In addition, the operation was probably highly profitable in private practice, though no figures are available to judge the number of such operations undertaken in private practice.

Although we have taken Glasgow Royal Infirmary as an example of routine practice in Britain at that time, there was a definite local interest in the condition of movable kidney that may explain some of the features of figs 2 and 3. In 1883, only two years after Hahn's first description of kidney fixation methods, the first nephrorrhaphies in Britain were performed in private patients in Glasgow by a Dr David Newman. The first operation in the Royal Infirmary was not recorded until 1893, when Newman joined the staff, though other surgeons in that hospital soon adopted the operation. Newman retired in 1914, and the drop in cases diagnosed and treated at that time may be explained by his departure. It may also be that the first world war diverted attention and resources away from such non-urgent cases, and there was certainly a revival of interest in the condition in the postwar years.

In 1928 the clinical section of the annual reports was changed before being finally abandoned in 1930. The subsequent history of nephrorrhaphy in the infirmary is not known, but by this time the operation had been increasingly criticised in surgical circles. Better follow up of all patients was now being carried out and this doubtless showed that patients with movable kidneys were

often no better off after surgery. Honest clinicians also noted that kidneys could be mobile without symptoms, and surgeons, now familiar with the inside of the abdomen, could demonstrate such mobility during laparotomies for other reasons.

Like other ineffective treatments for imaginary disease, surgery for the movable kidney simply faded away in Britain in the 1930s.

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The State of the Prisons

Dutch prisons: important lessons for the British

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More than 200 years ago John Howard went to the Netherlands to see if the Dutch were any better than the British at running their prisons. He found that they were. "Prisons in the United Provinces are so quiet, and most of them so clean, that a visitor can hardly believe he is in gaol. . . . I know not what to admire most, the neatness and cleanliness appearing in the prisons, the industry and regular conduct of the prisoners, or the humanity and attention of the magistrates and regents."¹ Penal reformers are still travelling to the Netherlands to look at their superior ways of managing prisoners, and I joined the stream this summer.

The day that the British parliament debated whether to bring back hanging I spent in a long term prison in the Netherlands, a country that abolished capital punishment 107 years ago. The average length of sentence in that prison, Norgerhaven, was less than three years, and any sentence over six months is considered a long term sentence in the Netherlands.^{2,3} In 1975 about 4% of Dutch prisoners were sentenced to more than 12 months, in contrast to 28% of British prisoners. And, most important of all, while England and Wales have about 45 000 of their 43.3 million inhabitants incarcerated, the Dutch have only 4000 of their 14 million in prison: proportionately we have about three times as many as the Dutch.

It is this last fact, and the consequence that the Dutch can then do much more for those they do have in prison, that causes British penal reformers to look longingly over the North Sea.³ But at the same time, in true British adversarial style, which is very different from the Dutch tradition of tolerance and accommodation, *Police*, the journal of the Police Federation, has held up the Netherlands as an example of what might happen if judges were to "go soft" on offenders—for in the past five years the Dutch crime rate appears to have risen roughly twice as steeply as that in England and Wales.⁴ But these figures need careful scrutiny for criminological data tend to be even more confusing than medical data (26 November, p 1614).

To try to understand more about the Dutch prison system, and particularly about how medical care is provided and mentally abnormal offenders managed, I spent four days in the summer visiting Dutch prisons and the Dutch Ministry of Justice. Apart from learning about the Dutch system I found the trip useful in other ways. Firstly, I could look back across the North Sea through Dutch eyes and see just how dreadful our system looks to them; and, secondly, I met people from other countries interested in prisons (most of them working in prisons) who had looked at systems in many countries and come to the conclusion that we have just about the worst problems in the developed world. Not only those working within the British prison system but also those trying to reform it become habituated to its awfulness. We often hear boasts that we have the best health service or education system in the world but rarely do we own up to having the worst prison service.

An overview of the system

The Dutch seem as confused as the British about the purpose of imprisonment. Certainly prisons are for punishment, but at the same time the Dutch want their prisons to be as comfortable as they can afford and as much like the outside world as is compatible with security. By law each prisoner must have his own cell, and in the new remand prison in Amsterdam that I visited each cell has a lavatory. There is no censorship of mail, and in many prisons the inmates can make telephone calls. The authorities encourage close relationships between staff and inmates, and, although the prison officers wear uniforms, the prisoners do not. In Norgerhaven, the long term prison, I saw staff and inmates eating and playing chess together. What is more, in the remand prison in Amsterdam and some other prisons there are women prison officers in the men's blocks, and the governors thought that this single change had done more than anything to reduce tensions in the prisons. Because of all these factors the British prison maxim that people are sent to prison as not for punishment is much more true in the Netherlands than Britain.

The Dutch also believe in using imprisonment to remove dangerous people from society, but, unlike the British, they put many of those deemed dangerous not in prisons but in clinics called TBR clinics (TBR is an abbreviation for the Dutch words meaning detained for an indefinite period). Those detained in TBR clinics have committed offences and are sent there by the courts but are not called prisoners. All of those admitted to TBR clinics these days are mentally ill, but in the past some who were more dangerous than mentally ill were admitted to have their dangerousness treated.

Just as in Britain, difficulties, and wishful thinking, arise when the Dutch consider whether imprisonment can be used to try to rehabilitate or reform prisoners. Almost everybody I met thought of prisons as bad places that tended to harm people rather than help them, and most thus thought that imprisonment should be used as little as possible. But at the same time those same people were doing everything they could within the prisons to try to ensure that prisoners came out better than they went in. The prisons have a generous staff of carers and teachers, and one social worker said how she put human needs above security and would allow a prisoner to escape if she thought that it would help him solve some problem he had in the outside world. Many of the prisons are also trying to mount programmes to help drug addicts, because addicts are common in Dutch prisons and drug related offences are some of the commonest crimes. The Dutch, too, send some of those repeatedly convicted of drunken driving to prison (usually for a fortnight), and some of these go to a small prison that contains exclusively drunken drivers and which runs a special programme—albeit more educational than therapeutic.

Overall the Dutch do not believe in the power of prisons to reform and rehabilitate, but they do try to make time spent in prison as profitable, normal, and human as possible. Their philosophy seems to accord with that called in Britain "humane containment" (26 November, p 1614): they send as few people to prison as they can, make the prison as normal as possible, and use the minimum amount of security.

Numbers of prisoners

The single greatest achievement of Dutch penal policy is that it has managed to reduce the Netherlands' prison population at a time when that population has been climbing fast in most other countries. As figure 1 shows, between 1951 and 1977 the number of prisoners for each 100 000 of the population fell by more than half in the Netherlands while it almost doubled in England and Wales. Tulkens has shown that this change is almost entirely due to the shortening in sentence lengths in Holland and a lengthening in England and Wales; roughly the same proportion of offenders have been sent to prison.²

FIG 1—Average daily prison population per 100 000 people aged 18 and over in the Netherlands and aged 15 and over in England and Wales. (Source: Downes.³)

David Downes of the London School of Economics has looked in detail at why this change might have occurred and at what the consequences might be. A small part of the fall in the number of prisoners seems to be because fewer crimes in the Netherlands are "cleared up," and because fewer offenders are being brought before both the prosecutor and the court. This may not seem a good thing, but it also may not be a bad thing when we remember the number of minor offenders that clutter up the courts and prisons in Britain. The generous welfare state, traditional Dutch tolerance, and the "politics of accommodation" as practised in the Netherlands are all, Downes thinks, probably important, although how exactly they lead to a fall in the number of prisoners is not clear. Another important factor seems to be that lawyers, and hence judges, in the Netherlands have a much greater exposure to criminology and similar disciplines in their training than do their British equivalents. Furthermore, Dutch judges seem to have a better acquaintance with prisons and their conditions.

This last factor, the knowledge and experience of judges, is especially interesting because it suggests a way forward for Britain. Maybe a crash course in criminology, and, better still, regular visits to Wormwood Scrubs, would discourage London judges and magistrates from sending offenders to prison so often and for so long. Prison reformers cannot hope to create tolerance and an instinct for consensus in the intolerant, adversarial British overnight, but possibly a wider debate on the limitations, purposes, and conditions of imprisonment in Britain would lead to a change in public and judicial attitudes. To give the Conservative government its due, it has—at least in print—encouraged a debate on prisons even while building new ones.⁵ Indeed, the Tory Reform Group has been looking at the Dutch system and has come out with some dramatic suggestions for the British system as a result.⁶ It suggests that "wherever possible offenders be kept out of prison" and that "prison sentences be drastically reduced."

One important consequence of having fewer people in prison is that the conditions of Dutch prisoners tend to be much better than in Britain—and this applies not only to the physical conditions but also to the atmosphere in the prisons—but the consequence that most interests the public is the effect on the crime rate. Figure 2 shows that over 30 years the serious crime rate has risen no faster in the Netherlands than in Britain, while figure 1 shows that these are exactly the years during which the prison population has fallen in the Netherlands. But viewed over the past five years, which is what *Police* has done, the Dutch crime rate has risen much faster than in England and Wales. We can only speculate on the link between all these figures, but we can conclude that a falling number of people in prison has not led to an increase in crime greater than that in a country that has been steadily putting more people in prison; and Downes thinks that the changes in the past five years have

more to do with economic and cultural changes in the Netherlands than with changes in the numbers in prison. One factor that might be attributed to the fall in the number in prison, however, is the fall in the "clear up" rate of crimes. The police may feel that it is pointless to charge people with crimes that are not subsequently punished. Relevant to this, bicycle owners in Amsterdam seem to expect to have several bikes stolen each year and do not expect to get them back.

FIG 2—Numbers of serious offences per 100 000 population in the Netherlands and England and Wales. (Source: Downes.³)

The Netherlands thus has its law and order problems, and some of the trends that are apparent in Britain can also be seen there. For instance, average sentences are beginning to lengthen, although they have a long way to go before they reach British standards, and, just as in Britain, the average age of prisoners is falling. A government commission has recommended that another 1300 places should be created in Dutch prisons (no final decision has yet been taken), and the Dutch also have remand prisoners in police cells. This is a consequence of the law on having no more than one prisoner in a cell, but that law must provide little comfort to those prisoners held in the unsuitable conditions of police cells.

Other differences from Britain

In some other important ways the Dutch prison system is very different from the British. Firstly, more than half of the prisoners are unconvicted—in contrast to only about 15% of British prisoners. What is more, these prisoners do not have the same "rights" as British remand prisoners, who are technically, and in some cases literally, innocent. English remand prisoners are allowed a visit every day and even to have a meal brought into the prison, which presents great security difficulties to the staff. Dutch prisoners are allowed only one hourly visit a week, which is worse than for some convicted prisoners. Additionally, the judge will insist that some remand prisoners are kept apart from everybody else, which makes life difficult for the prison authorities. In the Netherlands, in contrast to England, however, nobody could remember when a remand prisoner was last found not guilty. Many go free after their three months in remand, but that is because they are deemed to have been punished enough. This almost 100% conviction rate stems from the fact that prosecutor has looked into the case for some days before he sends the offender to court. He also has the power to dismiss cases, and this power, which is often exercised, seems to be important in keeping down the input

into the penal system. A similar system in Britain, which is being considered for Scotland,⁶ might mean that chronic schizophrenics who steal milk bottles would not be processed through an expensive system that is inadequate for both their and society's needs in such cases.

A second feature of the Dutch system, which at first sight seems strange to British eyes, is that the prisons have waiting lists. At the moment about 12 000 people are on the list, a high figure which naturally means that if all those people were in prison the population would be higher. They would not, however, bring the figures up to anything like the British, because most of them are waiting to do short sentences. One group who commonly wait for sentences are drunken drivers, who usually receive a two week sentence. These sentences are commonly served as seven weekends. The British All Party Penal Affairs Group has visited the Netherlands, and been impressed by this notion of "part time prison" and would like to see it introduced here.⁸ Most of the group's suggestions fall on deaf ears, but this time the Home Office is interested and the Home Secretary has announced that such a scheme will be tried in England and Wales.⁹

A third important characteristic is that more than half of the prisoners in Dutch prisons are not Dutch. Some are immigrants and foreign workers, and others are drug smugglers caught in Dutch sea ports and airports. The Netherlands is an important centre of international drug trafficking. One consequence of this is that many of those in Dutch prisons are opiate addicts. Special programmes to deal with addicts have been mounted in some prisons—for instance, in one of the remand prisons in Amsterdam which I visited and in Norgerhaven prison—but none of these seem particularly successful, and most of the governors agreed that drugs are freely available in the prisons.

Daily life

Dutch prisons feel much more relaxed than British ones, and riots, which have become a feature of British prison life, are unknown. The Amsterdam prison that I visited was the Dutch equivalent of Brixton, the capital's remand prison. I have visited Brixton four times, and by any standards it is a scary place: many of the cells accommodate three men, and many of the prisoners are locked up for much of the day. The psychiatric block contains 100 prisoners in a three floor *Porridge* type building. The Amsterdam prison consists of six brand new towers, one of which contains some psychiatric beds (not cells). Each prisoner has his own cell and his own lavatory. In the block I visited, which contains a special unit for drug addicts, the prison officers work very closely with the prisoners and are encouraged to take as many of the decisions about the prisoner as possible on their own. (The next step of letting the prisoners take decisions has not been taken as it has in some British prisons—in the Barlinnie special unit, for example (11 February, p 472).) The Amsterdam prison feels much easier than Brixton, but one important reason for this is the resources sunk into the Dutch prison. The cost of each place in the prison was 12 times the international average. As Brixton prison was built in the nineteenth century no such figure is available.

In contrast, Norgerhaven, the long term prison, is old (over 100 years) while Long Lartin, the British long term prison I visited was opened only in 1962. Long Lartin has only one prisoner in a cell, and prisoners can move around relatively freely within an extremely secure perimeter (nobody has escaped). Yet Long Lartin has a tense atmosphere despite its facilities and its psychological department doing all it can to keep the atmosphere cool. Norgerhaven felt much easier, and I can see only one main reason for this: the Dutch prisoners are not facing nearly such long sentences (although some of them face a second sentence in their own countries after leaving Norgerhaven).

Daily life in the two establishments does not appear to be much different. All the prisoners either work or are in full time education (and finding work for the prisoners is a problem in both Britain and Holland), and all can take part in sport. One fascinating aspect of life in Norgerhaven, which perhaps symbolises an important difference from the British system, is that new arrivals are shown a video in which the prison staff introduce themselves. The video was made by prisoners and is available in eight languages.

Punishment systems in the two prisons are similar in outline, but when I visited Long Lartin its punishment block was full, while only one prisoner was locked up at Norgerhaven—and that was because he refused to get up for work; in effect he “chose” to stay in bed.

Conclusions

Penal reformers travel from all over the world to visit Dutch prisons because the Dutch have managed to reduce their prison population at a time when it has risen fast in most other countries. The Dutch have not in consequence suffered a crime rate that has risen appreciably faster than in other countries, and it does allow them to treat their prisoners in a much more civilised way than most other countries. The smaller population is due mostly to Dutch prison sentences being much shorter than in other countries. Another important factor in the superiority of the Dutch system is that they spend about three

times as much per prisoner per year than Britain (£18 000 compared with £6000 in 1979), but as the Dutch have about a third as many prisoners per head of the population this means that the Dutch spend roughly the same amount on prisons per head of the population.

This is the first of two articles on the Dutch prison system. The next article will deal with medical care for Dutch prisoners and the unique Dutch system for dealing with dangerous, violent offenders.

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Reading for Pleasure

Durrell's Quincunx

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Only a handful of authors are so predictable in the pleasure they give that I would buy their next book unexamined and without reading the verdicts of the professional reviewers. One book, however, I am waiting for impatiently—the fifth and final work in Laurence Durrell's series of novels set in Avignon, Geneva, and Egypt. *Monsieur*, the first of the series, appeared in 1974; next came *Livia*, then *Constance*, and last year *Sebastian* (all published by Faber and Faber). Durrell describes the series as a quincunx (the pattern of planting sometimes used in orchards in which four trees are arranged in a square with a fifth in their centre), for the books do not form a sequence; instead they are concerned with interlocking stories with common characters—“only dependent on one another as echoes might be . . . a cluster of themes to be reworked in the others.”

The device of describing a series of events first through the eyes of one character and then through another is familiar enough. Durrell's design is far more complex. The first book,

Monsieur, is an account of the life and death of Piers (owner of Verfeuille, a decaying château near Avignon), his sister Sylvie, and their introduction by the Egyptian Akkad to the beliefs of the gnostics. In *Livia* we learn, however, that these and other characters are fictions based on another brother and two sisters, Hilary, Constance, and Livia, who live in Tu Duc, a decaying manor house near Avignon. To complicate matters further, one of the “fictional” characters, Rob Sutcliffe, is a novelist invented by Blanford, the author of *Monsieur*; and as *Livia* opens Blanford is talking (by telephone) to Sutcliffe about the relations between the real characters and the fictitious ones.

Do not be put off, however, by these complexities (or conceits, depending on the reader's reaction). For me the appeal of the books—strong enough to provide the incentive to reread all four in the past month in an attempt to unravel their interrelations—lies in a succession of beautiful descriptive passages interpolated with intellectually exciting ideas.

Durrell's earlier novels (especially the Alexandrian quartet) presented some lyrical descriptions of Egypt. The set pieces in the quincunx include a marvellous account of Christmas at Verfeuille, with the family and servants gathered in the stone flagged hall; a summer spent at Tu Duc, with long conversations in the cool waters of the lily pond; a ride on horseback across the desert to the oasis of Macabru for a gnostic ceremony