

Report of the Committee of Enquiry on Reformatory
and Industrial School Systems

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The report makes some courageous, commonsense suggestions but lacks fundamental discussion of the causes, consequences and treatment of emotional deprivation or anti-social character formation. The lack of sustained argumentation produces a rather fragmentary structure which reflects, by accident rather than design, the fragmented nature of the present Child Care System.

Useful proposals about the selection and training of staff and the importance of a broad, educational approach to youth in institutions would have had more weight if related to the personalities of delinquent or deprived youth. Even if the Committee felt they did not know enough in the general area of personality, they could still have pointed to the research which needed to be done before the facts necessary for policy formulation could be gained, and they could have gone on to frame policy proposals on the basis of explicit assumptions. Attempts should have been made to answer such questions as "What degree of family breakdown should be tolerated before a child is removed to an institution?", "Which type of delinquent does better in an institution?", "Which type of delinquent does better with psychotherapy?", "What type of personality among the staff does better with the rejected or deprived?" and "Are there basic differences of personality between the deprived and the delinquent?"

The strength of the Report lies in its commonsense not in its theoretical sophistication. It does not take a psychologist to see that places like Daingean and Marlborough House won't work any longer, if only because the public demand better conditions in their penal institutions. The basic viewpoint of the Report is in line with that of the 1936 one, namely, that institutionalisation should be replaced by a type of family care. Also evident is an emphasis on the work of specialists such as psychologists and psychiatrists within the therapeutic milieu. Psychologists would work in such areas as Diagnosis, Educational Guidance, Remedial Teaching and Counselling. Presumably they would also have a function in research and in the selection and training of staff - which needs are also stressed. Concerning diagnosis, the report says "We feel therefore that before a child is admitted to Residential Care he should have the benefit of medical, psychiatric and psychological assessment to ascertain where he can be suitably placed with most advantage to himself. For this purpose every Health Authority should have one centre designated as a Reception and Assessment Centre which may also be a Residential Home". Such recognition is a tribute to psychologists and psychiatrists but the usefulness of a psychological assessment in the case of a non-mentally handicapped delinquent is often quite limited. For one thing, there is no tried and true aetiological model or typology of delinquent behaviour. The psychologist is still free to take his choice of theory - whether based on Freudian repressed impulse and inconsistent super-ego, defective social conditioning, Adlerian compensation for inadequacy, or on delinquency as social status or as indicating low interpersonal maturity level. These theories are not mutually exclusive. It is conceivable that quite different theories of the aetiology of delinquency might all be correct because of the different

areas of behaviour and experience to which they relate. Take for instance this hypothetical account of the background of a fifteen year old boy who we'll suppose has just been sent to Daingean for repeated housebreaking and burglaries. Let us say there has always been a poor relationship between his mother and father, his mother being continually critical, in front of the boy, of his father. The result might have been that the boy's repression of his infantile murder impulse towards the father would not have been complete and that, with the reawakening of instinctual life during adolescence, he would have been experiencing periods of acute anxiety. He might have found that breaking into places and taking things seemed to allay anxiety, this kind of anti-social action being in fact a displacement of the infantile aggression and thus a defence against the consciousness of it. We could thus explain his delinquency in Freudian terms by looking for an infantile impulse which is only partly repressed because of an inconsistent super-ego. But we could also attempt an analysis in terms of faulty social conditioning. The boy might have been conditioned against the father by the mother, who presumably would have been closer to him as a source of reinforcement than the father. His anti-social activities during adolescence would represent a generalisation of the negative feelings for the father. Against this, a Freudian might urge the view that this boy was in fact very quiet when he is with his father. If this were so, it would strengthen the case on behalf of Freudian theory but it would still not eliminate the fact that the boy's natural infantile hostility to the father would have been artificially strengthened by a form of pathogenic social conditioning. Adler's theory of people being motivated to overcome feelings of inadequacy could also be applied to such a boy. A faulty repression of the infantile rivalry with the father might bring with it pre-conscious fears of inadequacy compared with him, which an Adlerian psychologist might well discover.

Albert Cohen's theory of delinquent behaviour offering an alternative source of status to boys who have done poorly at conventional pursuits such as study or games could also be used to interpret the boy's behaviour. As part of his rebellion against the father, the boy might favour group activities which tended to contravene the law, which he might identify in one way or another with his father. It might also be true that due to his anxiety attacks (which may have occurred to a lesser degree in pre-adolescence) he would be unable to concentrate on schoolwork or achieve the confidence and muscular co-ordination needed in sports, failure would act as a negative reinforcer to drive him away from such activities. Because he would be empathetic with them in their struggle with authority, he might well find it easy to mix with overtly anti-social youth and this social success would act as a positive reinforcer to his interest in the anti-social gang. Sutherland's theory of differential association may be invoked at this stage - 'facilis est descensus Avernī sed retro ---'. Finally, due to the fixation in psychosexual development caused by the unresolved Oedipus Complex, the boy's ego would be weak and in general his ability to assess others' feelings poor. His handling of personal relationships would tend to be manipulative and his level of moral development as described by Peck and Havinghurst would be low.

The psychologist faced with the problem of assessment is also faced with the problem of numerous, largely untested theories often relating to different aspects of behaviour. He may seek to assess the extent of anti-social character formation, considering this as an impaired ability for mutually satisfactory personal relations and thus a functional impairment of personality. He may seek to evaluate interpersonal maturity level using perhaps the California

Psychological Inventory⁽¹⁾ for this purpose, and on the basis of his findings, he may suggest which kind of approach should be taken to the boy or girl⁽²⁾. Yet in the long run, successful assessment and therapy implies both intuitive and scientific knowledge. In view of the lack of tested models of aetiology and classification, we must admit that psychologists are poor criminologists. Neurosis more than crime has been the psychologist's pre-occupation. The suggestion in the Report that psychologists engage in counselling (The Committee must have balked at "psychotherapy"!) has to be seen in this light. Educational assessment, vocational guidance and remedial teaching could only be successful if the psychologist understood the personalities with which he was dealing. Without such understanding psychologists would mechanically administer tests, give guidance and make superficial assessments. They would not make their own contributions as psychologists. There is a great need for them to involve themselves in problems of delinquency by carrying out basic research on aetiology, and by psychotherapy, which should lead to new insights.

- (1) See D. Gottfredson and B. Kelley (1963) "Interpersonal maturity measurement by the California Psychological Inventory", Institute for the Study of Crime and Delinquency, Report 1. California.
- (2) The Grants in California showed that more mature delinquents did better with psychotherapy and the less mature did better under a conventional prison regime, see J. and M. Grant, (1959) "A group dynamics approach to the treatment of non-conformists in the navy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 322, 126-35. Dr. Paul McQuaid and I have recently had some success in setting up a typology of Dublin juvenile offenders. Broadly speaking, this relates to the distinction between subculturally caused and familially caused maladjustment. The method involved an obverse factor analysis of assessment data on 107 anti-social youth referred to the Mater Hospital Department of Child Psychiatry. We hope to publish this soon: In the meantime those interested might contact me about it at the ESRI.

Education is regarded by the Report as a strong counter to problems of deprivation and delinquency. This is a modern vogue and one more easily recommended than implemented. If we are to judge from Erica Stratta's book "The Education of Borstal Boys", education is a plant which rapidly withers in institutions. What the Report didn't mention but should have was the need for leadership. Only with creative, imaginative leadership, can an educationalist make his contribution in institutions for the young. This applies a fortiori to the contribution of psychologists. Institutions need visionary leaders. What is also needed is a range of institutions of different types. The Report might have mentioned the importance of experimenting with probation hostels (so that a young person could go to work in his local environment but be removed from a possibly disturbing home background), weekend attendance centres or day centres where a young person could learn a trade, or follow a course in civic or social education. Also lacking is a recommendation that Childcare staff be required to possess certain minimum professional qualifications. Despite these weaknesses and its lack of theoretical substance, the Report is, however, a major step forward. The grass-roots public interest in it is encouraging and will be needed to counter the national tendency to respond to chaos, social or personal, with obsessive and institutional regimentation.