

# PRIVATISATION

## Factfile 21

### ANOTHER 24 NEEDED?

Twenty-four new prisons at a cost of over £2bn plus £300m in annual running costs could be needed within the next seven years if the prison population continues to grow at its present rate. The Director General of the Prison Service warned in February that, if existing sentencing patterns continue, the prison population in 2005 could reach 82,000 – or 93,000 on the worst assumptions.

Within a week of Mr Tilt's warning, the Home Secretary announced that an extra £70m [on top of the £43m pledged last July] was being allocated to provide 4,820 extra places. Six new house blocks will be built, some office space will be converted into cells, extra places will be made available in new prisons, and the use of the prison ship HMP Weare will be extended. The money will also provide for additional staffing and regime activities.

### ALTON MANNING INQUEST

Alton Manning, a 33-year old black remand prisoner, died on 8 December 1995 at UK Detention Services-run HM Prison Blakenhurst. An inquest started in January 1998 but was adjourned before the coroner's summing up at the request of UKDS lawyers, who have applied to the High Court for a ruling. Reporting on the reason for the application is not allowed. That hearing took place on 18 February 1998, after which the coroner's inquest will be resumed. At time of writing, no date had been scheduled.

The coroner and the jury had heard that Mr Manning died after UKDS staff attempted a body search for drugs. It also emerged in evidence that:

■ The cause of death was respiratory impairment/restriction during restraint leading to asphyxia. There was evidence of airway occlusion due to pressure to the neck and restriction of chest movement whilst on the ground with pressure applied to the back of the chest. Mr Manning suffered bruising to the neck, blood spots in the eyes, face and neck, and there was blood from the ear and mouth consistent with the occlusion of the airway. Bruising found on his back was consistent with the application of a knee in that area. Eight separate visible areas of injury to the face, as well as abrasions to the arms and legs, were noted. The pathologist also confirmed that no drugs or alcohol were found in Mr Manning's body.

■ Crucial evidence from UKDS was missing. Prison cameras that would have recorded an unobstructed view of the last moments of Mr Manning's restraint were said to have recorded

nothing due to operational error. Staff reports containing the first written accounts of the event could not be found by UKDS when sought on behalf of Mr Manning's family.

■ Five prisoners described how they saw Mr Manning being restrained in a neck hold that was wholly consistent with injuries to the neck and the cause of death as established by the pathological evidence.

■ None of the eight staff who were directly involved in the restraint offered any explanation for the visible injuries or the cause of death.

■ The two most senior staff involved – one holding Mr Manning's head and the other kneeling on his back – claimed to be ignorant of Home Office guidance issued in August 1992 [the prison opened in May 1993] warning of the dangers of restraining prisoners in the prone position or applying pressure to the neck, chest or abdomen. But all the other officers accepted that they had received the relevant warnings during their training in control and restraint techniques at Blakenhurst.

According to INQUEST, lawyers representing the Home Office and the company worked as a team throughout the hearing with the assistance of the Treasury Solicitor and the Home Office's Controller at Blakenhurst. Lawyers for Mr Manning's family were denied access to much of the relevant documentation. Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST, said that: "The evidence heard so far has been extremely disturbing. The jury will have to consider whether or not Mr Manning was unlawfully killed."

*Stephen Nathan  
presents his latest  
round-up of news  
and views on  
prison  
privatisation*



James Stenson

UKDS is now owned by Corrections Corporation of America and Sodexo, although at the time of Mr Manning's death, CCA's partners were John Mowlem and Sir Robert McAlpine. The Blakenhurst contract is being renewed for a further three years from May 1998.

For a full briefing on this case, contact: INQUEST Tel: 0181 802 7430, e-mail: inquest@compuserve.com.

#### BLAKENHURST BOARD'S REPORT

The Board of Visitors at Blakenhurst has published a brief report for the period 1 November 1996 to 30 June 1997. The Board noted that:

Julia Jackson  
reports on drug  
rehabilitation  
-Texas style

■ The increased prison population without a proportionate increase in staff "caused the Board concern" in terms of staffing on the landings.

■ Doubling up of some single cells led to an "unacceptable" lack of privacy.

■ There was evidence that drug use was increasing "despite ever more stringent controls by staff."

■ The professionalism and enthusiasm shown by the staff was "quite exceptional" and prisoners were treated "with humanity and respect."

■ Work on the suicide support suite had still not started.

■ Almost all those prisoners prepared to work had been found purposeful occupation.

■ Education/industries and the physical education department continued to provide an excellent service.

■ It was hoped that communications between management and grade staff would improve with the re-launching of the Staff Consultative Committee.

■ The provision of probation service programmes was cut from 40 to 20.

The Board also recorded that "we found it very disheartening that our serious concerns appeared to be virtually ignored by the previous administration at the Home Office. We look forward to better times and plea that, in future, our representations are at the very least responded to constructively."

*Annual Report of the Board of Visitors, HMP Blakenhurst, 1 November 1996-30 June 1997 (published December 1997).*

■ After five years of unsuccessful contract bids, UK Detention Services Ltd has won its second UK contract. It will run HM Prison Agecroft at Salford. Construction firm Tilbury Douglas has the £45m contract to build the prison.

#### RESPONSE TO HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

The Government has published its response to the Home Affairs Select Committee which



Jason Shenai

reported on the Management of the Prison Service (Public and Private) prior to the General Election in May 1997 (see **Prison Report** 39). On privately managed prisons, the Government "expressed reservations" about the principle of contracting out the management of prisons and "wish to give further and careful consideration to this issue."

On the issue of commercial confidentiality, the Government stated that "details of bids for contracts or the detailed analysis of the breakdown of operating costs made available in confidence by private operators to help the Prison Service analyse the cost difference between public and private sector operations ..." do have to be treated as commercial in confidence. But "the Prison Service will keep to a minimum information that has to be treated as commercial in confidence."

The Government also accepted that there was "strong evidence" [based on 1996 figures] that privately-managed prisons cost less. But "the Government is examining ways in which the Prison Service might demonstrate that the publicly-managed prisons can match the performance of the private sector in comparable prisons and develop realistic plans to establish a case for returning contractually-managed prisons to the public sector on value for money grounds at the expiry of contracts."

The Government "will consider the nature and longer term future of private sector

involvement as part of its general examination of Prison Service resources".

*The Government Reply to the Second Report from the Home Affairs Committee Session 1996-97 HC 57, December 1997, Cm 3810.*

#### COST COMPARISONS

In June 1997, in order to develop a case for returning privately-run prisons to the public sector, the Home Secretary asked the Prison Service to review comparative costs to see if they matched. That review has started and the Prison Service has published cost comparisons for 1996-97 (see **Prison Report** 40). The figures have not been independently scrutinised. The Prison Service concludes that, on average, privately run prisons "offered an operational cost saving of 8 to 15 per cent ... depending on the cost measure used ... it can be seen that the difference ... is narrowing."

*Review of Comparative Costs and Performance of Privately & Publicly Operated Prisons 1996-97, Prison Service Research Report No 3, December 1997.*

■ The Prison Service earlier reported that privately-run prisons were cheaper than their public sector comparators in 1995-96 (see **Prison Report** 37). According to another recent but restricted circulation report, the cost differentials for 1996-97 were largely explained by the following:

- contracted prisons' staff costs per prisoner were 33 per cent lower due to lower average staff unit costs and fewer staff per prisoner;

- salaries were 14 per cent lower; pension costs 86 per cent lower and overtime 65 per cent lower;

- lower average salary levels accounted for 50 per cent of the difference in employee unit costs and lower pension costs for 43 per cent;

- contracted prisons delivered 10 per cent more hours per employee, with a longer working week, shorter planned time off and lower levels of absence through sickness;

- contracted prisons had 16 per cent fewer staff per prisoner.

*Contracted Prisons: Cost and Staffing Comparison 1995-96, Planning Group, Prison Service.*

#### RELIGION ON CONTRACT

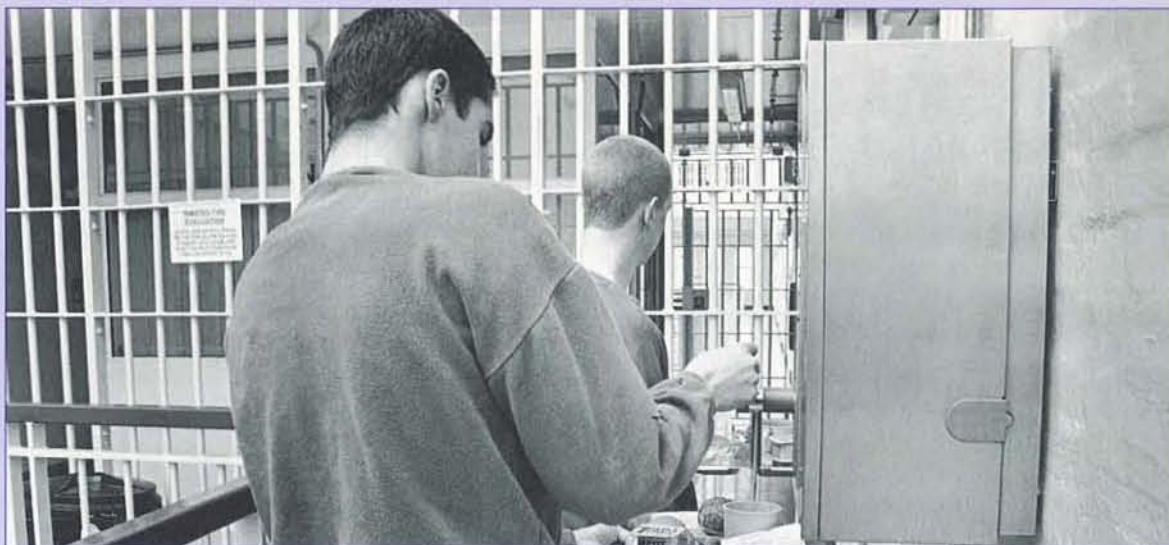
The US-based Kairos-APAC Trust continues to make inroads into the religious activities of prisons in England and Wales. As well as its first contract to provide services at The Verne, projects are being developed at Swaleside and Highpoint.

#### TAGGING EXTENDED

Trials of electronic tagging as a condition of bail will begin in Norwich Magistrates' Court and



Jason Shenai



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Crown Court on 1 April 1998 and in Manchester Magistrates' Court and Crown Court on 1 July 1998 (*Hansard*, 19 December 1997). Tagging is to be introduced in Scotland at courts in Aberdeen, Peterhead and Hamilton. Pilot schemes could be in place by the Summer of 1998.

### FIRST DEATH AT PARC

Securicor Custodial Services Ltd opened its first private prison, HM Parc at Bridgend, Wales in November 1997. But ten days after it opened, David Jenkins, a remand prisoner on suicide watch, hanged himself with his shoelaces. There was a full staff complement but only 99 prisoners in the 800 cell prison. Prisoners are being admitted at a rate of 50 per week.

On 15 December 1997, another prisoner attempted suicide but was found on the off-chance by a custody officer. Parc's design has reduced the overall size of the prison by 40 per cent compared with other 800 cell prisons. The design restricts prisoner movements and allows for fewer staff. The magazine *Building* has described the prison buildings as looking like "quality industrial sheds".

### LOWDHAM GRANGE

Premier Prison Service's latest prison, HM Prison Lowdham Grange in Nottingham, has opened amidst controversy. A plan to contract with a number of firms to provide employment for prisoners has been criticised by trade unions for allowing companies to undercut existing local wage rates. The local employers' association has welcomed the scheme as long as "it isn't providing unfair and subsidised competition to local businesses and it develops the skill base of individuals."

### RITZY BUSINESS

In April 1998, Group 4 will open the first private Secure Training Centre for 40 offenders aged between 12 and 15 years old. Another four centres are planned but contracts have not yet been awarded. The Government has refused to say officially what the estimated average annual payment to the contractors for each child will be

(*Hansard*, 4 December 1997). However, on 30 December 1997 the *Daily Mail* reported that the annual cost per child will be £250,000, or £4,800 per week – more expensive than staying at the Ritz Hotel in London.

### UNIONS' PLAN FOR INDUSTRIES

Wackenhut (UK) Ltd's contract to operate prison industries at HM Prison Coldingley is to be independently evaluated over two years. But Prison Service trade unions are still arguing that the Prisons Minister should reconsider the issue. The unions have recommended an alternative model for prison industries based upon the US Federal Government's UNICOR system. More details from: Larry O'Callaghan, CPSA, c/o Room G30, Abell House, John Islip Street, London SW1P 4LH, England. Fax: 0171 217 5916.

### COULD DO BETTER

The 1997 Annual Report from the Board of Visitors at HMP High Down reports that "Premier Prisons have arrived late and have failed to get prisoners to court on time during this reporting period and only the goodwill of the staff at HMP High Down has prevented locking out into police cells."

■ Premier Prison staff shackled a pregnant prisoner to a radiator pipe for almost five hours in an unsecured area at Leek Magistrates' Court on 27 January 1998. She was waiting to appear on a theft charge. According to *The Times*, the Prison Service has launched an inquiry into the incident.

### PRISON PRIVATISATION REPORT INTERNATIONAL

Since the last issue of Prison Report, issues 16 and 17 of the Prison Reform Trust's newsletter covering international developments have been published. Some back issues are still available. Subscription rates: Individuals £25 per ten issue subscription; public sector/voluntary organisations £50, corporate sector £100.