



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

13 July 1984

TOUGHER REGIMES IN DETENTION CENTRES

I have been keeping you in touch with my proposals for handling the report of the evaluation of the experiment with tougher regimes in detention centres. The purpose of this letter is to notify you (as Chairman of H Committee) and those of our H Committee colleagues who have interests, of the arrangements I shall be making to accompany publication of the report.

As colleagues may recall, our 1979 Manifesto contained a commitment to experiment with a tougher regime in certain detention centres, and you set up the experiment, and its accompanying evaluation, in 1980. The evaluation report (an advance copy of which is enclosed) has recently been completed, and there is a Parliamentary commitment to publish it before the House rises for the Summer Recess. A summary of the report's main findings is enclosed at Annex A. I intend to publish the report on 24 July, and to announce publication by way of an arranged Parliamentary Question. The text of the draft arranged PQ is enclosed at Annex B. As you know, my intention is to pre-empt a debate about the significance of the report's findings by announcing an immediate programme to establish a consistent detention centre regime as a distinctive feature in the penal system and one which will command the confidence of the courts. The draft arranged PQ makes clear the contribution to the new detention centre regime which the tougher regimes experiment has made. We shall be incorporating into the whole detention centre system those regime elements which the report and experience have identified as positive and suitable.

The announcement of a programme to establish a consistent detention centre regime should be welcome to the courts. The programme will be implemented within existing resources. My aim will be to move swiftly to have the new structure in place as soon as possible - I envisage about the turn of the year.

I am sending copies of this letter and enclosures to the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor, the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Social Services, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Chief Whip and Sir Robert Armstrong.

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw, CH, MC

TOUGHER REGIMES IN DETENTION CENTRES: MAIN FINDINGS OF EVALUATION REPORT

- (a) Deterrence: There was a slight fall at Send and a slight rise at New Hall in the adjusted reconviction rates: neither is statistically significant. There were no discernible general deterrence effects.
- (b) Trainees' attitudes towards staff: The new regime seems to have brought about a more positive attitude in trainees towards staff at both centres. There is no straightforward explanation for this result. The report suggests it may be partly the product of the more varied daily routine.
- (c) Trainees' reactions to the regime: At New Hall the new regime seems to have led to a reduction in the stress experienced by trainees, and to an increase in the proportion who described themselves as having an easy time. At Send there was no significant change. Drill and PE were less unpopular with trainees than most work activities. Many trainees appeared to enjoy drill once they had got used to it.
- (d) First two weeks: The report provides support for the view that the early days of sentence have an initial impact on the trainee which wears off fairly quickly as he comes to terms with the requirements of the regime.
- (e) Staff surveys: The earlier of the two staff surveys reported in the chapter, which took place at a time (late 1980) when staff had not settled down after the changeover, presents a worse picture than the second one (autumn 1982).

TOUGHER REGIMES: ARRANGED PQ FOR WRITTEN ANSWER ON TUESDAY 24 JULY

DRAFT QUESTION

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he will publish the evaluation of the experiment with tougher regimes in detention centres; and if he will make a statement.

DRAFT REPLY

The report of this evaluation, which has been carried out by the Young Offender Psychology Unit of the Prison Department and overseen by a committee with two independent members, is being published today, and copies have been placed in the Library and the Vote Office.

I am now putting in hand a programme of work to establish a consistent regime for the whole detention centre system - including those establishments which have been operating the experimental regime - with a view to enhancing the role of detention centres as a distinctive feature of the penal system commanding the confidence of the courts. The experiment will now be concluded. Of the features particularly associated with the tougher regimes experiment the new regime for all detention centres will include increased emphasis on parades and inspections; demanding work; earlier lights out; an initial period of restricted association, privileges and outside activities; and a brisker tempo. On the other hand, formal drill sessions and extra physical education will not be continued: many trainees came to find them undemanding and their inclusion would leave less time for other features - notably work - which the new regime will emphasise.

This programme will take full account of the evaluation findings, experience of running the tougher regimes, informed comment (including the memorandum which the Prison Officers' Association sent to us in 1982), and the way in which detention centres generally have geared their regimes to the new sentencing structure which was introduced last May. The experimental regime has made an important contribution to my decision on what form of regime should now be standard practice in detention centres. The evaluation report finds that the experimental regime had no statistically significant effect on the rate at which trainees were reconvicted: while it was right to test whether any such effect would be produced this conclusion is not surprising against the general background

of research findings on the identifiable deterrent effect of particular sentences. Nor does it alter in any way the need to establish a positive and well-defined detention centre regime. The evaluation rightly goes much wider: its particular value lies in the practical information it presents about the operation of the experimental regimes, their impact on both trainees and staff, and the suitability of different regime elements.

The report's confirmation of the impact on inmates of the first few days of sentence is especially important. We shall build on this finding - and on the changes made by detention centres in May 1983 to accommodate the new two week minimum effective sentence - to make a brisk and structured initial two week programme a key feature of the new regime. This will highlight basic and unpopular work such as scrubbing floors; increased emphasis on parades and inspections; and minimal privileges and association. As in the experimental regimes, trainees will now have to move briskly from activity to activity, and their lives will be conducted at a brisk tempo and within a well defined and clearly organised framework.

For the subsequent part of sentence the operation of the grade system will be sharpened so that incentives such as eligibility for association, privileges, the less unpopular types of work and any outside activities will be clearly dependent on good conduct.

Trainees will have physical education for an average of one hour each weekday. The content of education classes will be in keeping with the regime, and trainees of compulsory school age will participate in education, including physical education, for at least 20 hours a week. The interest taken by staff in the progress and well-being of trainees was a central feature of the tougher regimes experiment and this, together with the firm but fair approach towards trainees which has long been followed by detention centre staff, and whose value the report has re-inforced, will be maintained.

The Prison Department will work with the governors of detention centres and their staff on the detail of the regime adjustments which will be required. The prison service unions will be fully consulted at both local and national level. By early next year the new regime will be in general operation in all detention centres, including those which have taken part in the experiment. It will be monitored by the Prison Department. At the same time the analysis of certain reconviction and related data outstanding from the evaluation of the tougher regimes experiment will be completed.

The new detention centre regime will be a marked improvement over the regime which was in operation before the tougher regimes experiment was introduced in 1980. In incorporating much of the experimental regime on a permanent basis it will provide a penalty to which the courts can turn with confidence when dealing with an offender for whom a short period in custody is necessary.

24 JUL 1964

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