

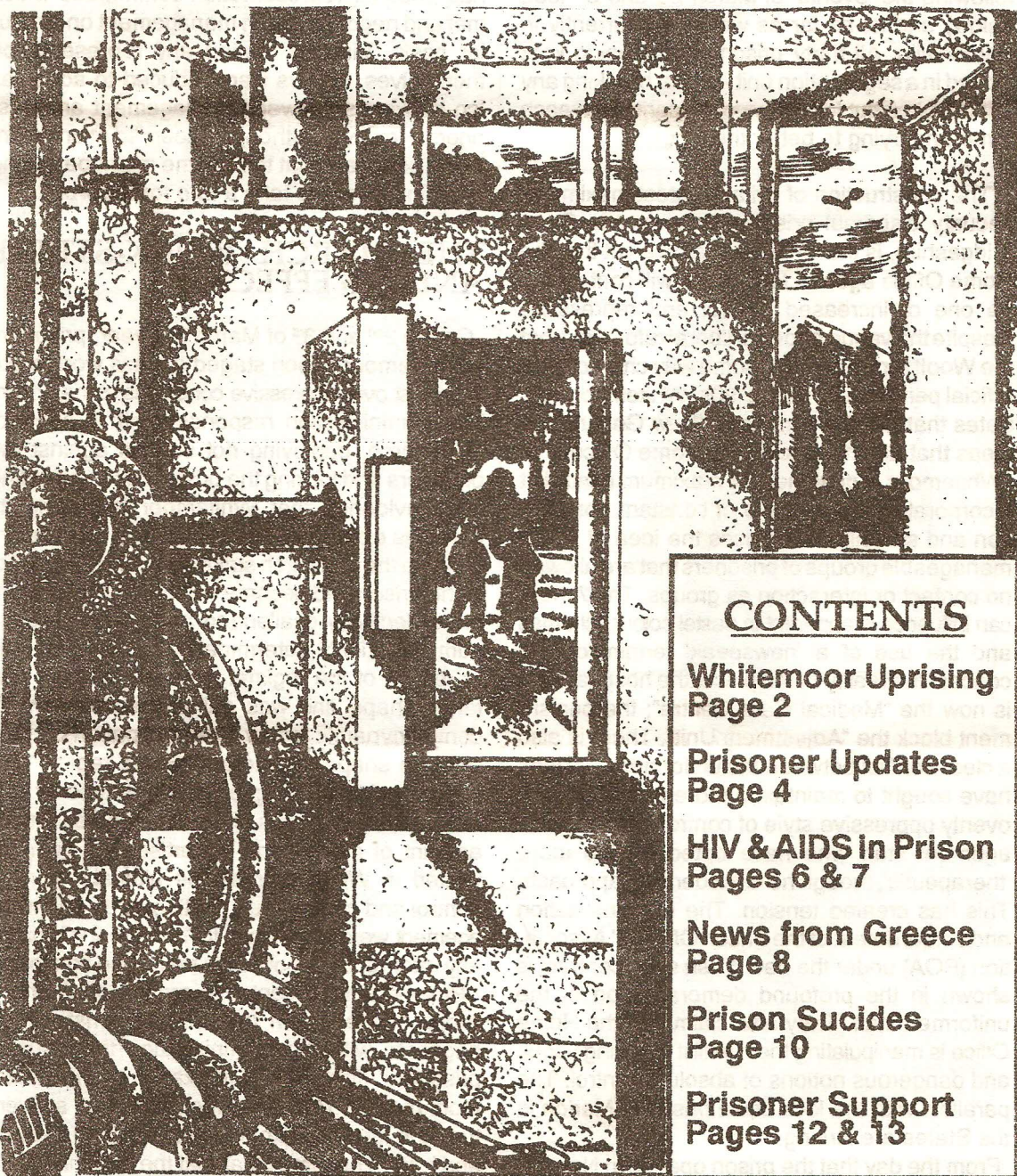
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FREE TO PRISONERS



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SUPPORTING CLASS STRUGGLE PRISONERS

SUPPORT THE WHITEMOOR THIRTY

The following article is an edited version of two sent in by the prisoner John Bowden. He was moved from Whitemoor prison along with 29 others to various prisons around the country following the 'events' of March 2nd and 3rd (see below) and is, as far as we know, currently in Pentonville. All thirty prisoners are being kept locked in a segregation unit - not for breaking any prison rules, but for showing solidarity with each other and trying to better their lot.

"The construction of Britain's latest maximum-security dispersal prison, Whitemoor in Cambridgeshire, is the clearest example yet that the Home Office agenda for prisons will continue to be one of increased control and repression. Despite the vague hopes of liberal reformists that the Woolf report might in some way characterise official penal policy for the '90s, Whitemoor illustrates that it is the American "New Generation" ideas that are influencing the Home Office.

Whitemoor is designed for maximum control. It incorporates the principle of constant observation and surveillance; it uses the idea of small, manageable groups of prisoners that are allowed no contact or interaction as groups. The American influence is apparent in pastel colour schemes and the use of a 'newspeak' terminology to conceal the reality of the place; the hospital wing is now the "Medical Care Centre"; the punishment block the "Adjustment Unit". There is also a clear conflict between the uniformed staff who have sought to maintain a more traditional and overtly oppressive style of control and the management staff who have opted for the more 'therapeutic', though no less coercive, approach. This has created tension. The marginalisation and virtual defeat of the Prison Officers' Association (POA) under the new 'fresh start' contract is shown in the profound demoralisation of the uniformed staff. They also claim that the Home Office is manipulating them whilst following vague and dangerous notions of absolute control. The parallels with the lock down prison in Marion in the States are striking.

From the day that the prison opened in November last year, solidarity amongst prisoners has been strong. During the visit of the Home Secre-

tary in January, prisoners staged a mass sit-down to protest against petty restrictions at the jail. In fact, so powerful was the solidarity and self-organisation of the prisoners that both wings had prisoner representation committees which met and negotiated with management on a regular basis. Virtually denied any representation themselves, screws were reduced to acting as 'go-betweens' between management and prisoners. However, although it seemed at one point to the prisoners that the regime might be easing up, things were to take a turn for the worst.

THE MARCH WORK-STRIKE AND ITS EFFECT

On the 2nd and 3rd of March this year, prisoners at Whitemoor prison staged a mass work strike in protest over oppressive conditions at the prison. The administration responded with a show of brute force, deploying riot squads against the prisoners and locking the prison down, providing clear evidence that Whitemoor is basing its methods exclusively on control and repression.

Prior to the 2nd March strike, tension and conflict in the prison had become widespread as prisoners collectively challenged and questioned the administration's determination to resist change or reform of the regime. A power struggle had taken shape and was gaining momentum, its central dynamic fed by a determination on both sides to shape and determine the regime of a prison obviously designed as a prototype for long term, dispersal prisons of the future. An enormous amount of money and expertise had been invested in Whitemoor as the ultimate word in control and containment, both guards and management were determined to "hold the line" against any attempt by prisoners to resist and fight back.

Prisoners' representative groups on C and D wings at the prison had sought constantly to negotiate with the administration the issue of prisoners' rights and a relaxation of the Whitemoor regime. They were met, however, at every turn and juncture with prevarication and evasion and it soon became clear that the administration was prepared to negotiate nothing and was simply using its meetings with the prisoners' rep-

representatives as a means of extracting intelligence and "clarifying" existing rules and regulations.

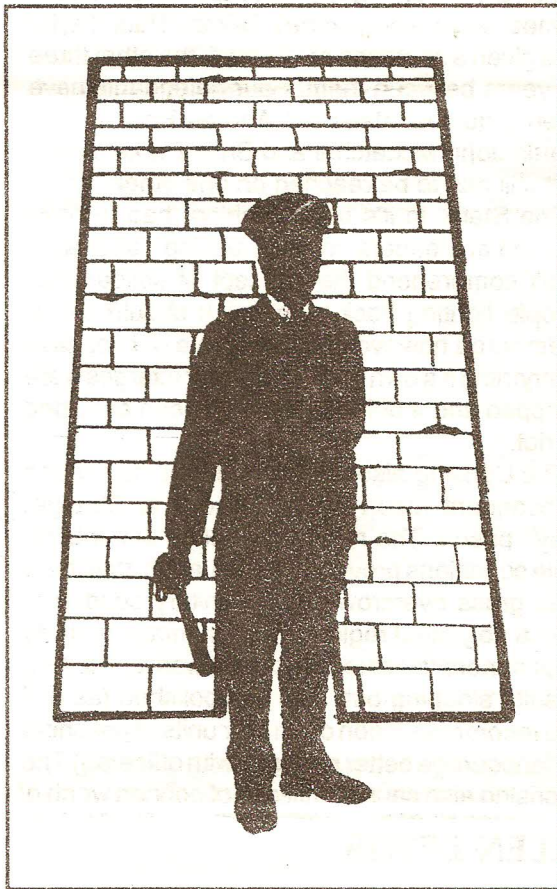
Meanwhile, the day-to-day struggle between prisoners and guards on the landings had produced a situation and relationship of power advantageous to the former. POA representatives at the prison claimed that staff were 'losing control' and prior to the strike on March 2nd, opinion amongst guards strongly favoured a hard line or 'tough' response to the prisoners' demands for a more liberalised regime. An inexorable process of prisoner empowerment had begun and both guards and governors were determined to crush it.

The strike at Whitemoor began as a localised dispute between inmate kitchen workers and the administration over the question of pay. The administration refused point blank to negotiate with the kitchen workers and threatened sackings and the 'reallocation' of the prisoners to workshops if the dispute continued. The kitchen workers responded with a call for solidarity from all other prisoners and by lunchtime on the 2nd March both C and D Wings came out in support. Rapidly improvised strike committees were then formed to respond to the organisational needs of the situation and from the perspective of the administration it became apparent that the balance of institutional power was now shifting in favour of the prisoners.

On the second day of the strike, prisoners on D Wing demanded a meeting with the head of 'inmate activities', Lynne Bowles, in order to discuss improvements of the regime generally. Despite her attempts to 'interview' prisoners individually about their grievances, a mass meeting was organised for that morning. In an obvious attempt at assuagement, Bowles agreed to 'review' the existing regime and promised the prisoners that all their complaints would be "carefully evaluated". She then cut the meeting short and explained that she was off to meet with the kitchen workers in an attempt to resolve their dispute. In fact, she met next with a Home Office official dispatched to the prison that day to oversee the breaking of the prisoners' strike. Between them they agreed that the prison should be locked down and the 'ringleaders' shipped out. Oblivious of such machinations, the prisoners collected their meals at lunchtime (cooked and served by guards) and allowed themselves to be locked within their cells for what they imagined would be the usual hour-long lunchtime

lock-up. They remained locked up for the remainder of the day.

At tea time, prisoners were unlocked individually to collect their meal and made to walk a gauntlet of screws dressed in full riot gear. They were also issued with a notice from assistant governor P.G.Kelly which said: "You have chosen not to follow the order to comply with the requirements of the regime. The process you have chosen to voice your objection is not acceptable. In order to secure the safety of both prisoners and staff you will remain locked up. The situation will be kept under review".



From 8.30pm onwards, prisoners were removed from their cells by riot squads and taken to the segregation unit. A couple of dozen prisoners were removed in such a fashion; the 'hard core' that Bowles and her colleagues claimed were inciting other prisoners to revolt. Their number included the D Wing spokespeople who had organised the meeting with her earlier in the day. At about 2.30pm these prisoners, stripped of all their possessions, were bussed out to Lincoln and Pentonville.

Continued Page 9

PRISONER UPDATES

STRANGEWAYS

As reported in the last Bulletin, the Strangeways Showtrial is steaming ahead with the State throwing all it's weight around. The trial has taken 12 weeks so far, and has heard evidence from more than 100 witnesses. The jury at Manchester Crown Court has found three defendants guilty of riot (maximum 10 years). The defendants are Paul Taylor, John Derek Spencer, James Miller and Sydney Doran. Paul Taylor was given a sentence of 10 years; the other three 20 years between them. Four defendants have been acquitted: Alan Lord, Andrew Paul Nelson, Martin John McLatchie and Brian Parke. A verdict still has to be reached on one other.

The State, in it's usual fashion, had to have 'named ringleaders' for the Uprising - after all, it can't comprehend the concept of solidarity or people fighting back together. It should be remembered however, that the State did not have everything it's own way - all murder charges were dropped and 4 defendants have been acquitted of riot.

The Uprising also led to an official inquiry and subsequent report into conditions at Strangeways prison. The report concluded that intolerable conditions provoked the situation; that there was gross overcrowding; insanitary conditions and a degraded regime. No systematic brutality to prisoners (by other prisoners) was found. As a result, "slopping-out" is to be abolished (as well the recommendation of smaller units of prisoners to "encourage better relations with officers"!) The Uprising also caused millions of pounds worth of

damage and Strangeways prison had to be virtually rebuilt - it now houses only 300 prisoners. However, it is due to open fully next year. Who knows what might happen then?



The Defendants still need your support. At the time of printing, we do not know where the three are being held: we will publish this as soon as the information is made available.

GLEN LEWIS

Glen Lewis is yet another innocent man fitted up by the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad. He was framed in 1987 for armed robbery and sentenced to 10 years. His convictions have been quashed by the Court of Appeal, but the judge ordered a retrial - the first time this has happened. Glen was forced to sign blank sheets of statement paper after being threatened with a hypodermic syringe and denied a solicitor. At the Court of Appeal, Lord Lane said that the credibility of the two WMSCS detectives who arrested him was so "blighted" that the jury would not have convicted him in the original case if all the full facts had been known. The two detectives were:

DC John Perkins and DS Peter Reynolds. Glen also says he was headbutted and racially abused by Perkins. Later on, he was forced to sign blank interview sheets. He was then interviewed by DS Griffiths and DC Timmins about another armed robbery - he was again forced to sign blank sheets. (Tests showed that the sheets had been tampered with). DC Perkins and DS Reynolds were later found guilty of a disciplinary offence regarding interview records on another case.

Meanwhile, Glen has to wait for the date of the retrial.

Letters of support may be sent to: **Glen Lewis W56246**. HMP, The Dana, Shrewsbury, Salop SY1.

