

The Association of Prisoners

The following info has been compiled by Bristol ABC from details circulated by Ben Gunn, general secretary of the executive committee of the Association of Prisoners (AoP). Our aim is to support prisoners in their struggle for human rights and freedom from oppression, and we consider that the AoP can go some way towards achieving that objective.

For background info on the AoP, and hopefully ongoing news, see <http://prisonersvoice.blogspot.com/>

For more news and comment from Ben Gunn see <http://prisonerben.blogspot.com/>

For prison news, info and useful links - Campaign Against Prison Slavery: <http://www.againstprisonslavery.org/>

As starting points for political & social prisoner solidarity see <http://www.brightonabc.org.uk/> and <http://bristolabc.wordpress.com>

Association of Prisoners Campaign Aims

Strategic:

- Advocate ending the use of imprisonment as a solution to social problems.
- An immediate end to imprisoning people who have not committed violent or sexual offences.
- An immediate end to imprisoning people with mental health problems.
- To institute restorative justice, addressing the needs of both criminals and victims, recognising that both are part of the wider community.
- To end the iniquitous practice of sentencing people for what they may do in the future, i.e. IPP and Life sentences.

Policy:

- To influence prison regimes in order to reduce the harm they cause.
- To campaign for prison regimes to operate with the lowest possible restrictions on personal freedom.
- A structural consultation process where the views of prisoners are reflected in outcomes. Prisoners must have a strong say in how they are treated.
- In accepting that the loss of liberty is the sole punishment elements in imprisonment, to focus regimes upon genuine rehabilitation.
- Education, training and the maintenance of family involvement should be paramount in prison regimes.

Individual:

- To end the use of prisoners' labours by commercial companies for below minimum wages.
- For every prisoner to be offered a place in employment, education or training whilst in prison.
- To end the commercial exploitation of prisoners, such as through inflated telephone prices and overpriced consumer goods.
- To end the iniquity that is the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme.
- For internal discipline hearings to be adjudicated by an independent person.
- To remove the limit on the level of private money that can be spent on telephones.
- The ending of forced psychological treatments for which there is no independent evidence of effectiveness.
- For all prisoners to be offered private family visits at least four times a year.

Setting Up The Union In Your Prison

We want to build the organisation across the country. In each of prison, just one person needs to read in the library Article 11 of the European Commission Human Rights (ECHR) and grasp the legality of what we are doing. Then read Prison Service Order 4480: Prisoners Representative Associations at http://pso.hmprisonerservice.gov.uk/PSO_4480_prisoners_representative_associations.doc It is several pages long and most of it is waffle. Ignore the negative tone, as we grow that will change.

AoP General Secretary, Ben Gunn, has written to the Director General of the Prison Service challenging PSO 4480: "The Executive Committee of the Association of Prisoners now asserts the right, under Article 11(1) of the European Convention on Human Rights, to form and operate a national association. We accept that you may exercise your rights under Article 11(2), but we place you on notice that any such restrictions will be legally restricted."

1. Write to your Governor, informing him that you are setting up a Prisoners Representative Association under Article 11 of the European Convention. Send a copy to your solicitor as well, just to cover your back. Tell the governor that you are open to discussions as to how the association can operate in your particular prison. If the Governor is an idiot, he will hit the roof and instantly break the law by banning the idea of an association. If he has more sense, he will accept the inevitable and, through gritted teeth, have some half-sensible things to say.

2. Ask the Governor how he intends to facilitate the Association. You will need to be able to communicate with people on other wings, put up notices and hold meetings and elections. The Governor has to work out how these things can take place.

3. Once you have informed the Governor of what you are doing, someone on each wing needs to be able to go from door to door asking people if they would like to join the Association, like to put themselves up for election as a local association leader, and whether they would like to vote for the local leadership. All legal and above board.

4. Pass your list of members to Elkan Abrahamson, Jackson & Canter Solicitors or Inside Time, or to myself.

5. Come up with a list of issues you wish to campaign about in your prison. Whilst there is a national list of issues the AoP wish to campaign over, it is important that local branches identify their own.

6. Watch this space.

Call For Support

The Association of Prisoners is this generation's attempt to give prisoners the voice we have long attempted to have heard.

Many other groups and organisations exist which play a role in attempting to change the prison system. Some are small and advocate abolition. Some are large, and advocate slow change. Some groups confine their work to specific subgroups of prisoners while others conduct broad based campaigns.

Along with the AoP, prison reform groups span the full width of political thought and action. The sole common ground sometimes seems to be dissatisfaction with the status quo. This is a call to put differences aside. Prisoners need your help. In order to function, the Association of Prisoners needs the support of reform groups as well as prisoners themselves.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to help form a broad movement which could reshape the landscape of power within prisons and lead to real, positive change.

We hope that you can support us, in whichever way you can. At this moment, the immediate need is to spread the word, informing prisoners across the country that there is a group to represent their interests and which encourages them to set up unions in their particular prison.

We call on everybody to use their contacts with prisoners, individually or collectively, to pass this call over the walls.