

PAP News Issue 18 2014

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1 Are UK Prisons in Crisis? The Chief Inspector of Prisons and Probation, Nick Hardwick, has made several very adverse reports on the state of prisons and accuses ministers of "political and policy failure". See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27847007. Nigel Newcomen, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, has reported a sudden upsurge in the numbers of deaths and violent incidents in prisons. See www.ppo.gov.uk/ The Howard League has published a report "Breaking Point" calling for urgent action. See www.howardleague.org/breaking-point/. And newspaper editorials roundly criticise the coalition government's failure to respond to the problems in prisons since 2010. The Independent's view on 12 August is "There is one simple way to address the crisis in Britain's overcrowded prisons. Stop locking up so many offenders." See www.independent.co.uk/voices/editorials/

2 Howard League appeal on Legal Aid cuts successful The Howard League and the Prisoners Advice Service appealed against the decision of the High Court in March to refuse judicial review of the cuts in Legal Aid by the Lord Chancellor. The Court of Appeal has allowed the appeal on the grounds that a judicial review has sufficient prospects of success. Without legal aid, many prisoners cannot secure the training courses required to gain review by the Parole Board. See www.legalvoice.org.uk/2014/07/02/court-of-appeal-allows-prison-law-laspo-appeal/ and www.howardleague.org/legal-news/

3 Books in Prisons: Italian prisons do different If you have followed PAP News and the General Assembly's Emergency Resolution in April, you will know of the restrictions on books for prisoners in UK prisons. In at least one Italian prison, the regime is the exact reverse. The more books a prisoner there reads, the shorter the period of imprisonment. Which system is most likely to reduce reoffending? See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italian-prisoners-get-cut-sentences-for-reading-as-uk-book-ban-continues-9336467.html>

4 Lib Dems want to stop imprisonment for drug possession The Unitarians and many others have been pressing for a Royal Commission on drugs in the UK. The response of the Prime Minister has been to reject the call because recently "there has been some improvement." No doubt aware of the effects of decriminalisation of drug possession in Portugal, the Liberal Democrats have broken ranks and have proposed the decriminalisation of drug possession should they return to government in 2015. See www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/nick-clegg-says-lib-dems-4022692

5 ECHR rules against compensation in votes for prisoners dispute The European Court of Human Rights has upheld the claims of 10 British prisoners that they have been unlawfully deprived of their right to vote but refused to award compensation or award legal costs. The decision follows a line of such cases involving several

other states but probably allows the UK government to delay further the re-enfranchisement of prisoners. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28753874

6 Changes to Judicial Review procedures not proven The Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights has produced a report into the changes made by the Lord Chancellor in Judicial Review procedures for challenging the decisions of public authorities. It claims the reasons given for the changes have not been proved. Without asylum cases, which no longer go to the High Court, the numbers of applications for Judicial Review have remained very stable. The Committee has been very critical of Chris Grayling's dual role as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. He does not or is unable to "stand up for the justice system". See www.theguardian.com/law/2014/apr/30/judicial-review-changes-all-party-committee

7 Legal Aid cuts for non-residents of UK unlawful The Lord Chancellor was roundly criticised by the High Court as attempting to make primary legislation by proposing to use statutory instruments to cut legal aid from claimants who are not "lawful residents" of the UK. Lord Justice Moses said "No-one can pretend that removing legal aid from non-residents is a means of targeting legal aid at those most in need.... The UK cannot discriminate against non-residents on the grounds that to do so might save costs." The Order was withdrawn before it passed to the Lords. See www.theguardian.com/law/2014/jul/15/legal-aid-high-court-residence-test-discrimination-grayling

8 Cuts in benefits for EU immigrants The Prime Minister has announced that benefits for immigrants from other EU states will not be claimable after three months. It has been suggested that the number of affected claimants will be very small. See www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-migrants-will-lose-benefits-after-just-three-months-under-new-tory-plans-9634143.html

9 Met Police admit spying on protesting families An internal report from the Metropolitan Police reveals its undercover Special Demonstration Squad has carried out surveillance of families involved in protests, including the family of Jean Charles De Menezes who was killed in 2005 when thought to be a bomber. The revelation gave rise to adverse comments in most national newspapers. See www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jul/23/undercover-police-spied-on-families-de-menezes-groce-reel

10 Cost of Court interpreters doubles in one year The costs of assisting non-English speakers in the Crown Court and in magistrates courts rose from £8 million to almost £16 million during 2012-13 according to Freedom of Information responses. The service was "privatised" with one company in 2012 to save costs. See www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2634484/

11 Unitarian Social Action Future Vision Conference SimpleGifts hosted a discussion in July on how to encourage the interest of Unitarians in social responsibility and action. Follow reports in The Inquirer and Unitarian and see www.simplegiftsucsa.org.uk/

12 Please Send Your News for PAP News to bruce_chilton@hotmail.com

Social responsibility is religion in action