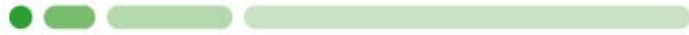


COMMISSION ON ENGLISH PRISONS TODAY



Not for publication before 2.30pm, Friday 20 July

Press release

Commission on English Prisons Today

The Commission on English Prisons Today is meeting for the first time today (Friday, 20 July).

A press conference and photocall takes place at **2.30pm** in **Room C, 1 Parliament Street** on **Friday, 20 July**.

The Commissioners are:

Cherie Booth QC (President)
Oscar Campbell
Baroness Jean Corston

Professor Andrew Coyle

Frances Crook
Dr Carolyn Hoyle

Professor Ian Loader

Kevin McGrath
Paul Myners

Stephen Nathan

Eddie Nestor
Professor Sir Duncan Nichol CBE

Barrister; Crown Court Recorder
Serving prisoner
Labour Peer and former MP, author of report on vulnerable women in penal system
Professor of Prison Studies, King's College, London; former prison governor; founding Director of International Centre for Prison Studies
Director, The Howard League for Penal Reform
Reader in Criminology, Centre for Criminology, Fellow, Green College, University of Oxford
Professor of Criminology; Director of Centre for Criminology, Oxford University; Fellow, All Souls
Partner, Reit Asset Management
Chair, Guardian Media Group, Land Securities, Low Pay Commission and Board of Trustees of Tate, former Chair Marks & Spencer
Journalist and researcher, specialising in privatisation
BBC Radio London
Chairman, Parole Board; former Chief Executive of the NHS

the Howard League for Penal Reform

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Dame Helen Reeves	Consultant on victim and witness issues and former Chief Executive, Victim Support
Professor Andrew Rutherford	Emeritus Professor of Law and Criminal Policy, member of the Parole Board and former prison governor
Clare Tickell	Chief Executive, NCH
Sue Wade	Chair, The Howard League for Penal Reform
Professor Martin Wasik	Professor of Law, Keele University; Crown Court Recorder; former Chair, Sentencing Advisory Panel
Dick Whitfield	Trustee, The Howard League for Penal Reform; former Chief Probation Officer, Kent and former Independent Member of the Parole Board
Professor David Wilson (Chair)	Professor of Criminology, University of Central England; Vice Chair, The Howard League for Penal Reform; former prison governor
Ruth Wyner	Psychotherapist and Group Analyst; Director of the Dialogue Trust; former head of Wintercomfort for the homeless; former prisoner

Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform, Frances Crook, said: "This independent Commission will look at the driving forces influencing change and practice including legislation, politics and the media. It will consider the principles, purpose and limits of a penal system and how it should sit alongside other social policy strategies.

"The Commission will prompt public debate using local and national media, consultation meetings with key players, seminars and public events including evidence sessions in public, feature articles, consultation papers, website consultations/questionnaires and other ways of engaging with people.

"Commissioners will make visits to explore new ideas and where effective and systemic change has been achieved.

"A final report will be published in 2009."

Further information

Frances Crook 020 7249 7373
 Andrew Neilson 020 7249 7373 ext. 119 07918 681 094 (out of hours)

ISDN line available on 020 7923 4196 - uses a G722 system

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Terms of reference

1. To investigate the purpose and proper extent of the use of prison in the 21st Century,
2. To consider how best to make use of the range of community sentences that currently exist, the principles that should guide them and to explore new ideas,
3. To consider the role of the media - both broadcast and print, in helping to re-shape the debate about the reform and proper use of imprisonment,
4. To investigate those issues which drive up the prison population in an age of globalisation,
5. To place any recommendations within the broader workings of the Criminal Justice System of England and Wales, giving due consideration to international development.

Structure and timetable

The Commission will have three phases:

1. Purpose, principles and scope of the penal system
2. Proper extent and purpose of prisons
3. Conclusions and discussion about findings and recommendations

Background and history

The prison population is now at an all time high but it has not always been so. The Commission commemorates a period of significant decarceration.

Between 1908-1939 the prison population of England and Wales halved, from 22,029 prisoners to just over 11,000. As a result some 20 prisons had to close - despite the fact that the crime rate actually increased during this period. This is the longest period of decarceration in world history, but it has rarely featured in any discussion about the use of prison in our public policy.

How are we to explain this phenomenal drop in numbers? Naturally we could point to the impact of the First World War, but there is more going on here than the sad simple reality of conscription and the high numbers of young men who died in the trenches. Instead we could point to:

- A general scepticism about the use of prisons that was widely shared - from politicians such as Winston Churchill (who had been a prisoner-of-war during the Boer War) and who set about reducing the numbers of people being sent to jail whilst he was Home Secretary between 1910-1911,
- The scepticism of conscientious objectors and Suffragettes who had been imprisoned, and who campaigned for change on their release,
- The existence of a credible alternative to prison in the shape of probation,

- The support given to penal reform from leading civil servants such as Alexander Patterson, who were prepared to advocate for change from within Government
- The creation of the Howard League for Penal Reform which campaigned for changes to the prison estate, and provided a focus for activities of the various reformers.

Two conscientious objectors - Stephen Hobhouse and Fenner Brockway who had both been imprisoned, established an independent commission on the state of the penal estate, and published their book - ***English Prisons Today*** in 1922. It had an immediate impact on popular and political thinking about what to do with offenders and the limited role that existed for prison in dealing with those who broke the law. Their impact would last until the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Howard Association was founded in response to the first Royal Commission on Capital Punishment that ended public executions - to equal that is our challenge.

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