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Special Category - the Long War of Irish Prisoners in England Nicki Jameson, FRFI

From Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa to Bobby Sands, much has been written by and about Irish political prisoners, their sufferings at the hands of the British state and their steadfast resistance. In these two books, which are the first of what will be a four volume set, Irish academic Ruan O'Donnell offers an original and valuable contribution to this body of research. Special Category chronicles in detail the struggles of Irish Republican (and in particular IRA) prisoners held within prisons in England during the time known to the British media as 'the Troubles', to the British Army as 'Operation Banner' and to the IRA itself as 'The Long War'. The books are based on material drawn from over 70 interviews with ex-prisoners, their relatives, lawyers and supporters, alongside copious documentation with which O'Donnell has been entrusted by the former prisoners – their letters, diaries, accounts and other documentation. There is also an extensive bibliography. Sources for Volume 2 include Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! (FRFI) and Hands Off Ireland (HOI - published by the RCG from 1976 to 1979) and archives of correspondence between comrades then active in our organisation and Irish prisoners of war (POWs). Although the focus is specifically on the Irish prisoners in England, of necessity these books also reflect the history of the wider Irish struggle during that period, and indeed the political movement in England as a whole, during a period which encompassed the Labour government of the 1970s, the rise of Thatcherism, the Malvinas/Falklands War and the Miners' Strike.

The English Prison System and the IRA: The story begins in 1968 at a time when '[t]he criminal justice system was undergoing an uneasy transition…' following the escape of Soviet spy George Blake from Wormwood Scrubs in 1966 (Vol 1, p5). Embarrassed by the Blake escape and by those of train-robbers Charlie Wilson and Ronnie Biggs, the government commissioned the Mountbatten Report, which recommended that all high security prisoners be concentrated in a single prison on the Isle of Wight. This recommendation was rejected and instead the British state adopted the 'Dispersal System' whereby high security prisoners were spread among six or seven different establishments; however Mountbatten's other main recommendation on giving each prisoner a security classification from A to D, depending on perceived risk to the public was implemented. The overwhelming majority of IRA prisoners were designated Category A, the highest risk level, and therefore served their entire sentences within the Dispersal System. While on paper, their classification was no different to that of the most dangerous criminal prisoners and although 'Special Category A', which gives these books their title, never formally existed, it was abundantly clear from the outset to the prisoners, their families and their gaolers that Irish POWs were subject in practice to yet another level of scrutiny and repression.

The prisoners who entered the English system in the late 1960s and early 1970s faced an austere regime with few legal rights: their mail was censored, their visits were interfered with and they were subject to physical violence both from staff and, before they had stamped their mark on the system, from other prisoners. While until 1976 POWs held in the occupied north of Ireland were able to claim 'political status', in England this did not exist, meaning that from the point of entry to the system, prisoners faced immediate battles on issues such as prison uniform and prison work, both of which they refused as incompatible with political status. This led to protests and hunger strikes, which the authorities responded to with force-feeding:

'Dolours Price was evidently the first IRA prisoner of the group to be force-fed in Brixton on 3 December 1973. A major scare came on the third day when she lost her breath and managed to pull the tube and feeding apparatus from her mouth. Marian Price was subject to her inaugural session on 5 December…This was her twenty-first day on strike and the distress and retching caused by the process was clearly audible in her sister's cell.' (Vol 1, p142) The prisoners strenuously resisted this vicious treatment. And, despite censorship and other barriers to communication, they knew they could count on there being tremendous support outside prison. Although obviously not altogether unhindered, prior to the Labour government's introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in November 1974, supporters of Irish liberation were able to organise far more openly than later became the case. O'Donnell describes how, following the death of Michael Gaughan on hunger strike in Parkhurst prison on 3 June 1974: 'A large crowd of supporters assembled in Cricklewood… to march behind an eight-man Guard of Honour dressed in black pullovers and berets. From there the 3,000 strong procession continued on a two-hour march to Kilburn and into the Sacred Heart Church, Quex Road.'

Stamping Their Mark on the System: These two volumes provide a densely packed, encyclopaedic history of the struggle of Irish political prisoners in English prisons. What comes over most strongly of all, alongside the brutality of the system, is their absolute determination and resilience. Aside from the few who are wrongly convicted and well known to be so, these are soldiers, for whom the same war against British rule which has led them to take armed action on English or Welsh soil, continues to be fought every minute they remain incarcerated: 'Such men viewed imprisonment as "another stage of the war" in which "every day was a combat day when you could do something"…' (Interview with Eddie O'Neill, Vol 2, p295).

At the start the main focus of the prison struggle was for political status. Although this was never officially reinstated in the Six Counties, after the 1981 Long Kesh hunger strike it was restored in all but name, and at that stage, the main demand for those imprisoned in England became for repatriation to serve their sentences in Ireland. The books describe how this was accompanied by a constant fight to preserve human dignity within the prison setting, although it is made clear that any demands for better treatment and indeed for repatriation, remained part of the political campaign and were not simply pursued on humanitarian, grounds. The books are full of accounts of blanket protests, sabotage and rooftop demonstrations. In carrying these out, partly through common cause and partly out of the necessity of survival, IRA prisoners politicised and worked together with English and other prisoners, both black and white. The influence of this relatively small group (no more than 100 at any one time) of Irish men and women, spread through the Dispersal System, changed the entire character of English high security prisons and the consciousness of those incarcerated in them for a period of 25 years.

A particular comradeship was established between Irish POWs and politicised black prisoners, and in telling this part of the history, O'Donnell is able to quote extensively from writings by Black Liberation Army prisoner Shujaa Moshesh in FRFI: 'In prison I was meeting people who were giving me the Irish liberation view. The first thing I noticed was their commitment to the Irish struggle. They're not half way guys… Any kind of English hostility against black and Irish prisoners the screws will support because it's in their interests to keep prisoners divided as well as matching their own racism. We had a lot of political discussion, were involved in protests and strikes. They proved the level of their commitment. It was a learning process; I'm sure I learned more from them than they learned from me. They used to ask me questions about aspects of the black struggle.' (FRFI January 1989, quoted Vol 2, p67) This unity between Irish and black prisoners informed all the major prison uprisings at Hull, Gartree, Wormwood Scrubs, Albany and Parkhurst which are detailed in O'Donnell's books. The Irish prisoners also gained support for their actions from swathes of the

English 'gangster' prison population who, whatever their pre-prison views on the Irish conflict, gave the IRA men respect for their dedication – and of course were forced to recognise that if they did not work with the POWs they would have to face the consequences.

Solidarity: These books are refreshingly partisan about the major conflict being described, ie firmly on the side of the Irish liberation fighters and completely against the role played by their British imperialist captors. There is no pretence at any 'lack of bias' on that score. Having established this as a given throughout the account, the books then take, insofar as possible, an even-handed approach to any disputes and differences which occurred within the movement itself, either inside or outside of prison. All those who are seen to have contributed to solidarity with the prisoners, be it the Prisoners Aid Committee, the Troops Out Movement, the nun Sister Sarah Clarke, the Young Liberals or the Irish Freedom Movement - which was set up at a similar time to the Irish Solidarity Movement in which the RCG played a pivotal role - are given their due. There is no sectarianism here and condemnation is reserved for those who truly merit it – vicious politicians such as Labour Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Roy Mason (Vol 1, pp402-3), and Britain's then biggest 'left' organisation, the Communist Party of Great Britain, which had a disgraceful stance in relation to the struggle in Ireland: 'the CPGB refused to be drawn into a declaration of solidarity. [It] remained wedded to a de facto policy of following the lead of communist affiliates in the North of Ireland, a body with disproportionate input from persons drawn from the Unionist, as well as sectarian Loyalist community. This produced a glaring paradox whereby the CPGB voiced support for international leftist revolutionary organisations in Continental Europe, Africa and Asia, while condemning the closest equivalent within the UK and Ireland.' (Vol 2, p27)

Working Class Unity: Although completely absent from the narrative of Volume 1, the RCG is cited frequently throughout Volume 2, and clearly shown to have played a central role in prisoner solidarity, both through our dedicated organising of events such as demonstrations outside prisons, the Home Office etc, and because of our comrades' consistent political correspondence and dialogue with the prisoners, which allowed FRFI and HOI to be the first to publicise many of the attacks on prisoners or acts of resistance by them. Volume 2 of Special Category covers in some detail the setting up of the Irish Solidarity Movement under the heading 'A new Broad Front': 'On 13 April 1983 IRA prisoners in Albany endorsed a complicated process of realignment taking place within Britain's numerous pro-Republican groupings. The impetus derived from the 20 November 1982 conference… organised by the North London Irish Solidarity Committee. The stated aim, as outlined by David Yaffe (aka Reed) of the Revolutionary Communist Group, was the formation of a national Irish Solidarity Movement by means of achieving a "real unity – based on the common interests of the Irish people and the British working class in the defeat of British imperialism."… Alastair Logan, Helen O'Brien and Michael Holden provided information and analysis on the prisoner dimension…and ensured an Irish republican input from the outset.' (Vol 2, p286) O'Donnell goes on to describe in detail the setting up of the Irish Solidarity Movement (ISM), the forces it drew in and the inspiring events it organised, up to 1984, when the very same weekend that the IRA spectacularly bombed the Tory Party conference hotel in Brighton, recently freed POW John McCluskey shook the hand of striking Kent miners' leader Malcolm Pitt on the platform at an ISM rally in London (p385). Volume 2 ends in 1985 at the point when Sinn Fein has begun to operate as an electoral party and looks forward to the 'end game' of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (p393). These books have already sold well and been widely praised. They will clearly go on to become one of the definitive accounts of this aspect and period of the struggle for Irish freedom.

'Catch me if you Can' Crook Back in the Can

A dopey drug dealer fugitive who taunted police on social media challenging them to "catch me if you can" is back behind bars after officers did just that. Steven Johnson, 40, from Prescot, Merseyside, had been wanted since January 2014 after breaching the conditions of his licence. It is believed that while he was wanted by police, Johnson - who had been sentenced to six years and 11 months for the original offence of possession with intent to supply Class A drugs - was in Spain. During his time on the run posted various photos online showing him posing obnoxiously in front of high powered luxury cars and boasting about yachts and massages. In one message online, he wrote: "You will never find me! Hahaha." But he got his comeuppance when officers did indeed find and arrest him. Sergeant Mark Worrall, from Merseyside Police, said: "The arrest of Johnson shows that we never give up. "Johnson has been wanted on recall to prison for two years and he had been living the high life abroad - but that has been cut short and he's now back behind bars."

Detainees: Death – (Dying for Justice IRR Report) House of Commons: Written Answers [25463]

Dominic Raab: Every death in custody is a tragedy. Each one is investigated independently by the PPO or the IPC, and is the subject of a coroner's inquest. Every effort is made to learn lessons from these investigations, and the prevention of further deaths is a priority for police, prisons and immigration detention services. The very small number of cases in which criminal offences are believed to have been committed are referred for further investigation by the police and/or to the Crown Prosecution Service, and where appropriate charges are brought. The final outcome in such cases is a matter for the courts. The Dying for Justice report by the Institute of Race Relations, published in March 2015, highlighted the particular issue of deaths of Black and Minority Ethnic people in custody The Government is not intending to issue a response to the report though has considered its findings. The report acknowledges some of the improvements that have been made during that period. It also reminds us of the enduring nature of many of the issues related to deaths in custody, particularly that the families of the deceased and others in the Black and Minority Ethnic community continue to lack confidence that appropriate action is being taken in response to such deaths. The Government is working to address this, for example through more effective liaison with families, as well as improvements to restraint techniques and training. The Prime Minister has asked David Lammy MP to lead a review of the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales to investigate evidence of possible bias against black defendants and other ethnic minorities. With significant overrepresentation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals in the criminal justice system, the review will consider their treatment and outcomes to identify and help tackle potential bias or prejudice.

Prison Keeps us Isolated. but Sometimes, Sisterhood Can Bring us Together

Chelsea E Manning, Opinion, Guardian: Prisons function by isolating those of us who are incarcerated from any means of support other than those charged with keeping us imprisoned: first, they physically isolate us from the outside world and those in it who love us; then they work to divide prisoners from one another by inculcating our distrust in one another. The insecurity that comes from being behind bars with, at best, imperfect oversight makes us all feel responsible only for ourselves. We end up either docile, apathetic and unwilling to engage with each other, or hostile, angry, violent and resentful. When we don't play by the written or unwritten rules – or, sometimes, because we do – we become targets. It's easy enough to make us go away; it's easy enough to make us "someone else's problem".

The unique problem for transgender women in prison is that our health and welfare are also

the responsibility of those charged with overseeing us. We live in an environment in which the same staff given the job of keeping us in prison for lengthy periods of time and occasionally "teaching us a lesson" are the same ones given the job of ensuring our transitions, when we're allowed to transition at all. The first job always takes precedent over the other, seemingly more annoying one. The day I first arrived at the United States Disciplinary Barracks in Leavenworth, Kansas on 22 August 2013, I announced my status as a trans woman intent on transitioning as soon as possible. At the time, the idea of a trans woman in a US military prison was considered unprecedented and even outlandish to the military brass and the outside world. However, when I arrived at the prison – and for nearly a year afterward – I was not the only trans woman at the facility, nor was I the first one to make such requests for treatment.

In 2009, another trans woman (who I'll call Alice) had arrived at the same prison. She was not the first openly trans woman to arrive at the prison either, but she was the first woman to have documented a request for hormones and other treatments. Unsurprisingly, her requests were ignored and even mocked by the very same staff members who today oversee the decisions about the conditions of my transition. Though Alice had multiple diagnoses of "gender identity disorder" – which was changed to gender dysphoria in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) – the medical and mental health providers at the prison acknowledged and denied her request. They told her what they told me four years later: the Army and the US Disciplinary Barracks do not provide hormone treatments or other gender-confirming healthcare.

Without any financial resources, personal support inside or outside, any knowledge of the legal complexities of making such a complaint and "exhausting" all administrative hurdles before doing so, any access to lawyers with knowledge of trans issues in prisons, or even knowledge that such resources existed, Alice stopped trying to get the medical treatment she deserved. That was, of course, until I made my announcement: after seeing an outpouring of support for me and my request, Alice restarted her battle. After spending about 40 days in a "reception" status in a self-contained portion of the prison, I finally met Alice in October 2013. She hurriedly and excitedly approached me in the prison dining area and described at machine-gun speed her own battle to receive healthcare, and how her enthusiasm to continue was re-ignited by my own efforts.

Alice told me the rest of her story, about her diagnosis and about how she had been ignored for all these years. I felt sick hearing her speak about being forced to live so many years without medical care; I tried to keep the tears, the concern, the anxiety, and the anger from boiling out of me. I told Alice that I would do everything that I could to help her out. She smiled, and then she frowned and said "I don't want a lot of attention." I told her that I understood, but that I could help not by shining a media spotlight on her, but by showing her how to make another formal request, how to appeal the expected denial – an arcane and required bureaucratic process that many prisoners don't understand – and how to petition for a change of name. I didn't tell her then, but Alice was one of the few trans women with whom I had actually interacted with for more than a few fleeting moments. And then, even though we were housed in different parts of the prison, she instantly became my closest friend and confidante.

Over the next six months, we bonded more and more. As promised, we started Alice's paperwork and, by the beginning of 2014, she finally started seeing a psychologist in the prison regularly. She then began the same evaluation process that I had gone through earlier in late 2013. Because she was without any money or meaningful way of earning it, I also showed her how she could file for recognition of her indigence before a state court as part of her name change petition. Though Alice had years of frustration and despondency behind her, she was starting to feel better. She became

more outgoing and vocal as a person. Before, she told me, she had just given up and "stayed quiet". From what I saw, though, she was clearly not going to be doing that anymore.

Unfortunately, our friendship and the assistance I gave her created a problem for prison management: instead of only having to deal with one legal challenge over gender-confirming healthcare, the prison and the military had to deal with two. And, to make matters worse for administrators, Alice's documented request dated back over four years earlier. Fearing the possibility of potential liability and providing healthcare for which they had no existing expertise, the military prison sought to transfer me to a civilian prison in April through July 2014. At the same time – unbeknownst to either of us – Alice was considered for a similar transfer.

Still, we moved ahead with our requests and, in July 2014 after exhausting all of my administrative appeals, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) began representing me and submitted a demand letter to the senior prison and military officials. A few weeks later, my best friend and ally at the prison was suddenly approached by prison officials on her way to work one morning. They pulled Alice aside and told her that she was going back to her cell to gather her belongings and "pack out". She was being transferred to a federal prison. I happened to be walking by as a guard led Alice to the same area for people being processed in and out from the prison. She was pushing a large cart filled with what few belongings she had, looking scared but confident. I asked her what was going on and she explained the transfer. I stalled her, trying to say a longer goodbye, but the guard escorting her told her to start moving again. I wanted to hug her, but the best I was allowed was a quick high five, a sad head-nod and a little wave.

In my cell during lunch break, the reality that Alice was gone and that I would probably never see her again sunk in. I broke down and cried behind my closed door for at least an hour: I wanted her to get the treatment that we both need to survive, but I also wanted us to be able to be friends. I often still think about Alice and wonder how she is doing in a civilian prison. The times we spent together make me smile; the thought of seeing her with an uncertain look on her face pushing that big cart makes me sad. While we came from different backgrounds and had different access to resources, we faced the same system. Alice started to become more confident and empowered once she became connected with more support and resources on the outside; that power she found from our friendship and from the hopethat she might finally get the medical treatment she needed made prison administrators nervous, and they took it away from both of us. But even though helping Alice ended up limiting my time with her, I have but a single regret: I wish I'd told her that I love her as a sister. I wish I could tell her that I still do.

Funeral and Vigil Held for Woman Found Dead in HMP Holloway Damien Gayle, Guardian

Hundreds of protesters held a candlelit vigil Monday 8th February, outside Holloway prison on the day Sarah Reed, the prisoner on remand who died in her cell last month, was buried in a private family ceremony. People braved the 30mph winds outside the jail, trying to keep candles lit as they listened to speakers from a number of rights groups describe what is known of the of Reed's case and the issues behind it. Stephanie Lightfoot-Bennett, of the United Friends and Family Campaign stood with tears her eyes as protesters gathered for the vigil. "We need to come out and we need to make a noise and we need to show support. Everybody says black lives matter; I've always said death has no colour when it comes to the state," she said. Lightfoot-Bennett's twin brother, Leon Patterson, was found dead in a cell in Stockport, Greater Manchester, in 1992. She added: "The state is killing us one by one. There has been 1,518 deaths in police custody and zero convictions since 1990 and that shows you that something is wrong. The CPS is a joke, the IPCC is not fit for purpose.

£10,000 Compensation After Eight Year Battle With Police *Dave Rudge, Mirror*

A man has finally won compensation eight years after he was attacked by an 'out-of-control' police dog as a schoolboy. Rhys Bennett was aged 12 when he was attacked by an Alsatian which chased him and his friends as they explored a derelict social club in 2007. As he fled the building in Sapcote Park, Leics., the dog dragged Rhys to the ground and sank its teeth into his face and shoulder. Rhys was forced to undergo months of treatment for his wounds and reconstructive surgery. Last month Leicestershire Police agreed to pay him £10,000 - just five days before a compensation claim was due to be heard before a judge at Leicester County Court . The force has consistently refused to apologise to Rhys - who received counselling for anxiety and depression following the "traumatic" attack. Rhys's family initiated a claim for compensation and an apology from Leicestershire Police in 2009. But they were stonewalled and court proceedings were launched in June 2014. In November that year Rhys offered to settle his claim for £10,000 but the offer was rejected. Finally on January 25 the force agreed to an out-of-court settlement.

Court of Appeal Legal Aid Ruling - 'A Blow For Civil Liberties' Sasha Barton, Justice Gap

Judges in the Court of Appeal dealt a considerable blow to civil liberties in this country with a ruling that will make it more difficult for victims to bring claims against public authorities for false imprisonment, assault and for other serious and significant breaches of their rights. The ruling overturned an earlier decision by the High Court and will effectively prevent those bringing claims against the police and other public bodies for unlawful acts from accessing legal aid funding, unless they can show that the public body intended to act unlawfully or acted dishonestly. Without funding we are likely to see many claims that would have been successful not being brought at all, going against the fundamental constitutional principle that members of the public should be able to hold public authorities to account for fundamental breaches of their rights. The dispute in R (on the application of Sunita Sisangia) v Director of Legal Aid Casework centred on the meaning of the test for public funding for claims against public authorities. The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) refused to fund Miss Sisangia's false imprisonment claim against the Metropolitan Police on the basis that her claim did not meet the new test under the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). Fortunately for Miss Sisangia, the LAA has since agreed to fund her case which she has now pursued to a successful conclusion. The LAA however, still fought the case on principle to prevent further cases being eligible for funding, presumably in a bid to save legal aid costs.

The test set out in LASPO is that claims against a public authority for assault, battery, false imprisonment and other torts will only be funded where the public authority has abused is position or powers. LASPO states than an act or omission is not an abuse of the authority's position or powers unless it is 'deliberate or dishonest' and results in reasonably foreseeable harm. It was common ground in Ms Sisangia's case that the police had intended to arrest her and the claim was that they did not have grounds to do so. The Legal Aid Agency argued that it was not enough to show that the police deliberately arrested her. She would now have to show in addition that the police arrested her knowing at the time that they did not have the powers to do so. This added an additional, and far higher, hurdle to qualify for funding. The interpretation proposed by the LAA effectively excludes from scope for legal aid funding all claims which do not involve allegations of dishonesty or bad faith on the part of the state. This was contested in a judicial review which was earlier successful at the High Court. However, Lord Justice Elias (the presiding judge, sitting alongside Lord Justice Lewison and Christopher Clarke QC) in the

Court of Appeal disagreed and upheld the LAA's original decision to refuse funding.

The Court of Appeal held that despite LASPO appearing on the face of it to define what an abuse of power is (under a heading labelled 'definitions'), the definition set out did not in fact fully define an abuse of power. Parliament must therefore have intended the courts to determine the meaning of the phrase and for something more than an intentional tort to be necessary before there was an abuse power (not necessarily misfeasance, though it is difficult to see from the Court's reasoning what lesser claims would get over the very high hurdle now set). The Court of Appeal rejected the High Court view that LASPO provided a full definition of an "abuse of power" rather than a statement of minimum criteria. The High Court had accepted that only the arrest must be unlawful, otherwise to obtain funding any false imprisonment claim would have to amount to a claim for misfeasance in public office.

Important constitutional safeguard: This controversial ruling has far-reaching implications for access to justice. The judge's suggestion was that claimants in Miss Sisangia's position could find a solicitor to represent them pro bono, under a CFA or represent themselves as a litigant in person and therefore still had access to redress. This suggestion is fanciful. Other funding changes mean it is no longer possible in practical terms to fund cases under CFAs unless there is a personal injury element, which in cases like this there are not. With the best will in the world specialist lawyers cannot represent people un-funded. These cases involve complex legal arguments and there is no equality of arms if victims do not have legal representation. Whilst Miss Sisangia was able to bring her claim, funded by legal aid, this decision means that if she were trying to bring a claim now, she would have no way of getting legal representation and there would be no way of her challenging the police, other than perhaps by way of exceptional funding, which is extremely difficult to get, and would likely be refused on the basis that parliament had not intended to fund claims such as hers.

This state of affairs is deeply worrying. Being able to hold state authorities to account for unlawful loss of liberty and breaches of other fundamental rights is an important constitutional safeguard. Before LASPO, cases of false imprisonment were routinely funded by legal aid (subject of course to satisfying the means and merits tests) and restricting funding so that it applies only to deliberate unlawfulness and dishonesty cases was never the stated intention of Parliament. A system where people who have been unlawfully detained or otherwise mistreated by the state have no means of redress, is totally unacceptable. We intend to seek permission to appeal.

Time Spent On Remand Must be Knocked off any Jail Term Imposed

1. Since section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (introduced by section 21 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008) came into force in November 2008, it has been necessary for the sentencing court to specify the number of days that will count towards sentence in consequence of time spent on remand subject to a qualifying curfew.

2. Despite the court's best endeavours, guidance in R Hoggard [2013] EWCA Crim 1024, [2014] 1 Cr App R(S) 42, as to the procedure to be adopted in the Crown Court, and additional guidance in R v Thorsby and Others [2015] EWCA Crim 1, as to the procedure to be adopted in this court, is being ignored. Hence this Special Court has been convened today so as to reaffirm and re-emphasise the relevant principles.

3. So as to ensure that the court has the fullest possible information, any court imposing a curfew with a tagging condition should use the relevant form (the record of electronic monitoring of curfew). The form should be included with the case papers and accompany them wherever the case is sent. At any subsequent sentencing hearing solicitors and/or coun-

sel for the defendant should ask him whether he has been subject to curfew and tagging. If he says that he has, they should ascertain the details. It is also the duty of the Crown Prosecution Service to have in place a system to assist the court. The parties should then be in a position to inform the court of any issue as to time spent on a qualifying curfew.

4. With the necessary information to hand the sentencing court must take the following steps: Step1: Add up the days spent on qualifying curfew including the first, but not the last, if on the last day the defendant was taken into custody. Step 2: Deduct the days on which the defendant was at the same time also (i) being monitored with a tag for compliance with a curfew requirement and/or (ii) on temporary release from custody. Step 3: Deduct the days when the defendant has broken the curfew or the tagging condition. Step 4: Divide the result by 2. Step 5: If necessary, round up to the nearest whole number.

5. To avoid difficulties the court in Hoggard helpfully provided a form of words for sentencers to use: "The defendant will receive full credit for half the time spent under curfew if the curfew qualified under the provisions of section 240A. On the information before me the total period is ... days (subject to the deduct of ... days that I have directed under the Step(s) 2 and/or 3 making a total of ... days), but if this period is mistaken, this court will order an amendment of the record for the correct period to be recorded."

6. Advocates should be on the alert so that if the judge fails to use these words, they can raise the issue with him or her. If the judge does not use these words, and no one realises at the hearing, defence representatives should use their best endeavours to have the case re-listed within 56 days under the slip rule. We understand from Mr Heptonstall, who prosecuted before us today, that in most cases prisoners are informed of their sentence calculation within seven days of sentence and should be in a position to advise their representatives of any error in good time.

7. If the Hoggard formula is not used, and the 56 days have expired by the time anyone realises that an error has been made, an application must be made to this court.

8. If the Hoggard formula is used the Crown Court thereby retains jurisdiction of the matter, even after 56 days. If any amendment needs to be made it can be made administratively, provided the parties agree. We advise caution in allowing an administrative correction of the direction where the amount of time a defendant will spend in custody is significantly affected. The judge will wish to satisfy him/herself that the calculations are correct.

9. If the parties are not agreed, the court must decide. If a judge decides that it would be a disproportionate use of court time and incur unnecessary expense to hold a hearing, the issue can be resolved on the papers in the defendant's favour.

10. For present purposes the two relevant paragraphs of Thorsby are paragraphs 28 and 29. An applicant who applies for leave to appeal will be expected to attach to his application either his agreement with the prosecution as to the number of days credit, or the relevant documentation to support his assertion that he is entitled to X days' credit under section 240A. It is the responsibility of the applicant's representatives, not the Court of Appeal Office, to make enquiries with the lower court and the monitoring company, and then seek the agreement of the prosecution. The applicant must then state that the calculation is agreed, or identify the nature and extent of any dispute. The court expects the Crown Prosecution Service to investigate as a matter of urgency and at a sufficiently high level.

11. Applicants/lawyers will be expected to provide a witness statement explaining when and how they became aware of an error in the court's calculations or order. There should be no further delay.

12, The advice in Thorsby could not be clearer; yet still applications are being lodged

without agreement from the Crown on the number of days spent on qualifying curfew, and with no accompanying statement from the applicant's solicitor setting out why an extension of time should be granted. They are being lodged late, so that they demand an urgent response from the Court of Appeal Office. Further, some local Crown Prosecution Units are not responding to requests from the defence solicitors for an agreement. As a result, the Court of Appeal Office is spending a disproportionate amount of time and resources on correcting errors.

13. In future, if the requirements in Thorsby have not been complied with, the Criminal Appeal Office will no longer progress applications on behalf of represented applicants. The Registrar will notify the applicant's solicitor of the duty to comply with Thorsby before anything can happen. The CPS Appeals Unit has undertaken to assess the number of days. If the calculations are agreed, the single judge will be able to give leave and send the mater to the full court for a formal declaration without any need for representation. If the calculations are not agreed, the single judge may prefer simply to refer the matter to the full court for resolution, without giving leave or making a representation order. If the Registrar is satisfied that the Crown Court has used the appropriate words, allowing them to amend the days administratively, he will notify the parties that the Crown Court retains jurisdiction and that initially he intends to treat the application as ineffective. The applicant can then ask the Crown Court to re-list the matter and resolve the issue.

14. Practitioners must appreciate that they have a duty to comply with the court's requirements. If they continue to ignore those requirements there may come a time when, in the case of serious misconduct, the court will be forced to report any offender to their professional body for a failure to comply with their professional obligations and/or consider making a costs order. The liberty of the subject is at stake and this issue is not to be taken lightly.

UK Child Prisons: Thousands of Injuries Not Disclosed by Government

Mark Townsend and Eric Allison, Guardian: Thousands more children have been injured in custody through the use of controversial restraint techniques than the government had previously disclosed, new statistics show. This has prompted accusations that the true scale of harm in privately run jails has been suppressed. Figures reveal that the number of injuries to children caused by the use of restraint is more than three times higher than the total previously stated by the Youth Justice Board (YJB). It has emerged that, between 2010 and 2014, children who were restrained while in custody suffered 3,312 injuries that had not previously been declared to parliament or included in the government’s statistical bulletins.

Prison Reform: Prime Minister's Speech - What a Load of Bollocks

Let me begin with a pretty extraordinary fact: it’s well over 20 years since a Prime Minister made a speech solely about prisons. To be frank, it can sometimes be easy for politicians to worry so much that their words will be caricatured, that they might just as well avoid this whole area. And it can be easy for us all – when these buildings are closed off by high walls and barbed wire – to adopt an “out of sight, out of mind” attitude. I want this government to be different. When I say we will tackle our deepest social problems and extend life chances, I want there to be no no-go areas. And that must include the 121 prisons in our country, where our social problems are most acute and people’s life chances are most absent. So today, I want to explain why I believe prison reform should be a great progressive cause in British politics, and to set out my vision for a modern, more effective, truly twenty-first century prison system.

My starting point is this: we need prisons. Some people – including, of course, rapists,

murderers, child abusers, gang leaders – belong in prisons. For me, punishment – that deprivation of liberty – is not a dirty word. I never want us to forget that it is the victims of crime who should always be our principal priority. And I am not unrealistic or starry-eyed about what prisons can achieve. Not everyone shows remorse, and not everyone seeks redemption. But I also strongly believe that we must offer chances to change, that for those trying hard to turn themselves around, we should offer hope, that in a compassionate country, we should help those who've made mistakes to find their way back onto the right path.

In short: we need a prison system that doesn't see prisoners as simply liabilities to be managed, but instead as potential assets to be harnessed. But the failure of our system today is scandalous. 46% of all prisoners will re-offend within a year of release. 60% of short-sentenced prisoners will reoffend within the same period. And current levels of prison violence, drug-taking and self-harm should shame us all. In a typical week, there will be almost 600 incidents of self-harm; at least one suicide; and 350 assaults, including 90 on staff.

This failure really matters. It matters to the public purse: this cycle of reoffending costs up to £13 billion a year. It matters to you: because in the end, who are the victims of this re-offending? It's the mother who gets burgled or the young boy who gets mugged. It matters to the prison staff – some of the most deeply committed public servants in our country – who have to work in dangerous and often intimidating conditions. And yes, it matters to the prisoners themselves, who mustn't feel that society has totally given up on them. I'm clear: we need wholesale reform. And I am convinced that with the right agenda, we can be world leaders in change just like we have been in welfare, just like in education – we can demonstrate that with the right reforms, we can make a lasting difference to people in our society.

Resetting the debate. Now that begins with resetting the terms of the debate, especially when there are unhelpful, but well-worn mantras that I think hold progress back. For years, education was set back by the soft bigotry of low expectations – the idea that the most disadvantaged children shouldn't be expected to achieve the best results. Likewise, police reform was partly set back by the false notion that the number of officers you had mattered, more than how smartly they were actually deployed. And welfare reform was set back by the lazy idea that fairness could be judged by the size of a cheque, rather than the chances you offered. One by one, in this government we've taken those arguments on – and we created the platform for reform. Today, we need to do the same with prisons. I think there are 3 views that have held back our progress. And together, they've helped produce the sterile 'lock 'em up' or 'let 'em out' debate that I think has often got in the way of real change. The first is the idea that prisons are packed to the rafters with people who don't deserve to be there. This is not wholly untrue – there's a strong case for the severely mentally ill, or women with small children, to be dealt with in a different way. But this position of some – that we could somehow release tens of thousands of prisoners with no adverse consequences – is nonsense.

It's simply not borne out by the evidence. Prisons are not full of offenders sentenced for drug possession, licence fee evasion or petty, victimless crime. It's actually pretty hard to get into prison in the first place. Here are the facts: only 7% of prisoners are sentenced to custody for a first offence – and these will inevitably have been very serious crimes. 70% of prisoners have at least 7 previous offences, and the average prisoner has 16 previous convictions. So you won't hear me arguing to neuter judges' sentencing powers or reduce their ability to use prison when it is required. Of course, there is one group I do want out of prison much more quickly, instead of British taxpayers forking out for their bed and breakfast: and that is for-

eign national offenders. One of the big barriers here is that we don't systematically record the nationality of offenders early enough – and this can hamper our ability to deport them. I know the frustrations of prison governors when they have to try to find out someone's nationality after they've already arrived in prison. So I can announce today that we will now legislate to give the police new powers to require foreign nationals to hand over their passports, and make them declare their nationality in court.

The second view that has held reform back is the idea that the only reliable way of cutting crime is to toughen sentencing and substantially increase the prison population. Now again, there is some truth in this, and I know that incapacitation – prisoners being unable to threaten public safety while they're behind bars – is absolutely vital. I've made this point myself about prolific burglars many times. That's why we've toughened sentencing, including for the most serious violent and sexual offenders, and rightly so. But I think politicians from all sides of the political spectrum are starting to realise the diminishing returns from ever higher levels of incarceration. For a start, under this government we've already cut crime by around 23% in the last 5 years while keeping the prison population largely flat. And the truth is that simply warehousing ever more prisoners is not financially sustainable, nor is it necessarily the most cost-effective way of cutting crime. Worse than that, it lets the other parts of the criminal justice system that are failing off the hook. It distracts us from the job of making prisons work better. And it fuels prison overcrowding, which hampers efforts to rehabilitate offenders – and that just makes us all less safe. So the question must be: wouldn't we be better to focus our scarce resources on preventing crime in the first place and by breaking the cycle of reoffending?

The third view that has held back reform is the one that says that prisons are too soft – that they're a holiday camp, and we should make them harsher to provide more of a deterrent. Now, I get hugely frustrated when I see the poor security that, for example, means prisoners able to access Facebook, or prisons that appear to be awash with alcohol and drugs. We are taking more action on drugs, corruption and mobile phones. We've legislated to criminalise possession of so-called legal highs in prison. We're developing a new Corruption Prevention Strategy to deal with the small number of corrupt staff who allow contraband in our prisons. And I can announce today that we are going to work with the mobile network operators to challenge them to do more, including developing new technological solutions, so we can block mobile phones' signals in prisons.

But you know what? Prisons aren't a holiday camp – not really. They are often miserable, painful environments. Isolation. Mental anguish. Idleness. Bullying. Self-harm. Violence. Suicide. These aren't happy places. It's lazy to subscribe to the idea that prisoners are somehow having the time of their lives. These establishments are full of damaged individuals. But here's the point: 99% of them will be released one day, back into our communities. So we should ask ourselves: is it a sensible strategy to allow these environments to become twisted into places that just compound that damage and make people worse? Or should we be making sure that prisons are demanding places of positivity and reform – so that we can maximise the chances of people going straight when they come out? Think about it this way: being tough on criminals is not always the same thing as being tough on crime.

Principles of reform - So we need a new approach – one that doesn't waste too much energy discussing big existential questions about the prison population or trap us into often false choices between so-called tough or soft approaches. We've got to move on – and develop a sensible plan for prison reform that will deliver better outcomes, improved public safety and lower costs for tax-

payers. Michael Gove is just the man for the job. And I want to thank Ken Clarke and Chris Grayling for the good start we made in this area in government – and Nick Herbert for changing our approach on prisons in opposition. In reforming prisons, we need to look no further than the approach we've taken in reforming other public services. Our reforms have followed some general rules.

One: give much greater autonomy to the professionals who work in our public services, and allow new providers and new ideas to flourish. This is how you institute a culture of excellence – empowering staff, as well as charities and businesses, to innovate and try new things. It's exactly what we did in education – with academies, free schools and new freedoms for heads and teachers.

Two: hold these providers and professionals to account with real transparency over outcomes. Just as we have done in education and policing, we need better data – to allow meaningful comparisons to be made between different prisons – so the best performing institutions and best performing leaders can be recognised and rewarded.

Three: intervene decisively and dramatically to deal with persistent failure, or to fix the underlying problems people may have. This is the lesson from our troubled families programme. We know piecemeal, fragmented solutions don't work. Instead, you need to see how an individual's problems link together, and intervene in the right way. So while we've got the opportunity that prison presents, we need to be far better at deal with and at addressing prisoners' illiteracy, addiction and mental health problems.

Four: use the latest behavioural insights evidence and harness new technology to deliver better outcomes. We've done this in welfare, for instance through the introduction of greater conditionality – meaning that those who are out of work must show they are taking meaningful steps to find employment, in return for getting their benefits. And the number of workless households has fallen by an incredible 480,000 since 2010. By applying these principles, I believe we really can deliver a modern, more effective prisons system that has a far better chance of turning prisoners into productive members of society.

So let me explain more what we will do in each area. Greater autonomy. The first part of our strategy is to put professionals in the lead and to remove the bureaucratic micromanagement that disempowers them. The prisons system today is incredibly and uniquely centralised. Think about this, and think about it from the perspective of the boss of a prison – the prison governor. 924 prison service instructions and prison service orders are currently in operation. These are documents issued from 'headquarters' to prescribe the running of our prisons. Together, they amount to an incredible 46,000 pages of rules, regulations and guidance. Now some of this will be necessary, I accept. Prisons need rules. But we've reached the point where someone in Whitehall is sitting around deciding how many jigsaws a prisoner should be able to keep in his cell, how many sheets of music they can have in their possession – 12, in case you're wondering – and even how many pairs of underpants they're allowed. Think about the kind of morale-sapping, initiative-destroying culture this can create in an organisation.

Want to try something new? Ask head office. Think you've found a better way of organising things? Get back in your box. Looking for motivation and inspiration on a Monday morning? Go and look elsewhere. There's a governor I spent some time with this morning who made exactly this point. He said it's almost as if, in doing the things he needs to, to get businesses in to prisons and to get workshops going ultimately he said he'd have to break the rules. This is obviously the wrong approach. Prisons are often accused of infantilising the prisoners, but we're actually infantilising the staff. This is one of the toughest environments we ask people to work in. And I want the leadership team of a prison to be highly-motivated, to be entrepreneurial and to be fired up about their work, to be a team who don't ask permission from the centre every time, but are just empowered to get on and try something new.

So this is what we are going to do. We are going to bring the academies model that has revolutionised our schools to the prisons system. We are going to give prison governors unprecedented operational and financial autonomy, and be trusted to get on and run their jail in the way they see fit. They'll be given a budget and total discretion over how to spend it. So, for example, they'll also be able to opt-out of national contracts and choose their own suppliers. Instead of being prevented from transferring money between different pots, they can decide what they want to focus resources on. And they'll also be able to tailor their own regimes – including the amount of time spent 'out of cell' doing purposeful activity. I can announce today that we will create 6 such reform prisons this year, run by some of the most innovative governors from across the prison estate. We'll follow this with a Prisons Bill in the next session that will spread these principles across the rest of the prisons system. And because we know that state monopolies are often very slow to change themselves, and because the involvement of the private and voluntary sectors in prisons has been one of the most important drivers of change in this system since the 1990s, we'll ensure there is a strong role for businesses and charities in the operation of these reform prisons and the new prisons we will build in this Parliament.

Together, this will amount to the biggest shake-up in the way our prisons are run since the Victorian times. And we'll adopt the same principle in youth justice, too. As Charlie Taylor's interim review will recommend tomorrow, we'll explore using the free school process to set up secure alternative provision academies. In short: this will mean turning existing Young Offender Institutions into what will effectively be high quality schools that will demand the highest standards. And we want to attract the best talent into our prisons. I want us to make it even more aspirational for people to work in a prison and to want to run a prison. So just as we have done with the police, we'll put rocket boosters under direct entry and fast-track schemes to attract the very best into managing the prison system so that it can benefit from greater diversity, fresh ideas and new leadership.

Transparency and accountability. With freedom and autonomy must come accountability – and that's why the second part of our plan must be to improve transparency. Here are some questions for you: What is the best performing prison in the country? Which is the prison that is achieving the best reoffending results? Which is the prison where offenders get the best qualifications to help them get a job when they're released? The answer is: we don't know. Seriously, we have no idea. This just isn't good enough.

Any modern public service has to be able to demonstrate its value. It's how you can make meaningful comparisons between different services. But most of all, it's how the people working inside the system can find out what's working and what isn't working – and adapt accordingly. It can incentivise more of the kind of projects I saw this morning, like the Halfords Academy that is getting people the skills they need to find work. So I can announce today we will now develop meaningful metrics about prison performance. We will measure the things that really count: reoffending levels compared to a predicted rate; employment outcomes for prisoners; whether or not the offender went into permanent accommodation; and what progress was made on basic literacy and key skills.

And I can also announce that we will not only publish this data, we will develop new Prison League Tables that allow us to easily compare different institutions. This

transparency isn't just a very powerful way to drive culture change, it also allows the government to hold those working in the system more easily to account. Using this information, we can use other tools – like payment for performance – to drive further improvements. It's working in academies, it's working in troubled families, it's working in the Civil Service - so I can announce today that we will work with prison staff to examine a new financial incentive scheme to reward staff in the best-performing prisons.

Intervention and treatment. By introducing autonomy and transparency, we can get the structures right to improve outcomes. But we often need more direct, and joined up, intervention to help turn people's lives around. Consider these facts: 24% of those in prison have been in care as a child. 49% have an identifiable mental health problem. Nearly half. 47% almost half, have no qualifications whatsoever. And behind these numbers, we have human beings. Children who felt the raw pain of abandonment at a young age – pain that never goes away. Young people who were abused physically by those they trusted most – with violence and fear often devastating the sanctuary of home. Kids who never had proper discipline and so never learnt the virtues of delayed gratification or impulse control. Arriving at school already far behind, and the frustrations of illiteracy or maybe dyslexia leading to bravado, misbehaviour and exclusion. Exposed to alcohol and drugs too young in life. Kicked out of the house as a teenager and learning to survive on the streets.

I spoke last month about extending life chances. But we have to recognise that the prison population draws mostly from the ranks of those whose life chances were shot to pieces from the start. This doesn't excuse where they ended up, nor does it say anything about the anguish they caused for victims. But it does, I believe, help to explain what's happening. This is important: cutting reoffending is just a pipe dream unless we truly understand the turmoil and the trauma that define the lives of so many who have ended up in prison. This is a golden opportunity to correct some earlier – often catastrophic – state failure. I want prisons to be places of care, not just punishment; where the environment is one conducive to rehabilitation and mending lives. That's why I'm so passionate about building new prisons. I think it's frankly a disgrace, that for so long we've been cramming people into ageing, ineffective prisons that are creaking, leaking and coming apart at the seams. These are places that were barely fit for human habitation when they were built, and are much, much worse today. They design in bullying, intimidation and violence. As one staff member told the Chief Inspector of Prisons last year, "I wouldn't keep a dog in there."

So I am proud that this this government has made a £1.3 billion commitment to knock many of these prisons down and to build 9 new ones, including 5 during this Parliament. As Policy Exchange's work has shown, these new prisons can be far more effective at rehabilitating offenders, with modern facilities and smart use of technology such as biometric key systems. But it isn't just about new buildings; it's about what goes on in them. And here we must think afresh about prison education. Over 50% of prisoners have the English and maths skills of a primary school child. Many have learning difficulties. But at the moment, governors have almost no control over who their education provider is, or what is taught. We have only 4 organisations nationally who provide education in prisons, and the way these services are organised is not producing anything like the results we need.

We're focusing too much on the number of qualifications – regardless of their usefulness – and neglecting basic literacy and good-quality qualifications that are actually going to help these people to find work. This needs to change. Soon Dame Sally Coates will publish her review of prison education. It will recommend giving control of education budgets to prison governors, letting

them bring in new providers – whether further education colleges, academy chains, free schools or other specialists. I can announce we back that recommendation 100%.

And we'll go further: I can also announce we'll protect those budgets in cash terms, with £130 million a year. I also want the best and brightest graduates to want to teach prisoners, even if it's just for a short period in their career. So just as we have backed programmes which get graduates teaching in our worst schools or working in social services, I can announce that I have asked Brett Wigdortz, chief executive of Teach First, to advise on setting up a new social enterprise that will work to develop a similar scheme for prisons. And I'm pleased to say David Laws has agreed to chair this new organisation.

Next, we've got to sort out mental health treatment and drug treatment. This is one area where I believe that we, as a country, really need to ask some searching questions. There's been a failure of approach, and a failure of public policy. In terms of approach, frankly, we are locking up some severely mentally ill people in prison who should not be there. And that's why, as a matter or urgency, I have asked Michael Gove and Jeremy Hunt to look at what alternative provision can be made for more humane treatment and care. In terms of policy, I worry that at the moment the design of mental health treatment cuts out governors and staff. So I can announce that for mental health, we will now move towards full co-commissioning for governors and NHS England – meaning prison leaders can have much more say in defining the kind of services their prisoners need and how the available budget is used. This will begin in reform prisons and, if successful, will apply nationwide from 2017, underpinned by new legislation in our Prisons Bill. We will also publish healthcare data on a prison-by-prison basis, so there is proper transparency about outcomes and performance. And we will also move towards co-commissioning for drug treatment funding, so governors have more freedom to set up the therapeutic communities, drug-free wings and abstinence-based treatment programmes that their offenders need.

When it comes to turning prisoners' lives around though, there is a new front we need to open: tackling extremism. We have around 1,000 prisoners who have been identified as extremist or vulnerable to extremism. And we know, through intimidation, violence and grooming, some of these individuals are preying on the weak, forcing conversions to Islam and spreading their warped view of the world. I understand not only what a problem this is causing for prison management who are trying to deliver a safe environment, but also what a danger the risk of radicalisation poses for public safety when prisoners are released. We will not stand by and watch people being radicalised like this while they are in the care of the state. That's why Michael Gove has commissioned a review of this issue. And I want to be clear: I am prepared to consider major changes: from the imams we allow to preach in prison to changing the locations and methods for dealing with prisoners convicted of terrorism offences, if that is what is required. I look forward to the review's recommendations.

But I can announce today 2 things we will definitely do: We will develop a new prison-based programme for countering the non-violent extremism that can lead to terrorism and violence and this will focus on those at risk of radicalisation, regardless of the crime they originally committed – as well as those convicted of terrorism offences. And to deal with the most serious cases, just as we introduce mandatory de-radicalisation programmes in the wider community, we will also introduce these in our prisons.Behaviour change Everything I have spoken about today is about what goes on in prison. But rehabilitation doesn't end at the prison gates; it's about what happens outside them too. That's why Chris Grayling began the Transforming Rehabilitation programme – and it means every prisoner now receives support and supervision on release. This was a huge landmark reform of the last Parliament that has the potential to make a real impact on reoffending and public safety.

Outside prison, I believe we should be really creative and much more open to the new thinking, the new technology, and the understanding from behavioural insights. For example, Judge Steve Alm in Hawaii has been pioneering the idea of 'swift and certain' sentencing to deal with drug offenders. Instead of just locking them up, they are randomly tested for drugs in the community on certain days of the week. If they test positive, they're instantly jailed for between 24 and 48 hours. And then they come back out, and the process starts over again. And the results are fascinating. It's perhaps the most successful community sentence anywhere on the planet. Massive reductions in drug use and re-arrest rates. Perhaps more effective than even intensive drug treatment in terms of changing behaviour. Almost 20 US states have now adopted this model, as well as others like it – including drug courts and problem-solving courts that adopt a similar tough love approach. And why do these programmes work? Because instead of an uncertain and often random sentence, delivered months or sometimes even years after a crime is committed, this is far more instantaneous and much more demanding for the offender. And because punishment is less severe but much swifter and more certain, it allows you to apply punishments far more frequently. More punishments, delivered rapidly. A real, meaningful deterrent. That is how to bring about lasting behaviour change.

That's why a promise to introduce legislation for a new swift and certain sentence was in our manifesto. And I can announce today that the Justice Secretary and Lord Chief Justice have set up the first joint working group to examine how to deliver problem-solving courts in England and Wales. We have also got to be much smarter about using new technology. We have already pledged to expand the use of alcohol monitoring tags, which enforce drinking bans for those offenders convicted of alcohol-related crimes. And there is also a huge opportunity presented by new satellite tracking tags. Satellite tracking will be ground-breaking for the criminal justice system – meaning that the police and probation service can know where an offender is at all times. It means we can tightly manage and accurately track someone's movements – opening up radical new sentencing options. Satellite tracking tags could be used so that more prisoners can go out to work in the day and return in the evening.

They could help some offenders with a full-time job to keep it, and just spend weekends in custody instead. This could revolutionise the way we release prisoners on licence at the end of a sentence, and dramatically toughen up community sentences We've made too slow progress in getting this technology on-stream, and I want us to go faster. So I can announce today that major new pilots will begin on satellite tracking later this year, and we will have this technology rolled-out right across the country before the end of the Parliament. I especially want to look at how we use these tags for female offenders. A sad but true fact is that last year there were 100 babies in our country living in a prison. Yes, actually inside the prison. In the prison's mother and baby unit, to be precise. Prison staff do their best to make these environments pleasant. Some units even have special sensory rooms, so that babies can see colours, sights and sound – even nature – that they wouldn't otherwise see inside the grey walls of a jail. I understand why this happens. But we should ask ourselves: is it right?

When we know the importance of the early years for child development, how can we possibly justify having babies behind bars? There are actually women in these prisons who were born in the same prison 20 years earlier, and then have ended up there later as criminals themselves. Think of the damage done to the life chances of these children. I believe we've got to try to break this cycle. So I want us to find alternative ways of dealing with women offenders with babies, including through tagging, problem-solving courts and alternative resettlement units.

There is one other area where I want us to be bold, and where we can use the latest

thinking to make a difference – and that is to help prisoners find work on release. There's a simple problem: today, ex-offenders are often rejected for jobs out right because of their past. I want us to build a country where the shame of prior convictions doesn't necessarily hold them back from working and providing for their families. Of course, I want businesses and organisations to know who they are interviewing. If a conviction is 'unspent', they need to know about it and make the right decision for that business. But here's my question: should offenders have to declare it up-front, before the first sift of CVs – before they've been able to state their case? Or might this be done a bit later, at interview stage or before an actual offer of work is made? They've done it in America – it's called 'ban the box'- and I want to work with businesses, including the many who've already signed up to the Business in the Community campaign, to see if we can do this here. And because I believe in leading by example, I can announce today that every part of the Civil Service will be 'banning the box' in these initial recruitment stages.

Conclusion: So this is our agenda for a revolution in the prisons system – all centred around those powerful public service reform principles. This will take time and a lot of hard work to deliver – just as in education and welfare – and I'm under no illusions, it won't be easy. This system will be hard to change because it is, in some ways, still stuck in the dark ages – with old buildings, old thinking and old ways of doing things. So I don't want to go slow here – I want us to get on with proper, full-on prison reform. And the prize is big: if we get this right, we can begin to deliver the lower reoffending rates that will protect the poorest who so often bear the brunt of crime. If we get it right, we can change the culture so that our brilliant staff can be empowered to lead the world with new rehabilitation techniques and smarter ways of managing prisoners. If we get it right, we can change lives, improve public safety and bring hope to those for whom it was in short supply. Turning waste and idleness into prisons with purpose. Turning remorse and regret into lives with new meaning. Finding diamonds in the rough and helping them shine. That is our mission. Let's get to work. David Cameron, 08/02/2016

A Fitting Reply: If Cameron Really Cared he Would Cut Prisoner Numbers

Polly Toynbee, Guardian: Here's one cut that would do nothing but good: a cut in the rising prison population. Prisons are damaging places that make unstable people worse – dragging them from families or tenancies – and almost bound to reoffend. Only the dangerous should be there. Prison reform, said David Cameron on Monday, is "one of the great progressive causes". He has a gift for verbal empathy on social issues, better at describing problems than solving them. But even fleeting prime ministerial attention is very welcome for this unseen, secretive world of fear and despair. Prisoners do urgently need good education, training, work and drug and mental health treatment. But once again, what Cameron says only bears a passing relation to the policies he has overseen.

The 30% cuts to prison staff since 2011 mean many more prisoners are locked up most of the time in overcrowded jails. They have no escorts to take them to education, training, exercise or counselling: classes are often half-empty, drug treatment sessions unattended. Prison suicides and instances of self-harming are rising; so is violence for lack of supervision.

Cameron announced league tables for prisons, pay incentives for success and pilots giving governors more freedom to escape the 456,000 pages of centrally imposed regulations – all good, according to the Prison Reform Trust. But would there be more money for hiring staff? No, money was not the issue. He spoke movingly of the mothers and babies: 100 imprisoned at some point

in 2015 who could have been better cared for elsewhere. Women are more likely to be jailed for non-violent offences than men. He spoke of the high number of prisoners who come from a childhood in care, after the "pain of abandonment". Yes, prisons should and could be better places.

But he shied away from what really could transform prisons and reoffending – sentencing policy. Ever-rising punitive tariffs have caused prisons to fill with people kept there far too long, so Britain locks up more offenders for longer than any other western European nation. Over the years, sentencing tariffs have got steeper, while indeterminate sentences have added hugely to the population. Mandatory life sentences now mean an average 17 years in jail, up from 13 in 2001. More than half of those on remand never get a custodial sentence and should never have been imprisoned at all – they make up 14% of the total number behind bars.

When a prime minister speaks, judges and magistrates tend to listen. The tone struck by ministers over the years has had a strong effect on sentencing. Michael Howard's thundering "prison works", when he was home secretary in 1993, sent sentences soaring. Might a call from Cameron for less prison stay their hand? But he didn't say it – indeed, when asked he denied any softening of sentencing. Besides, these days judges have far less discretion. What a missed opportunity. He knows locking up fewer non-violent people for shorter terms could be a win-win, saving on the prison budget and diverting money towards programmes that do stop offending. Each prisoner costs £36,000 a year and most will reoffend. Far less spent on good community sentences and, better still, on the services to stop people offending in the first place, would waste less.

Take one example: those mothers Cameron spoke of so movingly. There are some 50 women's centres, many set up in the wake of the 2007 Corston report on women's prisons. The idea was for courts to require women to attend as part of community sentences, and so they did. Alana House in Reading is a well-respected centre that offers mental health, drug and alcohol treatment, domestic violence counselling and support with housing and benefits for women needing help with chaotic lives. But like many other centres, it has just lost half its funding. The probation service funded it, but the new privatised probation company ended that support. It's the same story with other community services that might keep people out of jail: public health was devolved to cash-starved local authorities and then George Osborne cut the allocation. Community addiction services were cut by 19% last year, says the charity Revolving Doors – since when drug deaths and ambulance call-outs for overdoses have risen. Mental health services lost over 8%, yet mental illness is the root cause of much offending, and prisons are the dumping ground for over-stretched services.

On the Nixon-in-China principle, ending our addiction to imprisonment is one great social progressive change a Conservative government could achieve. That's not politically easy, with the Daily Mail and the rest ready to pounce: the Mail front page today warned, "Soft justice fears as Cameron plans to free offenders from Monday to Friday." Given that barrage, Cameron dares not do the only thing that will make a difference – change the sentencing guidelines to cut the ever-lengthening prison terms. Timid plans for more tagging and weekend sentencing will only cut a few. Twice as many are locked up now as under Douglas Hurd's liberal regime in the 1980s, when crime was far higher on every measure. Successive home secretaries strove to outdo one another in populist punitive measures, with Howard followed by Labour's draconian Jack Straw, David Blunkett and John Reid. Up and up went the overcrowded prison population.

Briefly in 2010, it seemed Cameron wanted to follow in Hurd's footsteps: appointing Kenneth Clarke as justice secretary was a good omen. But he was soon replaced with Chris Grayling. He will be remembered for banning books for prisoners, but worse were his legal aid cuts – and most destructive was a 30% cut to probation funding, and then privatising the service, now in ruins.

Every Monday Cameron makes a controversial social speech. Posing in an appropriate backdrop he has inveighed against Oxbridge elitism, told Muslim women to learn English, and offered vouchers for parenting classes – all distractions from banging on about Europe. Downing Street proclaimed this was the first prime minister's speech on prisons in 20 years. He plainly forgot he made a similar one himself in 2012. Will this "rehabilitation revolution" be as easily forgotten or will he genuinely cut the prison population? Last week, there were 173 more people locked up than the previous week.

Youth Jails Should be Replaced by Secure Schools Alan Travis, Guardian

The notorious Medway youth jail and other privately run secure training centres and state-run young offender institutions should be replaced by a new network of small "secure schools", according to the findings of an official review set up by the justice secretary, Michael Gove. David Cameron endorsed the demand for fundamental change in the system of youth custody recommended by Charlie Taylor, a child behavioural expert and former headteacher. Taylor has put forward the radical move in a short interim report to Gove which delivers a scathing verdict on the existing system of young offender institutions and secure training centres saying they are doing little more than teaching offenders how to survive in prison. He says that many staff working in youth jails in both the private and public sectors do not have the skills, experience or training to manage the most vulnerable and challenging people in their care.

Taylor says that staff shortages and rising levels of violence have recently combined to prevent the implementation of new education contracts that would have delivered 30 hours of education a week in young offender institutions leaving them with on average only 17 hours of education a week. "It is clear that what is best for children has at times become secondary to containment, the management of risk and establishing uniform processes. Rather than preparing children for life on the outside, too often these establishments seem to be teaching children how to survive in prison," says Taylor. The past five years has seen the numbers of under-18s held in youth custody in England and Wales more than halve from 2,418 in 2009/10 to just under 1,000 today. Over this period 12 young offender institutions and one secure training centre have closed but concerns about youth custody have remained which were highlighted by the recent allegations of abuse and bullying by staff at Medway STC.

Taylor says he wants to see the youth jails replaced by a network of secure schools for young offenders similar to alternative provision free schools in England and Wales. Head teachers will have the autonomy of an academy to create a rehabilitative and therapeutic culture that would ensure offenders at least learned to read. He acknowledges that a network of small secure schools will present "financial and operational challenges". Gove shelved a proposal by his predecessor, Chris Grayling, for one single "secure college" which would have been the largest youth jail in Europe. But both Cameron and Gove backed Taylor's plan. In his prisons speech, the prime minister, said it was worth exploring the free school process to turn young offender institutions into high quality schools.

Hostages: Sally Challen, Naweed Ali, Khobaib Hussain, Mohibur Rahman, Tahir Aziz, Roger Khan, Wang Yam, Andrew Malkinson, Michael Ross, Mark Alexander, Anis Sardar, Jamie Green, Dan Payne, Zoran Dresic, Scott Birtwistle, Jon Beere, Chedwyn Evans, Darren Waterhouse, David Norris, Brendan McConville, John Paul Wooton, John Keelan, Mohammed Niaz Khan, Abid Ashiq Hussain, Sharaz Yaqub, David Ferguson, Anthony Parsons, James Cullinene, Stephen Marsh, Graham Coutts, Royston Moore, Duane King, Leon Chapman, Tony Marshall, Anthony Jackson, David Kent, Norman Grant, Ricardo Morrison, Alex Silva,Terry Smith, Hyrone Hart, Glen Cameron,Warren Slaney, Melvyn 'Adie' McLellan, Lyndon Coles, Robert Bradley, John Twomey, Thomas G. Bourke, David E. Ferguson, Lee Mockble, George Coleman, Neil Hurley, Jaslyn Ricardo Smith, James Dowsett, Kevan & Miran Thakrar, Jordan Towers, Patrick Docherty, Brendan Dixon, Paul Bush, Alex Black, Nicholas Rose, Kevin Nunn, Peter Carine, Paul Higginson, Robert Knapp, Thomas Petch, Vincent and Sean Bradish, John Allen, Jeremy Bamber, Kevin Lane, Michael Brown, Robert Knapp, William Kenealy, Glyn Razzell, Willie Gage, Kate Keaveney, Michael Stone, Michael Attwooll, John Roden, Nick Tucker, Karl Watson, Terry Allen, Richard Southern, Jamil Chowdhary, Jake Mawhinney, Peter Hannigan.