees of such lengthy, ill-defined and isolated confinement are significant."



The existence of this group of prisoners is proof that none of our legal traditions and rights are safe from serious compromise and surrender, and their continued detention in conditions of virtual solitary confinement makes a complete mockery of the belief that anyone is truly safe from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, especially when the state decides to widen the focus of its 'War on Terror'.

The attorney general, Dominic Grieve, claimed in response to the release of Abu Qatada that 'indefinite internment without trial' does not exist in the U.K. This is a lie. He is fully aware that in the Detainee unit at Long Lartin a group of men are currently being held in exactly that unlawful situation as a gesture of acquiescence to American power.

Prisons: Factories of hate

May 2012

Right-wing Tory Justice Minister Chris Grayling's declaration in late April that prisoners would now be made to "earn" basic privileges by "working harder" probably wasn't just the usual "populist" promise to stick the boot into one of the most powerless and demonised social groups. During times of economic austerity and potential social unrest scapegoating marginalised and outcast groups like prisoners, is always useful as a means of deflecting and re-focusing public anger away from the true culprits of the country's economic ruination, in this case Grayling's pals in the city of London. Behind the rhetoric and the guise of "getting tough" on prisoners is the actual purpose of the prison industrial complex: to turn prisons into privatised forced-labour factories.

Prisoners are, it seems, to become like third-world workers, a source of extremely cheap and compliant labour for multi-national corporations, a practice which of course draws its inspiration from the U.S. Where one of the largest prisoner populations in the world have increasingly replaced outside unionised labour as a source of profit. Under the U.N. Charter of Human Rights forced labour is of course unlawful, but prisoners don't seem to count, and during times of economic crisis and a burgeoning prison population there is a cold rational in the capitalist intention to focus its rapacity on those behind bars.

It also harks back to the original purpose of the Victorian-inspired model of what was then a modern prison system: to instil conformity and the work ethic in the rebellious poor. After decades

of the control and containment model prisons are to be returned to their original function as places where the errant poor are taught their true place as producers of profit for the rich.

Of course the tabloids who cheer Grayling's "get tough" treatment of prisoners and whip-up mob support for him omit to mention or question why prisoners are being forced to do work that its unemployed readers could be invited to do on a legally-enforced minimum wage? And whilst large corporations and companies constantly "rationalise" their operations by shedding labour and creating unemployment, some of these same companies are using prison cheap labour to top-up profits, all with the willing assistance of Grayling and his rich and powerful colleagues in the Tory government.

Not only is prison slave-labour an absolute negation of the basic human rights of prisoners, which Grayling has now prevented any legal challenge to from within jails by stopping legal aid for prisoner litigation cases, but also the removal of a means of employment for many of those outside prison who are influenced by the lies and witch-hunting of the tabloids and an increasingly right-wing political establishment.

Grayling should also ponder this: forcing a slave-labour regime as a condition for basic privileges on prisoners serving increasingly longer sentences might just be a catalyst for some extremely expensive prison repairs further down the line.



Is the Parole Board rubber-stamping the continued detention of life sentence prisoner?

May 2012

Periodically reviewing life sentences by the Parole Board is a process required by law and such reviews, known as Tribunals, are intended to assess the current level of risk presented by life-sentence prisoners at the expiry of Tariff point of their sentence; Tariffs are the minimum length of time trial judges specify a lifer should spend in prison to satisfy the interests of retribution and punishment. Once the tariff point has been reached or exceeded by the lifer then the Parole Board has a legal duty to review and make an informed decision on the lifer's continued imprisonment.

The review process itself, known as an 'Oral Hearing', at which the lifer is present, is conducted like a semi-judicial hearing where reports by social workers, prison staff and psychologists are considered and assessed, and the lifer is given the opportunity to present their own case for release. It is from these hearings, or Tribunals, that the critically important decisions are made about the lifer's future, especially the one regarding whether to release or not. It would be absolutely wrong, as well as unlawful, if a decision regarding release was made BEFORE the 'Oral Hearing' had taken place and the paper work regarding that decision was written up to convey the impression that the decision had been made following such a hearing. In the case of a lifer called Malcolm Legget there exists indisputable evidence that such an unlawful practice took place and its discovery was purely by accident and incompetence on the part of the Parole Board.

On the 6 February 2012 a parole hearing took place at Shotts prison in Scotland to consider the case for release of Malcolm Legget who has been in jail since 1986. During the hearing Mr Legget asked that a prison-based psychologist, Sharron McAllister, be produced as a witness at the hearing to explain what Mr Legget claimed were significant inaccuracies in her report regarding him. The panel agreed to Mr Legget's request and the hearing was adjourned for a period of six months.

On the 21 February the Parole Board for Scotland wrote to Mr Legget saying the panel had made a definite decision regarding his continued

imprisonment and had decided not to direct his release. It claimed the reason for its decision was that it still considered Mr Legget a risk to the community. Understandably, Mr Legget was concerned and confused by what appeared to be a final decision of the Parole Board when in fact his hearing had been adjourned and not yet concluded. Then on the 24 February Mr Legget received a second letter from the Parole Board informing him that the information in the previous letter had been what it called 'an error'. Mr Legget is convinced that in fact the letter from the Parole Board of the 21 February was a pre-prepared decision made before the hearing on the 6 February and the real 'error' was that it was delivered to Mr Legget before the definitive conclusion of his hearing.

If Mr Legget's suspicion is true, and the letter from the board on the 21 February suggest it is, then it indicates a serious and unlawful abuse of Parole Board procedure and power, and the rubber-stamping of the continued imprisonment of life sentence prisoners without proper procedure.

It also constitutes a clear breach of human rights under Article 5[4] which states that, "Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful". This clearly stipulates that a proper, legally-based hearing should take place to sanction the prisoner's detention, and in the case of the lifer the parole hearing is constituted to consider the continued detention, or not, of the life sentence prisoner who has reached or exceeded the time stipulated he should remain in jail. The so-called Oral Hearing is the forum where reports and evidence is considered by the panel, which is usually composed of a judge or legally qualified person, and a psychologist and senior probation officer or criminologist. It is from the evidence presented at these hearings, conducted in the presence of the lifer, that the final decision to release or detain is made. The letter Malcolm Legget received from the Parole Board on the 21 February would suggest that a decision to continue detaining Mr Legget was made in private and before the Oral Hearing

itself. Clearly, if this did happen then either a unique and unlawful precedent was created, or the rubber-stamping in private of the continued detention of life sentence prisoners is an established practice and the Parole Board is operating on an unlawful basis.



John Bowden writes from HMP Shotts

June 2012

In June of 2011, the Parole Board for England and Wales finally carried out its statutory obligation to review my continued imprisonment after 32 years of captivity. Its official terms of reference were clear and straightforward; to be reassured that I represented no risk or danger to the public, (the main legal criteria determining whether a life sentence prisoner is safe to be released or not), and that I could be safely managed or supervised in the community beyond prison. The circumstances of my original offence of murder were indeed brutal and terrible, although confined to a sub-culture of petty criminals and alcoholics who existed on the margins of South London working-class society. Along with two other men I was convicted of the murder of another man during a drinking session in a South London flat; ordinarily a fairly unremarkable event in that part of inner-city London. This killing stood out more because of the means by which the victim's remains were disposed of than by the actual act of killing itself. At the time of the offence I was 25 years old, and had already spent the greater part of my life in repressive institutions and jails, and was considered the leader of the group of men who had committed the murder basically because I was considered marginally more intelligent and articulate than the other two. I was sentenced to life imprisonment, with the judge's recommendation that I serve no less than 25 years. The other two received recommendations of 15 years, and were released almost two decades ago. Two leading forensic psychologists, one a world authority on "psychopathic personality disorders", Professor David Cooper, interviewed and assessed me before the parole hearing last June, and submitted written and oral evidence at the hearing which essentially said that I no longer represented a risk or danger to the community and was safe to be either transferred to an open prison or be released completely. The first and most important legal criterion determining a life sentence prisoner's release; public safety or protection, obviously justified releasing me. Overall, the general consensus of professional opinion presented at the parole hearing was that I could be released and safely managed in the community, and in fact I already had been to some degree by being allowed to work in the community for a number of years on external prison work projects and schemes. A post-

release supervision plan was also presented to the parole hearing by a community based social worker, which envisaged my living a reasonably independent life in my own accommodation whilst being regularly visited and monitored by a social work team. Legally, the Parole Board would have been justified in ordering my release, but they chose not to do so.

Throughout the hearing the Parole Board panel focused insistently on my "anti-authoritarian" character and attitude, and defined it not as a result and product of my experience of prison, but as a lingering residue of a "psychopathic personality disorder". My prison history of protest and resistance, as well as legal actions taken against serious abuses of power on the part of the prison system, was not defined or characterised as a positive conversion from hardened de-humanised criminal to politicised prisoner and human rights activist, but as simply evidence of a pathological hatred of authority and discipline, and a potential risk to the community. As far as the panel were concerned I remained a psychopath, although one probably mellowed by age and manageable by the strictest and most robust post-release supervision plan.

Rejecting the independent living post-release supervision plan presented at the hearing, the Board decided instead that if released I should be required to live in a closely-supervised hostel and allowed minimum freedom and autonomy. Although I represented no real danger to the community, my "anti-authoritarian" character was considered, by the Board, justification for imposing as much authority and control over me as possible following my release. In order to allow Edinburgh Criminal Justice Services, who would be responsible for supervising me in the community, sufficient time to arrange such a stringent post-release supervision plan, my release was denied for a further twelve months, during which time, the Board suggested, I would be transferred to an open jail and prepared for release. The Scottish Prison Service representative at the hearing agreed to arrange such a transfer at the earliest opportunity.

Following the parole hearing, two crucial things happened. First, the prison authorities reneged

on the agreement to transfer me to an open jail, using two earlier absconds from prison to justify insisting that I be psychologically risk-assessed and made to complete whatever behaviour-modification programmes and courses were recommended, before consideration would be given to transferring me to open conditions. There were, of course, long waiting lists for both the assessment and programmes. And second, responsibility for formulating a post-release supervision plan was given to Brendan Barnett, a social worker employed by Edinburgh Criminal Justice Services.

Barnett considered his role to involve far more than just arranging a release plan and hostel accommodation, and decided also to write for the Parole Board a thorough personal assessment and analysis of my life before the murder offence, a forensic description of the killing itself, and what he believed were my psychological motivations both before and during my imprisonment, all of which he coloured with moral opinion and obvious antipathy. His completed report to the Parole Board was a mixture of amateur psychology, distorted fact, and obvious prejudice, with an actual post-release supervision plan almost an incidental addition. He also blatantly lied in his report, claiming to find a reference in an obscure early prison social work report, that justified his outrageous subsequent claim that I was convicted of racist and homophobic hate crimes! Despite every bit of evidence to the contrary (police reports, trial transcripts, and indeed every other report and document in my file), Barnett presented as fact his ridiculous lies. Equally incredibly, when presented with his report, the Parole Board chose to remain silent, despite KNOWING that his report was seriously and inexorably flawed.

When I made a formal complaint about the lies in Bartlett's report to his superiors at Edinburgh Criminal Justice Services, what immediately kicked-in was a concerted attempt on their part to close ranks around him, and despite all the evidence clearly ascertaining what he had wrote was untrue, reject my complaint out of hand. Truth and fact were clearly secondary to the absolute priority to defend and protect a colleague, even one so seriously and worryingly lacking in personal and professional integrity.

Barnett's response to my complaint was vicious and single-mindedly spiteful. On the 14th May

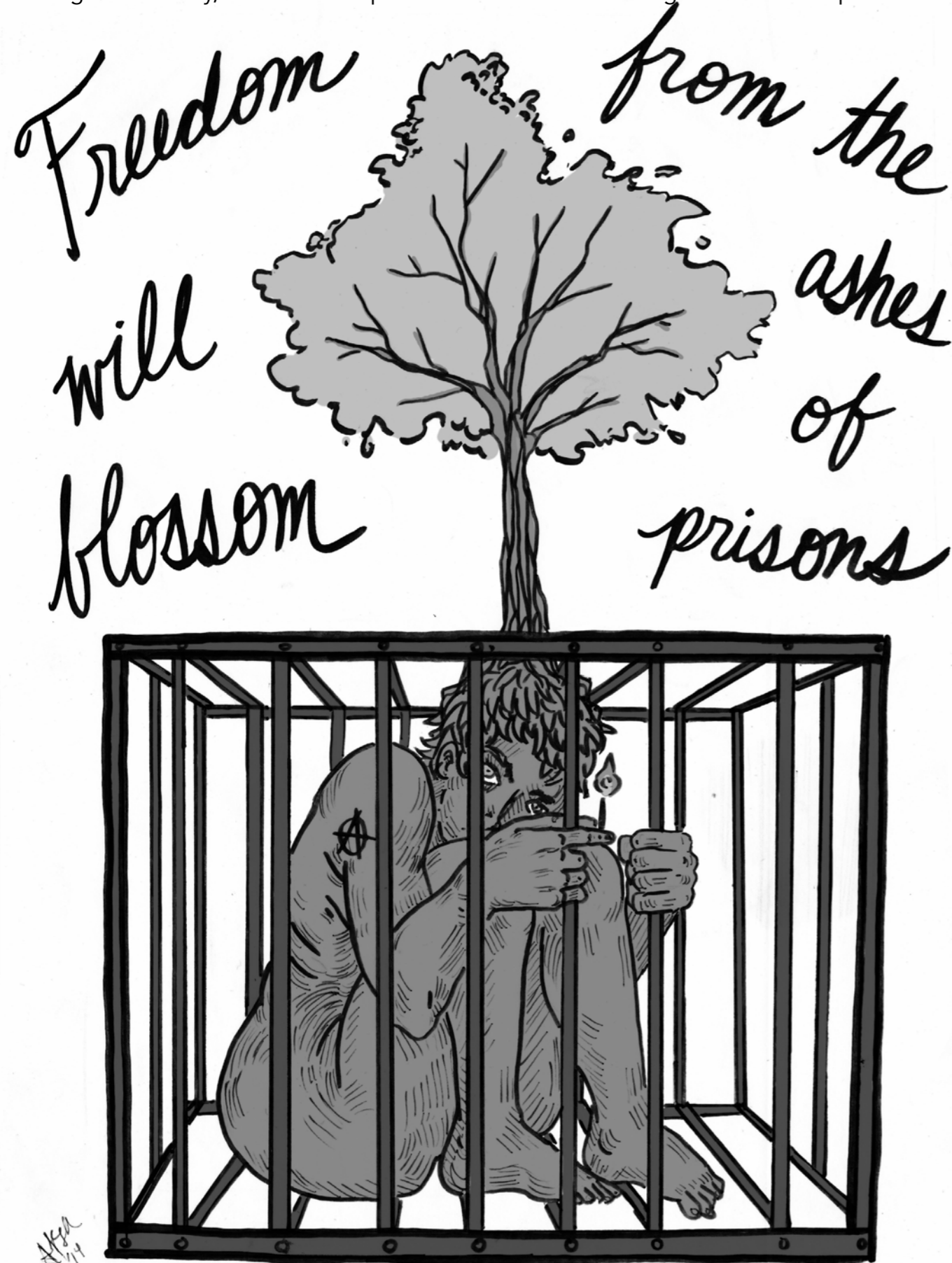
this year, he held a "multi-disciplinary meeting", and persuaded a hostel in Edinburgh, that had agreed to accept me as part of the Parole Board inspired post-release supervision plan, to now refuse me accommodation. He also persuaded a representative from Edinburgh Housing not to provide me with accommodation. He then persuaded Scottish Prison Service Headquarters that I should be transferred back to the English prison system because I had no links or contacts in Scotland, which he knew to be completely untrue. He then persuaded a remarkably compliant Parole Board that my next parole hearing, scheduled for June this year, should be postponed until I was "psychiatrically risk assessed" by a psychiatrist of his choice.

The Board were aware, of course, that I had already been thoroughly psychologically risk-assessed before the hearing last June, and there was absolutely no justification for introducing a psychiatric dimension to my case, but they agreed to Barnett's recommendation nevertheless. Neither did they question why Barnett, who was effectively engineering my transfer out of the Scottish system, and beyond Edinburgh Criminal Justice Service's responsibility and obligation to supervise, should happily provide the funding for a psychiatrist of his choice to "risk-assess" me. Brendan Barnett had effectively wrecked any post-release supervision plan, and yet the Parole Board appeared content to go along with and support him.

At the parole hearing last year, the parole panel clearly set its face against releasing me, despite the legal criteria supporting that release, and it then insisted on a post-release supervision plan of such severity that it was virtually inevitable that an authoritarian zealot such as Barnett would emerge to abuse the power such a plan would exercise over me. Barnett has created a justification to further prolong my imprisonment, and the Parole Board seem happy with it.

Earlier this year, the outgoing Chairperson of the Parole Board, once safely distanced from responsibility, warned that the Parole Board's hindering and delaying the release of life sentence prisoners, of which there are over 1200 in England and Wales, would inevitably and eventually create serious unrest in the prison system. The deliberate design in preventing my release suggests a total disregard for personal or institutional consequences.

Barnett meanwhile, continues to use the system to exercise his hatred of "offenders", supported and defended by his colleagues at Edinburgh Criminal Justice Services, and clearly within a social and political climate of increasing authoritarianism, intolerance, and hatred of "offenders" and those on the margins of society, he will feel empowered to continue wrecking the lives of the powerless.



Criminalising children in the care system

June 2012

Criminalising the behaviour of working class children and feeding them into the Criminal Justice System is a practice that has existed for generations and is now responsible for Britain having the unenviable reputation of Europe's worst jailer of children in terms of the numbers imprisoned.

"State raised convicts" form a substantial part of the adult prison population and all share a common genealogy of Children's Homes, Approved Schools, Borstals and Young Offenders Institutions, and finally the long-term prison system. Many children who through no fault of their own enter the so-called Care System are percentage-wise seriously at risk of graduating into the Criminal Justice System and a life disfigured by institutionalisation and social exclusion.

There are currently 10,000 children in local authority care, their number doubling in the past four years, and the government's current "Austerity" agenda with its attack on state benefit and services will so deeply impoverish an already desperately poor section of the population that the number of children from this group entering the Care System is bound to increase significantly.

A leading magistrate and member of the Magistrates' Association Youth Courts Committee, Janis Cauthery, has openly condemned the care system for operating as a doorway into the penal system by regularly prosecuting children for behaviour such as pushing, shoving, and breaking crockery. Behaviour that in normal circumstances would simply be punished by parents is frequently being referred to the police by Children's Homes and children are being charged with criminal offences and placed before the criminal courts. Ms Cauthery has warned that children in care who receive criminal records for what is in reality normal adolescent behaviour are being drawn into a "vicious cycle" of crime, joblessness and imprisonment, that would go on to seriously affect the lives of their own children. Ms Cauthery said: "Many of the young people we see coming to court have never been in trouble before going into care. These young people are often charged with offences that have occurred within the care home, including damage (e.g. to a door, window, or crockery) and assault (often to

one of the care home staff involving pushing and shoving). This behaviour is mostly at the lower end of offending, and in a reasonable family environment would never be dealt with by the police or courts. We worry about these children being criminalised". She added: "Surely the home has a duty to try to help the young people and find other solutions rather than resorting to the courts for minor offences which, in a normal family environment, would not be thought of as offending behaviour". She went on to warn that the maltreatment of children in care might be the reason for the "anti-social behaviour" in the first place, which is what classically happens in total institutions when inmates resist and challenge brutal regimes.

Recent high-profile cases when neglect by social workers has seriously contributed to the deaths of children already at serious risk from abusive or drug-addicted parents has created a public mood and climate favourable to the placing into care of even more poor and disadvantaged children, and for many of them an entry route into the penal system. The massive empowerment of social workers in the wake of tragedies like the Baby P case to remove more children into care, often for contentious and contested reasons, makes it reasonable to ask the question if many of these children actually face even greater abuse and the risk of destroyed lives by being placed INTO care.

There is clearly a greater propensity on the part of staff supervising the behaviour of children in care to view any non-conformist or disruptive behaviour on the part of such children as potentially criminal and therefore requiring intervention by the police and courts at the earliest opportunity, which also absolves such staff of the responsibility of working closely and consistently with young people in dealing with such behaviour in an emotionally supportive setting. How much easier to just offload such "difficult" children onto the courts and Young Offender System, where an awful self-fulfilling prophecy then takes place along with the process of criminalisation and institutionalisation. Ultimately, the wider society reaps the cost and consequences of this abandonment of vulnerable children to the Criminal Justice System.

The unlawful detention of John Bowden

Sept 2012

In 1982 I was sentenced to life imprisonment, with the trial judge's recommendation that I should serve at least 25 years before the Parole Board would consider my release. Legally, therefore, the trial judge had authorised my detention until 2005, after which a judicial body, the Parole Board, would have to authorise my continued detention. In the case of prisoners sentenced to life in jail, they are in fact set "tariffs", which are the minimum and specific length of time they are to be detained in the interests of retribution and punishment. Once that "tariff" period of imprisonment has been served the continued detention of the lifer must be authorised by the Parole Board. That is the law. It is a law also underpinned by Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In June of 2011, SIX YEARS after the expiry of my "tariff" and the original trial judge's recommendation, the Parole Board finally reviewed my detention. After a brief hearing, they authorised my continued detention for a further twelve months. That twelve months has now passed and I remain in jail with no sign of when my imprisonment is likely to be "reviewed" again. I am therefore being detained unlawfully.

The average sentence of imprisonment for holding a person unlawfully against their will, usually referred to as hostage taking, is ten years.

The prison authorities have persuaded a compliant Parole Board that although I represent little or no risk to the wider community, (a prime criterion for releasing life sentence prisoners), I am however

a prisoner of strong "anti-authoritarian" beliefs and ideas centred on my relationship with the prison system, and fuelled by my contact with politically "subversive" groups on the outside. That primarily is why I remain imprisoned, and imprisoned unlawfully at the moment.

In 1982 I was sentenced to life imprisonment with two other men. Both were "model prisoners" and both were released almost 20 years ago. I remain in jail because of my activities in organising and protesting against a prison system that routinely and systematically abuses prisoners' basic human rights. Indeed, by continuing to detain me without proper legal authorisation, my own basic human rights are being breached.

If the prison authorities are determined to detain me, even unlawfully, unless I compromise my basic human integrity by never questioning or challenging their abuses of power, then I am prepared to die in here. Before surrendering what is vital to my humanity, my spirit of resistance, I would sooner surrender my very life and existence. In fact, true human survival in prison has a fairly straightforward root: A refusal to compromise, even where there is nothing to gain. So if my captors have to now break the law to continue imprisoning me, so be it.

*"You left me my lips.
You took away all the oceans and all the room.
You gave me my shoe-size with bars around it.
Where did it get you? Nowhere.
You left me my lips, and they shape words, even
in silence."*

Osip Mandelstom.



Interview with militant prisoner John Bowden

December 2012

John Bowden was arrested for murder in 1980 and sentenced to life imprisonment. After twelve years of institutionalised brutality and repression, he managed to escape in 1992 and was on the run from the police for a year and a half. He was recaptured in 1994 and has since been moved from prison to prison for constantly speaking out and acting against the prison industrial complex.

FHOI – It would seem a bit false to start an interview without knowing anything more about you than the brief introduction offers. Tell us a bit about your life and how you feel that may have affected who and where you are now.

JB – The circumstances and history of my life before prison are familiar to many long-term prisoners; a materially very poor childhood, often accentuated by racism, and an inclination to rebel and challenge rules. Then the long trek through brutal institutions; children's 'homes', secure-units, youth custody institutions, and finally maximum-security prisons. Most "violent offenders" are created and manufactured within youth custody institutions, where violence is used to maintain control and discipline, and used as an expression of power. Young offenders learn quickly that an ability and willingness to use violence determines one's place in the institutional pecking order, an order sanctified by those in charge. Before my politicisation in jail, and discovery of solidarity as a true weapon of authentic empowerment, I was a classic example of a violent state-raised offender, a creation of the system.

FHOI – Tell us about the routine of prison life. When do you wake-up, eat, exercise and sleep, and how does this affect the mentality and morale of yourself and your fellow prisoners?

JB – The daily routine of prison life is structured and designed to crush the human spirit and engender total and absolute obedience. Long-term prisoners, especially, experience what feels like an eternity of timeless, soul-destroying, rigidly-structured monotony, where one physically ages in a total vacuum of psychological stimulation and emotional experience, apart from anger, despair, and complete disempowerment. It is a man-made hell, and intrinsically designed to break and destroy any spirit of resistance. Personally, my

strategy for psychological survival is to recognise and interact with the official regime here as little as possible; although confined physically within the prison, I create my own personal daily routine and a small piece of my own space. I don't work in the jail workshops on principle, so my average day is usually spent working-out in the gym and reading and studying in my cell. Although in jail, my mind is free and unrestrained, and ultimately that's where the final struggle takes place – a struggle to maintain the freedom and integrity of one's mind.

FHOI – What are the current conditions of your imprisonment and the legal context surrounding your case? For instance, are you due a parole hearing in the near future, and if so, is anybody trying to prevent that?

JB – My current situation is one of impasse with the system. Last year the Parole Board reviewed my case and decided that I represented minimal risk to the community and should be transferred to an open prison in preparation for release. The prison system refused to comply with the Board's request, and basically said that unless the Board ordered my release, the prison authorities would decide if and when I would be transferred to an open jail, and at the moment there is no intention to allow me out of maximum security conditions because of my "anti-authoritarian" attitude and refusal to comply with whatever prison management dictates. The Parole Board's position is that I must be in an open jail before they consider my release, and so it's a vicious circle situation, with both sides, the prison system and the Parole Board, almost colluding to prevent my release. At some point, I will probably have to pursue a Judicial Review and take the case to the courts, and possibly even the European Court of Human Rights. In fact, I'm now being held under a form of preventative detention, which under European human rights law is illegal.

FHOI – Have you ever worked within the prisons you've been incarcerated in? If not, what are your reasons for refusal, but if yes, what have been your experiences of prison labour?

JB – I have very little experience of prison labour and on principle have often refused to co-operate

with it on the grounds that it amounts to forced slave labour, which under European and UN law is of course totally illegal. I have, however, often organised mass work-strikes in jail, (in Perth jail in 1994 we virtually closed the jail down for four days). So there is real potential to use the prison labour issue as an instrument for creating and mobilising real and effective solidarity in jail.

FHOI – What is your opinion on immediate issues such as a minimum wage for prisoners, or whether prisoners should get the vote? How do you see these struggles (whether they exist in action or not) within the context of the struggle against the prison system, state, and capital as a whole?

JB – I think we need to be very careful about supporting palliative reforms, like voting rights for prisoners and the minimum wage, because there's a danger of legitimizing prison as an institution. That is the danger of the whole prison reform enterprise, that it seeks to reform an institution and system that is intrinsically irreformable, and instead should be completely abolished. We also need to ask ourselves which reforms of the prison system undermine and weaken it, and which ultimately legitimize and consolidate it. Tactically, I'm certainly not opposed to liberal reforms of the prison system, but only as a means to weakening and subverting it, and definitely NOT as an attempt at making prisons "better" and more respectable places. What has our so-called "liberal democracy" fundamentally achieved for the poor and powerless in our society? And will allowing prisoners access to that sham REALLY improve their conditions and make jails less oppressive and inhumane? I think not.

FHOI – A lot has been written from radical perspectives on how society on the outside more and more resembles the prison. What is your personal or shared experience (with other prisoners) of this depiction?

JB – Prison has always existed as a microcosm of the wider society, and also as a concentrated laboratory of repression and social control. In so many ways, the society beyond jail is little more than an open prison, where people's lives are controlled and regulated by an omnipresent state. The unfortunate difference is of course that the majority of people on the outside in the wider society are unaware of their captivity, and so are mostly compliant with it, whilst in here we KNOW

we exist under the iron heel of the state, and even the most co-operative prisoner harbours a hatred of it. The state generally is becoming more oppressive and intrusive, more all-controlling, as the economic fabric of our capitalist, class-divided society disintegrates, and rich and poor become even more polarised and antagonistic. And whilst we in prison are daily confronted with even more repressive regimes, so the poor in the wider society will also experience greater repression. Ultimately, it's one struggle and one fight against a common state enemy, inside and outside prison.

FHOI – You have written a great deal on the purpose and development of the prison industry whilst inside. Why do you do this, and how do you imagine the information continues after leaving your hands?

JB – I have written much about the development of the prison industry because I think it's important to highlight the way prisons are being used increasingly as a source of profit and cheap enslaved labour. I hope that the information and perspective that I communicate is used to raise awareness and inform a debate and struggle.

FHOI – Finally, what has been the most inspiring or heart-warming moment of your time behind bars? My life in prison has mostly been hard and difficult, and a real struggle against overwhelming adversity. But there have been moments of victory and inspiration, when my faith in the strength and beauty of the human spirit has been deeply confirmed.

JB – I still vividly remember my first participation in an organized protest at Wormwood Scrubs prison way back in about 1981, and how it changed me deeply as a person. The guards in the jail had been routinely brutalising prisoners, and had created a regime based on absolute fear, even terror. A few days before the protest I was involved in a peaceful protest by prisoners in one wing of the jail, which had been crushed with savage violence and brutality, and its "ringleaders" beaten and batoned all the way to the punishment unit. An atmosphere of fear subsequently prevailed in the jail and the guards swaggered around with an almost omnipotent arrogance and confidence. When a prisoner on the exercise yard one day suggested we should stage a sit-down protest, in solidarity with the prisoners whose recent protest

had been so inhumanely crushed, I recall how a shiver of fear and apprehension ran through everyone on the yard. To protest in such a place was to invite terrible retribution, and yet all of us silently nodded and agreed to refuse to obey the order to leave the yard on the completion of the one hour exercise period. Initially, the guards grinned and smirked when we remained on the yard and refused to return to our cells, and then their mood and demeanour grew serious and more hostile as time passed. There were about 200 of us on the yard that day, men who usually associated only with their own groups or gangs, men from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, men who imbued with prison culture, usually treated each other with suspicion, hostility, or indifference.

On this day however, on that drab prison exercise yard, with fear and anticipation in the air, a unity developed that was unbreakable and absolute. We all recognised a common purpose and humanity, and we all knew that together we were strong and would prevail, whatever brutality was inflicted on us. The guards also saw and recognised our collective defiance, and fear replaced their arrogance. For the first time in my life, a life largely spent in brutal state institutions, I felt incredibly strong and empowered, and began to understand the dynamics of true struggle and solidarity, and it changed me irrevocably. Despite countless struggles and protests in jail since, the feelings of that day remain very precious and memorable.



State using ‘secret evidence’ to try and keep John Bowden behind bars

January 2013

It is relatively rare that prisoners, originally sentenced for non-political offences, become so politicised whilst in jail, that their release is opposed by the prison authorities for exactly that reason.

In the case of life sentence prisoners who have served the “tariff” part of their sentence (or the length of time the judiciary stipulates they should remain in jail), the legal criteria determining their release, or not, are clear and straightforward: Has the prisoner served a sufficient period of time to satisfy the interests of punishment and retribution? Does the prisoner remain a risk to the community? Can the prisoner be safely and effectively supervised in the community post-release?

Of course the prison authorities would never openly admit that apart from the above criteria, there is another “risk factor” that would prevent a life sentence prisoner’s release: Their identification with a progressive or radical political cause. Opposing a life sentence prisoner’s release, purely on the basis of their having exposed and organised against human rights abuse in the prison system, would of course make a complete mockery of the claim that, apart from its punishment function, prison also exists as a place of reform and rehabilitation, a place where supposedly brutal and anti-social criminals are made better people by a system administered by humane and just-minded individuals. The entire legitimacy of the prison system is based on the premise that, essentially it exists to protect the public from individuals who represent a threat, so denying that some life sentence prisoners are kept locked-up solely because they embrace an ideology that actually believes in a society and world free from violence, exploitation, and inequality, is imperative if the myths and fallacy used to justify the existence of prisons is to remain intact.

The prison system actually employs a whole legion of compliant ‘Criminal Justice’ system “professionals”, like social workers, probation officers, and psychologists to provide, if necessary, the politically neutral lexicon of “risk-factors” and

“Personality Disorder” to legitimize the continued imprisonment of life sentence prisoners, who in reality are viewed as politically motivated and likely to become politically involved on the outside if released. The narrative of my own life and experience from brutalised and violent young criminal to politically conscious prisoner activist, and how the prison system continues to respond to that, is illustrative of how that system actually considers politicised life sentence prisoners far, far more worthy of continued detention than those who might genuinely pose a risk to the community.

In 1982, I was sentenced, alongside two other men, to life in prison for the killing of a fourth man during a drunken party on a South London council estate. At the time, I was 25 years old, and a state-raised product of the care and “youth justice” system. The prison system that I entered in the early 1980’s was a barbaric and de-humanising place, where in terms of the treatment of prisoners, the rule of law stopped dead at the prison gate. My almost immediate response to prison repression was one of total defiance and resistance, that was met with physical and psychological brutality in the form of regular beatings, (in 1991 a civil court in Birmingham found that prison guards in the notorious Winson Green jail had subjected me to a sustained and gratuitous beating-up within minutes of my arrival at the jail), and many years held in almost clinical solitary confinement. Far from breaking my defiance, such inhuman treatment only deepened my determination to fight the system, and to use the only method truly effective in that regard – solidarity with other prisoners. As the years passed, I began to politically contextualise the struggle I was involved in against the prison system, and understand it as a part of a much wider struggle that transcended prison walls and essentially characterised all societies and places where the powerful brutalised and de-humanised the powerless.

The length of time that my original trial judge recommended I should remain in jail has now long passed, and yet I remain in a maximum security prison, and what can best be described

as a campaign by the prison system to keep me here intensifies with the approach of my second parole hearing in over 30 years.

It is essentially my contact with prisoner support groups on the outside, or “subversive” and even “terrorist” groups, as the prison authorities have defined and described them, that is now claimed in some prison system reports, as the main “Risk-Factor” preventing my release. Of course, if necessary, for the purpose of officially legitimising my continued imprisonment, for the convenience of the Parole Board, the usual array of morally compromised and corrupt social workers and prison-hired psychologists will attest to the fact that my enduring “anti-authoritarianism” is just a symptom of my psychopathy and continuing risk to the public. But if there are any doubts that I remain in prison, first and foremost, because of my efforts to expose the prison system for what it truly is, then a document sent to the Parole Board by the Scottish Prison Service on the 2nd December last year, lays them firmly to rest.

The document, an “intelligence report” compiled by the Security Department at Shotts Prison in Lanarkshire, was comprised of two parts, one that I was allowed to read, and another part described as “Non-Disclosure”, which means secret information that I would not be allowed access to. It is rare for “Non-Disclosure” intelligence reports to be submitted to the Parole Board, and it represents a total negation of any pretence of open and natural justice, very much like the secrecy employed to imprison “terrorist suspects” without legal due process. Obligated as it is to officially inform prisoners if “Non-Disclosure” evidence is to be used against them at parole hearings, I received a letter from an “Intelligence Manager” at Shotts Prison in late December of last year, informing me that a portion of “intelligence” on me was so detrimental to “public interest” if it was revealed that it had to be kept secret. I was, however, informed that the “intelligence” related to articles written by me that were critical of the prison system and then placed on political websites. One seriously wonders how the posting of articles and information on the internet that expose abuses of power by the prison system, would so endanger “public interest”, unless of course we replace “public interest” with the more precise “state interest”. The purpose behind the use of “Non-Disclosure” evidence in my case is obvious – To convey to the Parole Board the clear message that my current “risk” is not so much

about a danger to the public, but much more about my willingness to publicly expose the brutal nature of the prison system, with the assistance of “subversive groups” on the outside. The part of the “Intelligence Report” that I was allowed full access to confirms this.

Virtually every single one of the “entries” in the part of the report I was allowed access to focuses on what it describes as my “internet activity” and links to “subversive groups” on the outside:

“Bowden continues to leak information through a social networking site.”

“Website features articles relating to Bowden asking people to protest and fight for freedom.”

“Bowden continues to be involved in internet activity and there are plans to have a day of action in support of Bowden.”

“Intelligence provides that Bowden sends correspondence out of prison that is then posted on the internet.”

There is also a reference to what was described as my attempt to set up a debating society in the prison’s Education Department to “platform his current political views, which are focused on poverty.”

This is the evidence that the prison system claims justifies my continued detention after more than three decades in prison. Not a single entry in the “intelligence report” suggests I pose a genuine risk to the community or am likely to re-offend in a criminal way, and yet the Parole Board, a wholly white middle-class body, will inevitably rubber-stamp my continued imprisonment in compliance with the prison system’s wishes.

The two men who were originally imprisoned with me in 1982 were released almost twenty years ago, and I, as a direct result of my struggle to empower and organise prisoners in defence of their basic human rights, remain buried in a maximum security jail, probably until I die.

I will of course continue to write and distribute articles exposing and criticising the brutality of prison as a weapon of social control and ruling class violence, and also highlighting my own victimisation as a consequence of that.

Education is subversive in prison

February 2013

The role of teachers and educational tutors employed by local colleges and contracted to work within the prison system can be a conflicting and potentially very hazardous one. Empowering prisoners with knowledge in an environment intrinsically organised to disempower them can sometimes be a dangerous activity.

Unlike the function and role of most other types of staff working within prisons (guards, probation officers, social workers and psychologists etc.) that revolve around the containment, control and disempowerment of prisoners, teaching within jails usually involves a relationship with prisoners that is often inimical to that custody and control dimension of prisons. The uniformed guards who basically control and maintain 'discipline' in prisons instinctively understand the empowering influence of education on prisoners, which is essentially why they view civilian teachers working within prisons with suspicion and as an always potentially weak link in the chain of security and 'discipline' (control), whose loyalty is always in question. There is a very strong and all-pervading occupational culture amongst prison guards that views any attempt to empower and humanise those over whom they exact an absolute degree of power as just another step to a liberalism that undermines and weakens the basic function of the prison – punishment and absolute control. It's an attitude and culture that teachers working within prisons are confronted by every day, as well as a balance of institutional power firmly tipped in favour of the guards, who charged with maintaining the physical security of the prison will always inevitably label teachers who question their authority and power as a 'security risk', which is a sure way of getting them removed from the prison and recalled to a local college usually desperate to protect and continue its contract with the prison system.

Essentially, however, to usually poorly-educated prison guards it's the spectre of educated and empowered prisoners that disturbs and angers those responsible for maintaining and enforcing the 'good order and discipline' role of prisons, and in the mini totalitarian world of prison the aphorism "knowledge is power" is something clearly understood by those keeping prisoners in a constant condition of absolute powerlessness.

The education department, or Learning Centre at Shotts maximum-security prison in Lanarkshire, Scotland, was, before the arrival of Kate Hendry in the summer of 2011, a place of little inspiration or significance within the prison. The curriculum and number of subjects available was basic and poor, the classes poorly attended, most numbering less than a half-dozen prisoners, and teachers always mindful of their lowly position within the hierarchy of power within the prison. Education and classes were always peripheral to the main daily activity of the jail: enforced attendance in the cheap-labour work sheds where a more acceptable 'work ethic' could be instilled, the fundamental basis of prisoner 'rehabilitation' for those who have failed to accept their true place in class society. Classes were usually attended by those desperate to escape the mindless drudgery of the work sheds but unwilling to risk a 'disciplinary report' and the removal of even the most basic of 'privileges' by outwardly refusing to 'attend labour'. Classes were usually a last option before the punishment of the removal of recreation time with other prisoners or a spell in the very austere lock-down 'segregation unit'.

The function and purpose of the Learning Centre at Shotts had been reduced to achieving little more than the prison's statutory obligation to provide at least the basic rudiments of an education (the three Rs) to those prisoners who needed and asked for it.

Kate Hendry's impact on the Learning Centre at Shotts prison could be fairly described, from the first day, as seismic, simply because of her commitment and dedication to providing a high quality of education to prisoners, something her colleagues in the Learning Centre, apart from the odd, isolated individual, had long ago forsaken in the interests of just supervising a class, not rocking the boat, and continuing to draw a salary. Kate also pushed hard against the boundaries that restricted the development of the Learning Centre, the institutional culture of control and 'dynamic security', that which says prison security is not just about bars, walls, lock and keys, but also about the control of prisoners, both physically and psychologically, and the treating with suspicion of anyone who enters and works with the prison who might threaten or challenge that

concept of 'security'. Kate certainly did that with her uncompromising belief in and commitment to the educational and intellectual integrity of the Learning Centre, and her attempt to involve her chief employer, Motherwell College, far more closely in the activity and range of classes provided by the Learning Centre, thereby strengthening its independence from the restricting influence of the prison's management and their uniformed guards who believe prisoners should be watched, controlled and counted, not educated to a point where they might challenge the authority and legitimacy of the regime inflicted on them. An educated convict is a dangerous convict in the eyes of most jailers.

Her achievements within her first twelve months of working at the prison were considerable. She created a high-quality, award winning national prisoners' art magazine based at Shotts. She formed a prisoners/students representative forum with direct input into discussions and decisions influencing the management and quality of the Learning Centre. Virtually single-handedly she created a new library in the jail, where before there existed just a few shelves of pulp fiction and true crime books in an almost inaccessible area of the prison for prisoners. She organised a "Cuba Week", featuring Cuban music, art and films, and a talk from a representative of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. She was in the process of organising a "Writers in Prison" week, looking at the lives and writing of prisoners of conscience from around the world, before the events that were to lead to her exclusion from the prison unfolded. For the relatively brief period of time that she worked at the prison she created a dynamic in the Learning Centre that was empowering and inspiring, and revealed the true potential of education as a means of transforming the lives of prisoners in a fairly revolutionary way.

I had attended classes in the prison a short while before Kate began working there and had attempted to organise a 'debate' class, encouraging prisoners who attended to learn the skills and confidence of public speaking and debate, something difficult for individuals whose self-esteem has been virtually destroyed by years, and often lifetimes of brutal institutionalisation. The class became a sort of organisational nucleus for events like a large debate held in the prison chapel and attended by prisoners throughout the jail, all debating the topic, "Alternatives to

Prison", which a guard at the back of the chapel taking notes would subsequently write as an 'entry' in my security file presented to the parole board, claiming I had simply used the event "as a platform for his latest political views". Even before Kate's arrival in the Learning Centre at Shotts my presence and influence there was perceived as in some way 'subversive' and probably motivated by intention simply to create disruption and discontent within the jail.

My initial impression of Kate was unfortunately coloured by prejudice and suspicion and so I viewed her as a middle-class liberal probably driven by personal ambition, not the empowerment of my brother prisoners. I was wrong. I eventually collaborated with her on a number of projects within the Learning Centre that were probably viewed by the jail's administration as dangerously 'left-wing' and potentially threatening in terms of the effect they might have had on the intellectual confidence and increased self-esteem of prisoners. Over time the intellectual and political relationship I formed with Kate would be interpreted by some guards and jail managers at Shotts as a 'security risk' and justification for her removal from the prison. Two events probably became the catalysts for the process that would lead not only to her exclusion from the jail but a deliberate attempt by the administration to destroy her professionally and personally. The first was my openly confronting a delegation of Turkish prison officials being taken on a guided tour of the prison and its Learning Centre by the jail governor and an E.U. Official. Prior to their arrival Kate had made known her views about the visit and how it was legitimising and lending respectability to probably the most brutal prison system in the so-called developed world. She was therefore viewed as complicit in my attempt to embarrass the visitors by confronting them with their verified record of human rights abuse.

The second event was clearly the most critical one, revealing as it did something about Kate's true loyalty in the eyes of the prison guards and clearly marking her out for removal from the jail as a consequence. Guards supervising the Learning Centre had obviously been told to 'keep an eye' on certain prisoners who attended classes and restrict as much as possible their movement around the centre. I was in no doubt that I was one of the prisoners being more carefully watched.

One morning a young and particularly overzealous guard decided to interpret the instruction to 'keep an eye' on me as probably a license to put me on a disciplinary charge for whatever he liked. He decided to 'nick' me for smoking in the Centre's tea break area. Not a single one of the twenty or so prisoners also in the area at the time saw me smoking, neither did the guard's own colleague who was also carefully watching those prisoners, including me. The guard's action quickly created an atmosphere of anger amongst both prisoners and teachers in the Centre, although the later had long ago learned never to take a prisoner's side in a dispute with guards and risk professional suicide as far as continuing to work in any prison was concerned. Kate, however, was not so constrained and she directly approached the guard and expressed her unease about what appeared to be my victimisation. By appearing to openly take the side of a prisoner against a guard, Kate would provoke an immediate and total hardening of attitude against her by those who ran the prison. Her position wasn't helped by the official perception of the prisoner that she appeared to align herself with – a long-time "subversive" and "disruptive influence" in the prison.

I would subsequently be cleared of the charge the guard had invented against me by a prison disciplinary hearing, but for Kate the nightmare was about to begin.

The guard that Kate had confronted in my defence submitted a "security intelligence report" to the prison's security department alleging that Kate was involved in an "inappropriate relationship" with me and was therefore a "security risk". A prison manager then phoned Motherwell College and claimed that Kate had become "emotionally involved" with a prisoner and she was under suspicion. A manager at Motherwell College then phoned Kate at home late one night whilst her partner and children were present and informed her of the prison's allegation. She was also informed that when she returned to the jail the following day she would be 'interviewed' by a security manager about the allegation. She was duly summoned to the prison's security department the next day and in the presence of the Learning Centre manager warned that prison staff suspected her of becoming unprofessionally close with a prisoner and that "boundaries" had been crossed. She strenuously denied the

allegation and demanded to be shown what real evidence existed to support it. Of course there was none, so she was then warned that I was a "psychopathic" and "subversive" prisoner who was simply "manipulating" her for my own sinister and disruptive ends. She was then questioned about some of the projects we had organised in the Learning Centre and told that prison staff suspected my involvement in them suggested a "politically subversive" dimension to the activities that could impact on the "good order and discipline" of the prison. She was finally warned that I was being closely watched by the guards so her contact with me should be kept to the absolute minimum.

Of course the intention to remove Kate from the prison remained and a second guard submitted a "security intelligence report" on her, claiming she had taken me without permission to the prison library and spent some time there alone with me. This was a complete lie and related to a visit Kate, me and another prisoner had made to the old prison library to assess what books should be retained for the new library. She had obtained permission to take myself and the other prisoner to the old library which was situated in the busy administration area of the jail. The guard who submitted the security report against Kate was actually present with us in the library at the time.

On the 26th September 2012 a known prisoner informer told a member of the teaching staff that Kate had exchanged "love letters" with me and had witnessed us being intimate with each other. The teacher reported the information to the Learning Centre manager, who passed it on to senior prison management. The following day Kate was denied entry to the prison and Motherwell College told her that she would be placed before a college disciplinary hearing on a charge of "gross misconduct". I was also seen by two prison managers and informed that I was barred from the jail's Learning Centre and my behaviour was under investigation.

No "love letters" were ever discovered or produced as evidence against Kate or me, and when closely questioned by security staff at the prison all of the teaching staff said they had never witnessed or seen any inappropriate behaviour between myself and Kate, and neither had any of the guards who supervised the Learning Centre. The prison informer was revealed to be someone

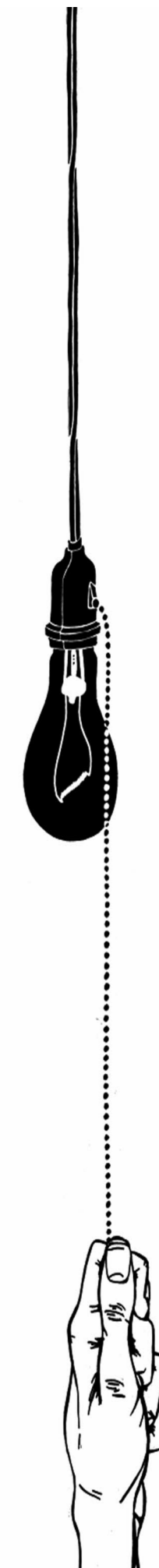
with a history of serious mental illness who had previously passed false information to prison staff.

Kate's treatment deeply angered the prisoners who attended the Learning Centre and who had benefited from her dedication and tireless commitment to prison education, so they organised and signed a petition in support of her and sent copies to the Scottish Prison Service H.Q. And the local M.P. For the area. The M.P. Pamela Nash, wrote to the governor of Shotts, Ian Whitehead, expressing concern about Kate's treatment and asking that the matter be fully and promptly investigated. She also asked that copies of her letter and Whitehead's response to it be made available to all those prisoners who had signed the petition. In his response Whitehead tried to absolve himself or his staff of any responsibility for Kate's removal from her post at the prison and instead shifted the blame and responsibility to Motherwell College, claiming they alone had decided to withdraw her from the prison, and the responsibility for any investigation subsequently lay with them.

A short while after that a story was leaked to a Scottish tabloid that claimed there had been a "love affair" between me and Kate, and inevitably I was described in the usual folk devil way. The purpose of those who passed the story to the tabloid was essentially to destroy Kate's professional and personal reputation.

Following Kate's sacking from the prison all her projects and work in the Learning Centre were closed down and eradicated. What happened to Kate Hendry absolutely epitomises the treatment of any member of staff working in prisons, especially in a 'non-custodial' role, who dares to relate to prisoners with humanity and solidarity. The position of civilian teachers is particularly hazardous in that regard because of the nature of their relationship with prisoners and the potentially empowering effect their work has on prisoners, something prison administrations would rather was purged from prisons for obvious reasons. In many long-term jails the education department or Learning Centre is the one place where its possible to effect a change in the relationship of power between prisoner and jailer, as well as returning some semblance of self-respect and intellectual integrity. That is a spectre that unnerves those employed to subjugate and

disempower prisoners, and their deepest wrath is reserved for those actively trying to make that spectre a living reality.



In the belly of the beast

March 2013

Fyoder Dostoevsky, the Russian novelist and sometimes political dissident, once wisely observed that a good barometer of the level and quality of a society's civilisation is the way it treats its prisoners, the most dis-empowered of all social groups.

There has of course always existed a sort of socially organic and dynamic relationship between prison society and the wider ordinary society beyond its walls, and the treatment of prisoners is usually an accurate reflection of the relationship of power that prevails between the state and ordinary working class people in the broader society. It is how political power is shaped and negotiated between the state and the poorer social groups on the outside that essentially determines the treatment of prisoners on the inside.

Prisons are concentrated microcosms of the wider society, reflecting its social and political climate and the balance of social forces that characterise its political culture. The more authoritarian and politically oppressive the society, the more brutal its treatment of prisoners is. The treatment and sometimes the very lives of prisoners is therefore critically dependent on the balance and alignment of power in society generally. For example, changes in state penal policy always tends to reflect shifts and changes in that relationship of power between the poor and powerless and the elites who constitute a ruling class, and it is always the more marginalised and demonised groups such as prisoners who feel and experience the repression more nakedly when society begins to shift even further to the right.

During the 1960s, 1970s and part of the early 1980s structures of established power in society were seriously challenged and the atmosphere and movement of radical social change became manifested within the prison system itself in prisoner protests, strikes and uprisings, and an organised movement of prisoner resistance that was recognised and supported on the outside by political activists, radical criminologists and prison abolitionists. The struggle of long-term prisoners was recognised by such groups as a legitimate political struggle against an institution originally and purposely created to punish the rebellious poor and as an integral part of an entire state

apparatus of repressive social control, along with the police and judiciary. Just as the heightened social struggle of groups like the organised working class in the broader society caused a shift and change in the balance of power, within the long-term prison system itself prisoners used the weapon of solidarity and self-organisation to collectively empower themselves as a group. This climate of increased struggle and freedom that permeated society generally at that time found expression within long-term prisons and even found limited reflection in the thinking of those administering them with the adoption of the one relatively liberal recommendation of the 1968 Mountbatten report concerning prison security: whilst Maximum-Security jails should make physical security as impregnable as possible the regimes operating in such institutions should also be made as relaxed as possible.

But just as changes in the balance of power can be to the advantage of progressive forces in society so it can shift the other way, and that is what happened in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s with the defeat of the organised working class movement and the apparently finale triumph of Neo-Liberal Capitalism (deregulation, free trade, unfettered profits and minimal state benefits – in short, capitalism at its most savage) and a Thatcherite ideology of "greed is good" and "there is no such thing as society". This found expression in the treatment of prisoners with the seizing back of the long-term prison regimes and their re-moulding into instruments of "Dynamic Security" and naked repression. The control and absolute disempowerment of long-term prisoners was conflated with the necessity of physical security now. And of course the economic principles of Neo-Liberal Capitalism also found expression in the prison system with "Market Reforms" and the flogging off of increasingly greater parts of it to multi-national private prison entrepreneurs. Prisoners would now be bought and sold as commodities and also as a source of forced cheap labour. They would also be taught and conditioned to know their true place in a massively unequal society, and prisons would revert to their original purpose of re-moulding working class "offenders" into obedient slaves of capital and those who own it. Towards this end the huge proliferation and empowerment of

behavioural psychologists in the prison system over the last decade is a symptom; the breaking and re-creating of prisoners psychologically in the image of a defeated and compliant working class on the outside has become once again the purpose and function of prisons. Rebellion and defiance in prisoners is now labelled "psychopathic" and "social risk-factors", which depending on how they are "addressed" will determine the length of time one spends behind bars, especially for the growing number of "recidivist offenders" serving indeterminate sentences for "public protection".

As what were once tight-knit working class communities on the outside fractured and were destroyed following the last high point of organised working class struggle during the 1984 miners strike, so the solidarity and unity of long-term prisoners was broken and withered away. The flooding of heroin and crack cocaine into now marginalised and poor communities created an almost alternative economy and was reflected in the changing nature of the prison population. What had been a generation of prisoners from strong working class communities imbued with a culture of solidarity, mutual support and a readiness to confront and challenge official authority, was increasingly replaced by prisoners with no memory of a time before the victory of Thatcherism and the dog eat dog culture it bred and encouraged. The increasing prevalence of drug-orientated crime found expression in the "Millennium convict", lacking in principle and with an acquiescent, submissive attitude towards their captors and a focused determination to do

whatever it takes to achieve an early release from prison.

The uprising at Strangeways prison in 1990 was the last significant expression of collective defiance and protest in a British jail and is unlikely ever to be repeated in such a form.

The current Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, with his Tory "Attack Dog" reputation and contempt for the human rights of prisoners, blended of course with his determination to sell-off virtually the whole of the criminal justice system to multi-national capitalism, is a perfect representation of the social and political climate outside prison. Deep economic crisis generates social fear and insecurity, and the scapegoating of marginalised and demonised groups who are used as a focus for public anger. Folk devils and moral panics are stock in trade for the tabloids, Tory politicians and far right groups when social climate is at its most receptive for easy, powerless targets. Grayling is pandering to what he imagines is the masses appetite for revenge, as long as its not focused on those actually responsible for the economic and social destruction of people's lives.

If, as Dostoevsky believed, the treatment of prisoners is an indicator of a society's level of civilisation then we seem to be entering another Dark Age, and of course history provides us with some chilling examples of what can happen when an apparently modern and developed society enters such a phase.



CSC & SIU: Marginalised and demonised civil death

October 2013

The Prison system's treatment of Kevan Thakrar, who has been kept in almost total solitary confinement for more than 5 years, has now become a straight forward and systematic attempt to destroy him completely, and in a social and political climate increasingly intolerant of and hostile to prisoners' human rights the implications of his treatment for the imprisoned generally are deeply disturbing. The fragrant and open contempt expressed by the Tory Home Secretary Teresa May and Justice Minister Chris Grayling for the Human Rights Act and the ability of Prisoners to gain access to the courts to defend their human rights finds brutal expression in the treatment of Prisoners like Kevan Thakrar who are pushed to the very edge of existence because of their determination to question and legitimately challenge the worst excesses of the prison system. In the totalitarian world of prison those who fight back are subjected to the most de-humanising and murderous treatment imaginable.

Imprisoned in 2007 for a crime he has consistently protested his innocence of, Kevan Thakrar, an intelligent, articulate, and determinedly litigious prisoner, was always inevitably going to be targeted by the prison system as a 'trouble maker' and a 'difficult' prisoner; his mixed race heritage would soon provide that targeting with an edge of racism.

In 2008 while on remand in Woodhill Prison in Milton Keynes, Kevan provoked the wrath of prison staff by repeatedly questioning their abuse of power on both his own behalf and that of other prisoners. On the 31st May 2008 a gang of prison officers decided to teach him a very direct and painful lesson in unquestionable compliance to their power, and beat him up in his cell. The incident, apart from the physical injuries, would leave him with the much more permanent mental scar of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Following the assault he immediately complained to the Thames Valley Police, who quite simply refused to investigate his complaint. The official attitude of disinterest and dismissal would characterise the response of both the senior staff at Woodhill prison and the Prisons and Probation Service Ombudsman to Kevan's complaint about being assaulted, until he pursued it as far as the Parliamentary Ombudsman, who,

focussing on the behaviour of the Prisons and Probation Service Ombudsman in relation to Kevan's complaint concluded it amounted to 'maladministration' and an 'injustice' to Kevan. The behaviour of the prison officers at Woodhill, however, went uninvestigated and unpunished. Kevan on the other hand was 'ghosted' around the prison system for a while before being moved to HMP Frankland prison in 2010. Frankland, a maximum security prison near Durham, had long had a reputation for staff racism and violence, and predictably Kevan would represent an absolute focus and target for their hatred and violence. It is probable that Kevan was deliberately sent there for exactly that reason.

Soon after his arrival at Frankland, Kevan was indeed subjected to racist abuse, which he confronted and complained about repeatedly. As at Woodhill, a gang of prison officers decided that more direct and painful methods were required to condition him into silent conformity, and so they entered his cell with such an intention, as they had done countless times before with 'difficult' prisoners. This time, however, Kevan fought back. Re-enforcements were summoned and he was 'restrained', i.e. brutally beaten. He was 'ghosted' out by the Governor to HMP Wakefield where he was starved and denied medical attention having to make do with a doctors peering through the bars of his cell as an examination. He was held in squalor in the 'ice box'. An isolation cell with a stone floor and a broken window for two weeks before being brought up before a review panel. Kevan relayed his story of torture to this panel regardless of the threats from the officers in the corridors on the way to the hearing. He was 'ghosted' out the next day to Woodhill Prison CSC.

He was then prosecuted for seriously assaulting the three prison officers who had initially entered his cell. At his subsequent trial at Newcastle Crown Court during October/November 2011 Kevan pleaded not guilty on the grounds that his response to the prison officers entering his cell at Frankland with obviously violent intention and purpose was conditioned by what had taken place at Woodhill, the cause of his PTSD. During the trial a Psychiatrist originally hired by the prosecution dramatically changed sides and

supported Kevan's PTSD defence. He was then acquitted by the jury, to the fury of the Prison Officers Association who initially threatened a private prosecution against Kevan before realising it might again reveal the violent and racist behaviour of its members at Frankland, and so no doubt decided to leave it to their members at the sharp edge of prison repression to extract a more personal revenge.

Despite the not guilty verdict and medical evidence that his Psychological condition required proper treatment as opposed to more brutality and violent repression, after his trial Kevan was moved to the brutal control unit, or 'Close Supervision Centre' (CSC), at Woodhill prison, the place of his initial beating up and where staff attitudes towards him were sure to be malevolent in the extreme.

Created in 1998, the so-called 'Close Supervision Centres' explicitly defined their purpose: to 'manage' the most 'disruptive' and 'difficult' prisoners in an extremely 'controlled environment'. In reality their intention was to be an overt weapon of punishment based behaviour modification based on a crude Pavlovian system of 'rewards and punishments' enforced by endemic staff violence and brutality. The necessary legitimacy for the CSC's is provided by prison system employed and corrupt behavioural psychologists, who in fact rarely ever visit the CSC's, even to assess the condition of the disproportionate number of seriously mentally ill prisoners sent there; they are employed simply to provide a cover of official legitimacy for the systematic abuse of human rights carried out against prisoners confined to the CSC's. Kevan described his psychological condition at the time he arrived in Woodhill Prison CSC: 'From all the abuse I have suffered from prison staff I now have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, resulting in severe anxiety, panic attacks, flash backs, nightmares and constant fear. I have gone through such bad spells that I have been unable to leave my bed for days. At the Woodhill CSC the psychological torture is mentally unbearable and worse than the physical kind. Orders are barked and failure to jump high enough leads to further abuse and often physical assaults. The behaviour modification skills the ex-army staff employs were learned in Afghanistan and Iraq. I am told that I require further clinical treatment for my PTSD but none exists here. I therefore live an unbearable life, just waiting for

the day I'm forced to end it, or the staff in prison to do it for me and cover it up by making it appear to be a suicide. Either way I am struggling and need some proper help and support. The worst thing is that I am innocent of the crime I was imprisoned for in the first place, for which I was sentenced to life with a judicial recommendation that I serve at least 35 years'.

Within the Woodhill CSC the various levels of supervision or their intensity (the basic level of 'supervision' involves the prisoner being held in clinical isolation, or solitary confinement, and denied all human contact, apart from that with a gang of prison officers clad in full riot gear whenever the prisoner's cell is unlocked for his one hour of statutory exercise, weather permitting, inside an outdoor cage) are determined by how the prisoner responds to the austere and cruel regime operating in the CSC's. Compliance is rewarded with a gradual and staged 'progression' to less punishing levels of 'supervision' and control, until one graduates eventually back to mainstream prison life. Defiance, on the other hand, is punished by a prolonged or permanent stay within the most repressive conditions. Kevan, predictably, has remained on a 'basic regime' since his arrival in the Woodhill CSC and it was never intended that he would ever be 'progressed' from it. Most of the prisoners who share this 'level of supervision' with Kevan within the CSC suffer with severe mental illness, confirmed by the Operational Manager of the Woodhill CSC, Claire Hodson, and the noise level (screaming, door banging wrecking of cells) fills and penetrates the self-enclosed unit 24 hours a day. Kevan endured this hellish place for over two years by mentally focussing on legal actions challenging and trying to hold the prison system legally accountable for his treatment and that of all prisoners held within the CSC's.

Finally in June 2013 those managing the CSC tired of Kevan's litigious war and informed him that he would be transferred out of the CSC system via an ordinary segregation unit at Manchester Prison. Instead he was moved to a hastily constructed 'Specialist Intervention Unit' at Manchester and subjected to an even worse regime of crude intimidation and open hatred. Manchester Prison, or Strangeways as it was known prior to the riot there in 1990, was always infamous for its staff brutality and the wide scale membership of its staff to far-right racist groups

like the National Front and British National Party. In such a place and environment Kevan's treatment became inhumane and his access to the courts to challenge it more restricted; right wing Justice Secretary Chris Grayling was preparing legislation to make it increasingly difficult for prisoners to be allowed legal aid to challenge human rights abuses through the courts, litigation that he described as 'unnecessary' and 'frivolous'. In such a total vacuum of legal rights the behaviour of the prison system and those operating the 'Specialist Intervention Unit' at Manchester Prison is unaccountable and beyond the law, and prisoners like Kevan are left at its mercy. In the face of such unrestrained cruelty and abuse Kevan's psychological condition worsened and deteriorated, as would the strongest and most resilient human beings subjected to such unremitting repression and focussed brutality. His visitors, also subjected to the barely concealed contempt by those closely 'supervising' Kevan's visits, say that he is barely hanging on psychologically and that his physical appearance has changed radically, suggesting

neglect and a denial of basic facilities. His family and friends have written to MP's, the Governor of Manchester Prison, The Justice Minister and the Inspectorate of Prisons, complaining about Kevan's treatment and the obvious abuse of his human rights, and all have responded, if at all, with indifference and bureaucratic fobbing-off.

There are populations and groups in our society that are so marginalised and demonised, like prisoners, that they exist in a condition of civil death. The reality is that if the state is allowed to deny any group in society, even prisoners, basic human rights then the implications of the whole of that society are real and dangerous. Those who profess a commitment to justice and equality, even for the most marginalised and oppressed of groups, therefore should recognise the absolute importance of supporting the struggle of prisoners like Kevan Thakrar and protesting on his behalf. Unless a line is drawn even within places of extreme repression that repression will eventually radiate outwards and reach everyone.



John Bowden's recent parole hearing

November 2013

On November 6th 2013 the Parole Board for England and Wales carried out its statutory obligation to review my continued detention after more than three decades in prison and many years beyond what the judiciary originally recommended I should serve in jail. Following an earlier parole hearing in May 2011 the board had recommended my transfer to an open prison in preparation for my release 12 months hence.

Almost three years later I remain in a maximum-security prison because of what the prison system and a criminal justice system social worker claim is my politicised anti-authoritarian attitude and "rigid belief system" that is antipathetic to my being properly supervised outside a custodial setting. No one who gave evidence at the parole hearing, even representatives of the prison system, claimed that I represented any sort of threat or risk to the community, the usual reason or criterion for the continued detention of a life sentence prisoner beyond what the judiciary had originally recommended as the appropriate length of time they should serve in jail. In my case the "interest of retribution" had long been served or satisfied and I continue to be detained because of what is viewed and defined as a "rigid" political belief system formed after 30 years of resisting and confronting abuses of power by the prison system. At the recent parole hearing reference was also made to what was described as my "internet activity", my writing and distributing articles critical of the prison system through a political group on the outside.

A prison officer, Marten Whiteman, who gave evidence at the hearing, claimed that my attempt to publicly expose abuses of power by the prison system was an explicit attempt to "intimidate" and frighten prison staff such as himself. Whiteman, who routinely opposes the release of life sentence prisoners at parole hearings that he manages and administers within Shotts prison, claimed that my use of and access to the internet through radical groups on the outside represented little more than a weapon of subversion to undermine the power and authority of people like himself. His evidence was treated sympathetically by a parole board now focused on legitimising and rubber stamping my continued imprisonment. When asked by my lawyer why a recommendation made

by the parole board in 2011 that I be transferred to an open jail in preparation for release was completely ignored by the administration at Shotts prison, Whiteman replied that following that recommendation the "programs Dept" at the prison, of which he is the manager, decided that I "qualified" for a lengthy "anti-violence" behaviour-modification programme; my refusal to co-operate with the programme, he claimed, was the reason why I remained in maximum-security conditions. When I asked why I "qualified" for such a programme considering that I had exhibited or shown no violent behaviour in over 20 years, during which I had worked outside of prison in community-based projects for the vulnerable and disadvantaged, Whiteman claimed to have no idea. When pressed to explain the decision of the "Programmes Dept" and what evidence it had considered to justify my qualification for such a programme, Whiteman said he couldn't remember.

Two days after the parole hearing a prisoner who worked in the re-cycling and disposal facility at the prison retrieved a bundle of documents sent for destruction from the "Programmes Dept". The consisted of downloaded articles from the internet written by me and a profile describing me as a "militant prisoner". This, it would seem, was the evidence considered by the "Programmes Dept" who then arbitrarily used the system of programmes and behaviour-modification courses as a justification to prolong my imprisonment. Another critical witness at the parole hearing was a community-based criminal justice system worker authorised to supervise me in the event of my release. Brendan Barnett co-ordinated the opposition to my release in his role as committed "public protection officer", whilst admitting that my actual risk to the public was minimal or none-existent. His reason for opposing my release was his stated belief that I would be difficult to supervise in the community because of my "entrenched and rigid anti-authoritarian attitude". When asked by my lawyer about significant lies and distortions of truth in his report to the parole board, he simply smiled.

The board itself, chaired by a senior judge, remained silent when confronted by the lies in Barnetts report. Like Whiteman, Barnett claimed

my writing and distributing articles critical of the prison and criminal justice system was little more than an attempt to "intimidate" people such as himself. As evidence of my ideologically-driven contempt for official authority he produced an article recently written by me and distributed via the internet entitled "Neo-Liberalism and Prisons" and then quotes the following paragraph: "The change of philosophy and policy as far as the criminal justice system is concerned is especially reflected in the treatment of those subject to judicial supervision orders and conditions of parole, and the changing role of probation officers and criminal social workers from a "client-cantered" and rehabilitative approach to one far more focused on strict supervision and "public protection". Occupations that were once guided to a certain extent by the rehabilitate ideal have now become little more than an extension of the police and prison system, and abandoning any vision of positively reforming and socially reintegrating the "offender" now instead prioritise punishment, social isolation and stringent supervision. This replacement of the rehabilitative model with a more managerialist one enforcing evermore "robust" and invasive conditions of parole and supervision renders it's subjects increasingly less as prisoners being returned to freedom and more as ones waiting to be returned to prison for technical breaches of licence conditions. As with all things neo-liberal the increased focus on the strict supervision and surveillance of ex-prisoners and "offenders" draws it's inspiration from the U.S. and it's parole system with a total focus on the straight forward policing of parolees. It's also a form of supervision increasingly extended into the lives of the poor generally, especially those dependent on welfare and state benefits, the social group from which prisoners are disproportionately drawn. In a age of economic deregulation the marginality and inequality of the poor has increased to such an extent that they are now almost demonised and subject to the same penal-like supervision as ex-convicts." This, Barnett claimed, was evidence of my contempt for any form of post-release supervision and a compelling reason why I should be detained in prison indefinitely. The parole Board appeared to agree with him.

There were other voices that were not heard at the parole hearing, like Kate Hendry, a lecturer and teacher at the prisons education dept. In May of 2012 she submitted a report to the Parole Board

in which she wrote: "In the 12 years that I have worked in prisons, I have never met someone so transformed while in prison, from criminal to citizen as John Bowden. His experience of imprisonment has enabled him to develop a more social and humane perspective; a rare achievement indeed. His energetic but gentle approach in assisting in the education of other prisoners, given his long imprisonment, is a testimony to his successful struggle to retain his humanity in the service of others. He is a generous and thoughtful person who has become a invaluable presence to staff and students alike". Following her submitting that report to the Parole Board she was dismissed from her job in the prison on the grounds that she had become "inappropriately close" to me and was therefore a "potential security risk" in the prison. Her voice, in any case, would have been marginalised at the parole hearing, the agenda of which was obviously to construct a case against my release by any means necessary.

Towards that end the "evidence" of Whiteman and Barnett, no matter how dishonest and motivated by a desire to silence and crush me, held sway for an inherently conservative and risk obsessed Parole Board whose collective attitude was encapsulated in a question asked by one of them during the hearing: "Why haven't you kept your head down and did all that was asked of you, like most other life sentence prisoners?" Absolute, unquestioning conformity within a prison system characterised by one of the worst records of human rights abuses in Europe is, it seems the sole prerequisite for release of life sentence prisoners on Britain.

Inevitably the formal decision of the Parole Board when it is delivered soon will authorise my continued and indefinite detention on the grounds that by my attitude and inclination I remain a "difficult" and "confrontational" prisoner who although not a risk or threat to society doesn't quite know his place as someone with absolutely no human rights or otherwise that the state is obliged to recognise or acknowledge. My continued imprisonment with increasingly less hope of release and freedom will do nothing to diminish my determination to continue speaking out with political integrity and courage.

Victimisation Continues - John Bowden's Parole Hearing January 2014

The statutory role and duty of the Parole Board in relation to reviewing the continued imprisonment of those prisoners serving indeterminate or life sentences and who remain in jail far beyond the length of time originally recommended by the courts in "the interest of retribution" is critically important if an abuse of executive power in the form of unlawful detention is to be prevented.

As a system of punishment indeterminate sentences, when not the courts but the prison system and what is in effect a hidden state decide when or if a prisoner is ever to be released, is inherently vulnerable to abuse, especially when right-wing politicians and an increasingly brutal prison system have a determining influence on how long such prisoners are detained. When the state itself assumes the power to decide how long someone should remain in jail then the concept of "public protection" is often used to justify what is in reality arbitrary and unlawful imprisonment. The Parole Board exists, supposedly, as a quasi-judicial influence to prevent such an abuse of power and objectively assess the continuing public risk of indeterminately sentenced prisoners; in that regard the Parole Board, a state appointed body, has failed miserably and is clearly unfit for purpose.

An increasingly growing number of "post-tariff" lifers (prisoners who remain imprisoned long beyond the length of time originally stipulated by the judiciary) numbering thousands continue to be warehoused in the prison system not because they represent a genuine risk or threat to the community but rather because they are either hostages to an increasingly repressive state or because of their "difficult relationship" with a prison system becoming ever more punitive and inhuman. And the Parole Board colludes in their unlawful imprisonment by simply rubber-stamping and thereby legitimising their imprisonment. A recently retired chairperson of the Parole Board has now criticised the board for what he described as it's routine inclination to deny the release of life sentence prisoners thereby creating a prison overcrowding problem that would eventually and inevitably find expression in despair and anger-fuelled unrest.

In mid-November 2013 the Parole Board delivered

it's judgment on my continued detention after 32 years in jail. Significantly, there was no claim that I represented a risk to the community or hadn't changed fundamentally after three decades in prison; the panel at my hearing on the 6th November described me as an "articulate and intelligent man" whose life prior to imprisonment "was dominated by a criminal sub-culture of violence. That person no longer exists. You discovered a cause in prison for which you were willing to fight, namely against injustice, or what you perceived to be injustice, in the penal system. Your cause was on the part of all prisoners, not just yourself. This has caused you to be labeled as militant or subversive, and your complaints have made you a target of the prison system, or so you believe". The judgment then focuses it's criticism on the prison authorities and "makes the observation that it is alarmed that the conclusions of an earlier parole hearing in 2011 (that I be moved to an open jail in preparation for release) were so easily and quickly brushed aside". It also condemns the prison system for manufacturing justifications to keep me confined in maximum-security conditions, like deciding I required a lengthy "violence prevention" behaviour-modification programme, and then ignoring a request from the Parole Board for an explanation as to exactly why I required such a programme, thereby treating the authority of the board with obvious contempt. The judgment describes it in the following way: "Unsurprisingly you were taken aback by the decision of the management and psychology dept at Shotts prison that you would be required to complete a violence prevention programme as a condition for your transfer to less secure conditions. As a result of that decision the Parole Board issued a direction requiring the psychology dept at Shotts jail to provide information as to who attended the meeting that decided you required such a programme and what risk assessment tools were used to assess you for such a programme. The information subsequently provided to the board seems not to comply except in perhaps very superficial terms with that direction. The persons who attended the meeting that decided you must complete the programme are not identified, except for Marc Kozlowski, a senior psychologist at Shotts jail, who chaired the meeting. At your parole hearing in November of 2013 he told the panel that he

had not recommended the programme but the decision had emerged from the meeting. Marc Kozlowski was unable to give any cogent evidence upon which the meeting had made its decision. You could be forgiven for thinking it was rather an arbitrary and illogical decision. So, whilst this Parole Board would not presume to criticise the Scottish Prison Service, looking at this decision from your point of view your anticipated progress towards release has been brought to a halt by a process which seems to lack any transparency that you must do a programme for which there is little or no supporting evidence provided. Combined with the deeply unsatisfactory compliance by the Scottish Prison Service with the direction from the Parole Board concerning this matter it is not surprising that you are dispirited and angry". And then the judgment turns its fire on me, criticising me for having the temerity to complain, justified or not, about my treatment when it was clearly not my place as a mere prisoner to do so. This disapproval of my tendency to complain permeates the whole judgment and is clearly flagged-up as a risk factor; "You have set your cause of release back by your intransigence, no matter how superficially justified and understandable your complaints", "The Board might have some sympathy with you because of the lack of progress by the prison system in your case, the fact remains, however, that as a life sentence prisoner you have to accept that the prison system has operational control over you. You may or may not like the decisions that are taken but you have no realistic alternative but to accept them. Had you thought of yourself and prioritised your quest for freedom without seeking to make an issue of it you could have completed the violence prevention programme by now whether you felt you needed it or not". So although the decision that I required a violence-prevention programme "lacked transparency and nobody outside the process knows on what basis and upon what evidence the decision was based" (the words of the Parole Board in their judgment) I should nevertheless have viewed the programme as an obedience test to be passed as an absolute condition of my progression towards my eventual release. The judgment continues in such a way: "You seem to have lost sight of the fact that you need to re-establish trust and have a working relationship with those supervising you", "things have now reached a nadir and something will have to change, probably on both sides, but you must remember that you have the greater

responsibility in that regard. If you are really concerned about your freedom you must think of what is best and most productive for you", as opposed to what is right and just. So although the board have clearly identified an abuse of power on the part of the administration at Shotts prison in manufacturing dubious justifications for obstructing a recommendation made over two years ago that I be transferred to an open prison, by complaining I must bear the responsibility and consequences for that abuse of power.

If my tendency to complain about my treatment makes my continued imprisonment self-afflicted then my use of the internet through political supporters on the outside renders me a lost cause completely in terms of the sympathy of the Parole Board, who view such an activity in highlighting abuses of power by the system the worst crime of all on my part and the most damning "risk-factor" of all preventing my release. So instead of keeping my head firmly down and conforming unquestioningly, no matter how wrong and unfair my treatment, I had sought to highlight it and place it in the wider political context of prison/state abuse of power – something a life sentence prisoner wholly dependent on the state for a release date simply should not do. The Board then tries to undermine the integrity of my use of the internet and the information I have placed on it. Part of the evidence presented against my release was a dossier given to the Parole Board by a community-based Criminal Justice Social Worker, Brendan Barnett, which contained downloaded articles of mine from various anarchist and radical websites describing abuses of power by system-hired individuals like Barnett. The Board responded to the articles thus: "Your lawyer in her finale submission to the Parole Board seemed to be of the view that because not many questions had been asked about your use of the internet it was improper to refer to it. With great respect, the articles were in the Parole dossier for all to see and read and their contents speaks for itself". "The Parole Board simply makes the point, in relation to material placed on the internet, that whilst nobody should be stopped from, and indeed nobody must be prevented from exercising his or her right to criticise judgments with which he or she disagrees, that must be within limits imposed by the law of libel and should not be inflammatory. Your articles are based on the view that you have formed of the prison system and how it is determined by hook or crook to

prevent your release. The complaints you made against individuals in the prison and criminal justice system were investigated by complaint procedures in those systems and found to be wanting. This you regard as a case of closing of ranks by the prison and criminal justice system". Any prisoner who has ever attempted to access internal prison complaint procedures as a means of achieving justice quickly learns the futility of expecting prison staff to investigate one another with anything approaching credibility, despite what a middle-class Parole Board might imagine.

Brendan Barnett, the criminal justice system social worker employed by Edinburgh City Council, who had so assiduously downloaded and presented to the Parole Board a dossier of my articles played a pivotal role in preventing my release, exploiting his position as the person charged with the critically important responsibility of "supervising" me in the community should I be released. Barnett's priorities in terms of what sort of information the Parole Board should be provided with when considering my release became apparent at the parole hearing. He produced one of my articles (Neo-Liberalism and Prisons) that he said he had downloaded the previous evening and insisted he be permitted to read it to the parole panel because it reflected, he claimed, my absolute and total antipathy regarding the penal-like supervision of ex-prisoners in the community. The parole judgment describes the attempt of the panel to elicit from Barnett anything resembling an actual social worker report containing a plan for my post-release supervision: "Mr Barnett, for some reason, had not completed a structured risk-assessment plan (despite having two years in which to do it) but in an effort to be helpful had drafted a rough plan. The panel were not shown this and in any event are not overly impressed by "rough guides" done on the back of an envelope". Barnett had, however, been extremely efficient in other ways. Asked by the Parole Board in 2011 to put in place a post-release supervision plan that would include accommodation, Barnett persuaded Edinburgh City Council, his employer, to refuse me any form of accommodation on the grounds that I had never been a legal resident of that city; he persuaded the management committee of the only probation hostel in Edinburgh to refuse me a place on the grounds that I might write negative articles about the hostel and place them on the internet; he wrote to Scottish Prison Service H.Q. and asked them

to organise my transfer to the English Prison System on the grounds that I had neither family or friends in Scotland, which he knew to be untrue. He had throughout all of this closely "liaised" with a senior prison officer at Shotts prison who, coincidentally or not, was manager of the jail's psychology programmes dept) and was clearly determined to co-ordinate the attempt to keep me in prison. When asked directly by the Parole Board if he considered it safe to release me he replied, "Definitely not", and added that if ever I was released it must only be under the most stringent and repressive conditions: placed into a "closely supervised" hostel, made subject to curfews, electronically tagged, monitored by an entire team of social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and police, and immediately recalled to jail if suspected of being associated with "pro-criminal elements or political activists". The implied message was obvious: for both financial and practical reasons it would be more convenient just to keep me locked-up. Despite its mild criticism of Barnett's inability to write a structured and proper post-release management plan for me, as opposed to scribbling something on the back on an envelope, the Parole Board treated Barnett and his "evidence" most respectfully, despite its obvious discomfort that two years earlier he had written bizarre and obvious lies in a report to the board about me. In that report he changed completely the narrative of my original crime, despite obviously having read police and judicial records and reports, and claimed that what had been a senseless and drunken killing by three petty-criminals of another individual on the margins of South London society, had in fact been a crime motivated by racism and homophobia; which is somewhat odd considering that the defendants were first and second generation Irishmen and the victim was a white heterosexual second-generation Irishman. Worst still, Barnett claimed that in his summing up the trial judge had explicitly acknowledged the racist, homophobic dimension to the offence; the transcript of the judges summing-up revealed nothing of the kind. Barnett had invented the story and committed it to an official parole report. This begs the question of how or why someone who works for an organisation like Edinburgh Criminal Justices could possibly imagine there wouldn't be obvious consequences to writing such obvious and easily provable lies? I would soon discover the basis of Barnett's confidence. I would spend two years pursuing my complaint against Barnett's lies at

every level of Edinburgh City Council and at each turn was confronted by disinterest, contempt and an impenetrable closing of ranks. Finally my complaint was pursued to the highest level of the council at the city chambers, who informed me their social work complaints committee was currently in the process of being "re-organised" and they would give no time scale for when my complaint might be heard. I've heard nothing from them since. The parole judgment rather guardedly deals with Barnett's lies in the following way: "Brendan Barnett produced a report that you found offensive. He wrote that your crime was motivated by racism and homophobia. The simplest way of dealing with this would have been to approach Mr Barnett. If you were not satisfied with his response you could have taken it further. Instead you resorted to the internet – the published articles appear in the dossier and accuse Mr Barnett of telling blatant lies to sabotage your release". "You used the internet to voice your strident opinions and vent your spleen against Mr Barnett. Unsurprisingly, he thought you were unsupervisable at the moment". Not a single word about the glaringly obvious lies in Barnett's report, not a question about something that went right to the heart of Barnett's integrity, or lack of it. Yet again, their fire is focused on me for having the temerity to complain and seek to expose Barnett's lies. Indeed, Barnett is treated as the victim in all this: "The vitriolic personal attacks on people like Mr Barnett are both unpleasant and worrying for their families and their future". And then the implied threat: "Any future social worker who now knows that you will resort to common abuse and using the internet to air complaints will think long and hard before accepting the job of trying to supervise you.

Then the judgment makes a remarkable contradiction of fact. It accuses me of wrongly informing prison management that in 2011 the Parole Board had favoured my transfer back to an open prison and had asked the prison system to organise it. The current judgment says I had made an "error" because the Parole Board "has no power to interfere or seek to interfere in prison operational matters, such as a transfer to open conditions, which are exclusively for the Scottish Prison system". This is an incredible claim to make considering that earlier in the same judgment the board had accused the Scottish Prison System of simply "brushing aside" the board's request in 2011 that I be transferred to an open prison.

Obviously conscious of its sudden shift of position the Board decides to put the matter to bed by concluding "Unfortunately of course an open jail is not an option at the moment, nor is it likely to be in the future if both sides to this impasse remain obdurate in their stances". It then effectively washes its hands of the situation by making no recommendations regarding a progression plan for me, nor does it even give a time when my sentence would next be reviewed. It simply leaves it to the prison system to decide when I have been sufficiently tamed in thought and attitude to be wheeled before them again.

Britain currently has a greater population of life sentence prisoners than all the other European countries combined and a prison population that in terms of sentence length now resembles the U.S. Thousands of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences (not all for serious offences of violence) are detained long beyond the "retribution" part of their sentence, or "tariff", usually because of the inability of the prison system to "process" such a dramatically increased population of lifers; the populist "Indefinite Detention for Public Protection" ("two strikes and you're out") law resulted in a massive growth in the population of life sentence prisoners, now numbering some 13000. Whilst the current Parole Board mentality prevails, informed and influenced as it is by an increasingly punitive and intolerant political climate, the proportion of prisoners with little realistic hope of release will continue to increase and fester, and combined with a hardening of repression in prison as right-wing Justice Secretary Chris Grayling "gets tough" with prisoners, the ingredients are being sown for serious and major unrest within the prison system. The Parole Board has much to thank itself for.



Americanisation of the British Criminal Justice System February 2014

A recent Government announcement that it was considering introducing U.S. style prison sentences like a hundred years custody for the most serious offences is on one level a straightforward attempt to undermine a recent European Court of Human Rights ruling that life sentence prisoners should be given some hope that their sentences will be reviewed before they die, and on another level evidence that the Americanisation of the British criminal justice system continues to increase and deepen.

Apart from the probable introduction of prison sentences that are in effect a slow form of capital punishment, an American penology has characterised the treatment of British prisoners for quite some time in the form of the treatment model with its psychology-based programmes and courses designed and inspired by Canadian and U.S. ideologies regarding "offending behaviour", which is attributed not so much to social and environmental causes but more the individual pathology of the "offender". So the fact that the prison population is drawn disproportionately from the poorest and most disadvantaged group in society is of absolutely no significance and instead a crude behaviourist notion prevails that providing prisoners can be re-socialised into behaving in a "normal" way then "offending behaviour" can be exorcised from their thinking before they're released back into the same desperate economic and social circumstances.

Predictably, the "treatment model" with its programmes and courses has had absolutely no appreciable effect on recidivism rates.

As in American prisons, prison-hired psychologists in Britain have carved out a veritable industry for themselves in the prison system by subscribing to the belief that inequality, disadvantage and poverty have absolutely nothing to do with why most people end up in prison and instead everything to do with individual pathology in the form of inherent personality disorders and an inability to distinguish right from wrong. And again as in the U.S. prison psychologists in Britain have now become an integral part of the system of control and repression in prisons, legitimising it with a language and narrative of "treatment"

and addressing prisoner's "needs and risks". So entrenched have psychologists now become in the prison system that, like their American counterparts, they often willingly assist in the use of the worst forms of repression against prisoners labelled the most "difficult" and "unmanageable".

American prison officials penchant for euphemisms to disguise the reality of its worst practices and forms of punishment, such as "special management units" where in fact prisoners are clinically isolated and psychologically brutalised, is a tendency that finds expression in British prisons also now. "Close Supervision Units" and "Intensive Intervention Units", overseen and managed by both jail managers and psychologists, are also places where "difficult" prisoners are subjected to extreme punishment and a denial of basic human rights, often to the extent where many are driven to insanity.

The American "treatment model" of prisons probably finds its most extreme expression in the U.K. Prison system in the form of the "Dangerous Personality Disorder Units" (DPDU) created and overseen by psychologists from the psychopath-spotter school of psychology that defines all "anti-social" behaviour on the part of the least powerful and wealthy as symptomatic of psychopathy. In the totalitarian world of prison either fighting the system or confronting the institutionalised abuse of power that prevails there is sufficient to have oneself labelled a "psychopath" by psychologists anchored mind, body and soul to the prison system. In the case of life sentence prisoners such psychologists now have the power to decide if they're sufficiently risk-free to be released.

It is not just within the prison system that the American influence is apparent, it's also recognizable in the radically changed role of probation officers and criminal justice system social workers from what was traditionally "client-centred" liberal occupations to an overtly "public protection" centred extension of the police and prison system. Now a closer equivalent of the American parole officer, probation officers and criminal justice system social workers in the U.K. now see their role as one of policing parolees or "offenders" on supervision orders and returning them to jail for the slightest technical breach of

their licence conditions. The massive increase in the use of community supervision orders as a form of social control has created a veritable ghetto of marginalised people in poorer communities who exist constantly in the shadow of imprisonment and the omnipotent power of their supervision officers. This mirrors what has been taking place in some U.S. states as the global economic crisis has virtually eradicated legitimate employment in poor communities and replaced it with an alternative economy of illegal drugs, resulting in the almost mass criminalisation of young working class men, especially those from poor Afro-American communities. In such U.S. states and deprived communities prisons now replace factories where the new underclass are increasingly concentrated and forced to work as cheap labour for multinational private security corporations that now own and operate a significant portion of the American prison system. This new prison industrial complex is laying roots in the U.K. too and it is from the poorest de-industrialised communities that it draws its sources of cheap labour and human commodities.

This U.S. cultural influence on the criminal justice system is far greater in the U.K. than anywhere else in Europe, which accounts for it having the largest prison population in Europe and the longest prison sentences. It is also forever vulnerable to the American style prison riot when despair and hopelessness overshadows prisoners lives completely and there is essentially nothing left to lose. As a model of either justice or retribution the American criminal justice system is riddled with corruption and failure, and yet Britain slavishly attempts to imitate it in its quest to achieve absolute social control at a time when the lives of the poor are being made increasingly unendurable and society continues to fracture and polarise.



Letter from John about his parole application

March 2014

Imprisonment as a human experience probably has its closest parallel in slavery. People in prison are systematically stripped of basic human dignity and bodily integrity and reduced to the condition of caged animals. In terms of their relationship with the state and those who directly oversee and enforce their captivity prisoners are disempowered to the extent where even their most elemental of human rights are frequently treated with contempt and are in reality non-existent. By its very nature and intrinsic purpose imprisonment denies the imprisoned their very humanity. As a system and institution prison is incapable of being reformed and it most definitely doesn't "rehabilitate" those held within it, and neither is it intended to; how can degrading and humiliating a human being improve the condition of their minds and characters. How can imprisoning and de-socialising someone make them more able and inclined to integrate back into "normal" society when they've emerged from such a brutalising and alienating experience? Prisons prime purpose is to punish and suppress and enforce social and political control – it is nothing more than a weapon of the state. It derives its legitimacy as an instrument of "law and order" or "public protection", when in fact it manufactures anti-social behaviour as evidenced by high rates of re-offending and the transformation of young petty offenders into seriously alienated, angry and violent criminals. In that regard, prisons are actually a danger to public safety, and in any case only imprison working class people, leaving untouched and unpunished the behaviour of corporate criminals that has a far more socially and economically damaging effect on society and the lives of ordinary people.

Like slavery, prison is an inhuman and anti-human system, and in any genuinely civilised society would be relegated to a museum piece, an example of man's inhumanity to man. Instead neo-liberal capitalism has created a prison industrial complex that feeds on the suffering of prisoners as a source of profit and corrupts any basic notion of prison as a "public service".

I have been imprisoned for 34 years. Originally I was sent here as a violent and extremely damaged young man from the slums of South London, who with two other men brutally killed a fourth man. All

existed on the margins of society and on the edge of existence. I remain imprisoned long beyond the length of time stipulated by the judiciary and twenty years after the release of the two men imprisoned with me, not because I continue to represent a risk to society but because the prison system or some of those enforcing it believe I should be detained indefinitely because of my activities during the 1980s and 1990s in organising prisoner resistance and creating struggle in prisons. They demand that I now surrender my political integrity completely and unquestioningly comply with their power and authority. When reviewing my continued imprisonment last year the Parole Board said there was no question that I had changed fundamentally as a human being during my long imprisonment and now embraced the cause of prisoner's rights, but it refused to order my release because I continued to question and challenge the authority of the prison system, which it nevertheless conceded was often characterised by a clear abuse of power. The board refused to order my release because it considered my defiance of prison system abuse an inappropriate response from someone who should, on the contrary, be completely broken and compliant to official authority, no matter how corruptly it is administered. It also condemned my use of the internet through radical groups on the outside to expose and highlight abuses of power against prisoners and publicly name some of those responsible for it. I remain in prison therefore exactly because of what the Parole Board described as my "impasse" with the prison system, or my refusal to remain silent in the face of its abuse of power. I am told by those responsible for my continued detention that unless I acknowledge and accept the total authority of the prison system over me then I will remain here until death. So the price for my release is total and abject surrender of the very thing that has provided me with the strength to survive the last three decades of my imprisonment – my personal and political integrity. I must effectively die as a principled and thinking human being before I am granted physical freedom. That I cannot and will not do.

Solidarity is the only effective weapon that prisoners possess in their struggle against a system that treats them as something less than

human, and the solidarity of those who while not sharing their physical captivity nevertheless share a common desire for freedom is absolutely crucial if the state violence that prison represents is ever to be significantly resisted and overcome. I therefore ask all those who identify with the prison struggle to add their names to the petition supporting me; by doing so they are making a statement to the prison system that its authority is by no means universally recognised and that I am not completely alone and isolated. By isolating prisoners and surrounding its treatment of them with secrecy as well as walls and bars those operating the prison system believe they possess an almost omnipotent degree of power that is accountable to no one. By publicly supporting those prisoners targeted by the prison system and victimised by it, groups and individuals on the outside can significantly challenge that power. Just by adding their name to this petition supporters are making a significant contribution both to my own struggle and that of prisoners everywhere whose isolation and powerlessness is significantly diminished when solidarity is extended from those beyond the belly of the beast.



Petition for John Bowden - Cut out/copy/print and use!

Feb 2014

Please send, with as many signatures as possible, to:

Scottish Prison Service Headquarters
Calton House
5 Redheughs Rigg
Edinburgh
EH12 9HW

Justice Minister
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Amnesty International
17-25 New Inn Yard
London
EC2A 3EA

Jim Kerr. Governor.
HMP Shotts
Cantrell Road
Shotts
S.Lanarkshire
ML7 4LE

To the Parole Board for England and Wales, and the Scottish Prison Service,

We wish to register our concern about the treatment of John Bowden who is clearly being held in jail at the moment as a form of preventive detention and not for any legitimate reason associated with genuine risk to the community or real belief in his propensity to commit crime. We feel that because of John's association with attempts to expose and highlight abuses of power within the prison system and wider criminal justice system he has been targeted for victimisation and his continued detention is an example of that. At two successive parole hearings to review his continued detention in 2011 and 2013 no evidence what so ever was presented to suggest that John was continuing to be held in jail for reasons of "public protection" or that the focus of his struggle was anything other than the abuse of state power in the treatment of prisoners or ex-prisoners being "supervised" in the community.

Following his 2013 parole hearing John was informed by both the Parole Board and the prison authorities that unless he stopped publicly exposing abuses of power by prison and criminal justice system officials his release from jail would be prevented. John's continued detention therefore is of itself a blatant abuse of state power.

he use of preventive detention to punish and silence legitimate complaint is a clear abuse of human rights and we wish to make it absolutely clear that we intend to highlight John's situation at every opportunity and in every possible way.

Signed:

Letter concerning the criminalisation of the Anarchist Black Cross

June 2014

In 2007 my association with the Anarchist Black Cross was considered a compelling enough reason by the prison authorities to prevent my release, despite the subsequent exposure of the lies manufactured by a prison administration regarding the nature and activities of ABC.

In the summer of 2007 following my transfer to an open jail, Castle Huntley near Dundee, after almost three decades of imprisonment, a prison-hired social worker at the jail, Matthew Stillman, submitted a report to the Parole Board in which he claimed I was linked to what he described as a "terrorist group", specifically naming ABC, and had received visits from "terrorists" also linked to ABC. As a consequence of Stillman's allegation I was transferred back to a maximum-security prison.

Following a campaign of protests on my behalf by ABC, which included demonstrations outside the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Prison Service H.Q. in Edinburgh, and an investigation by Perth & Kinross Council into Stillman's allegations to the Parole Board, those allegations were exposed as lies. Whilst being interviewed by a representative from Perth and Kinross Council Stillman would claim by way of a defence that he had been encouraged by senior management staff at Castle Huntly prison to use the term or description "terrorist" when describing ABC in the parole report. Stillman faced no disciplinary proceedings following the exposure of his lies and was simply moved to another social work council.

It would be several years before the prison authorities would resurrect it's lies regarding the "terrorist" or "criminal" nature of ABC in an attempt yet again to prevent my release, and once again prison-hired "professionals", this time psychologists, would be used to present the lies as impartial and unprejudiced fact.

On the 9th June the psychology dept at Shotts Prison in Lanarkshire carried out an assessment of my case, ostensibly to decide my "level of risk" in terms of danger to the community, and my suitability, or not, for a return to an open prison.

On page 21 of their subsequent "Psychological Assessment Report" they wrote the following:

"Mr Bowden holds value in communicating his political ideals and advocating change. He has also used radical websites to identify Criminal Justice system professionals (the allusion to Stillman is obvious) that he alleges have abused their positions of authority. While he cites this to be a feature of his views on authority in general and therefore feels entitled to express his views and thoughts, this is an area that should be further monitored by the relevant authority supervising him. Mr Bowden has stated his intent to distance himself from criminal associates, yet considers the Anarchist Black Cross groups, to whom he is linked, to be non-criminal in their approach. At the time of writing, there was no information available from the police to confirm this. It should be noted however, that in 1992 he had associates that facilitated his escape to Holland. His associations should therefore be monitored in conjunction with the police. It will also be useful to liaise with the police if concerns emerged in the future about the approach of Anarchist Black Cross groups being criminal in their intent".

Firstly, ABC members played absolutely no role or part in my escape to Holland in 1992 and there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest they did, and secondly, following Stillman's lies regarding the ABC in 2007, Perth and Kinross Council asked the police to provide an opinion of ABC and were informed it was a "radical group" with "potential public order risks" but definitely not "terrorist" in nature or unlawful in political orientation. Once again the prison authorities here in Scotland are attempting to criminalise ABC and punish prisoners linked to it.

I would ask ABC members therefore both in solidarity with me and as a protest against their criminalisation by a serial human rights abuser like the prison system, to e-mail and send letters of complaint to the [addresses included previously with the petition].

Contact and Information

Please send letters of support to:

John Bowden - 6729
HMP Shotts
Cantrell Road
Shotts
S.Lanarkshire
Scotland
ML7 4LE

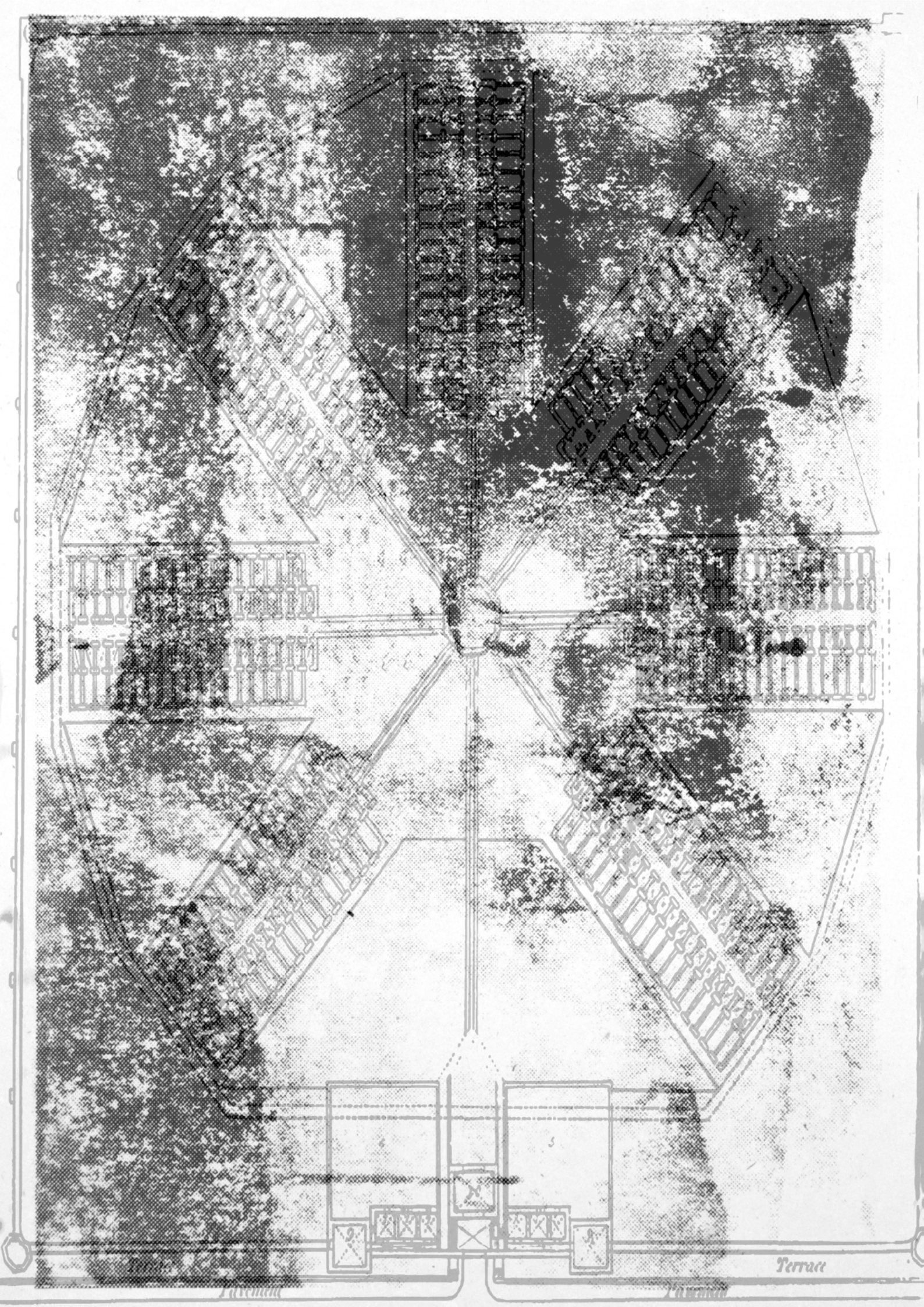
To receive further copies of this publication and access more information please write to:

ABC Hurricane, 14 Robertson Rd, Easton, Bristol, BS5 6JY, alternatively please email: **abc-hurricane@riseup.net**

• **abchurricane.noblogs.org** - ABC Hurricane Website

- **insidetime.org/search.asp** - Search 'John Bowden' for his articles
- **justiceforkevan.com** - Kevan Thakrar's Website
- **revolutionarycommunist.org** - Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! - BCM Box 5909, London, WC1N 3XX
- **prisonersadvice.org.uk** - Prisoner's Advice Website - PO Box 46199, London, EC1m 4XA
- **leedsabc.org** - Leeds ABC - 145-149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ
- **325.nostate.net** - 325 Collective Website
- **fromhereonin2012.wordpress.com** - From Here On n
- **actforfree.nostate.net** - Act For Freedom Now Website





Terrace

Paradise

Paradise