

The 2011 Quaker Lecture

Tony Taylor

CHANGING the PRISON SYSTEM



SATURDAY May 21st, 2011, 7.30PM

Davis Lecture Theatre

Whanganui Regional Museum, Watt St entrance

All welcome: Entry Free, Supper follows

Our prison system is immoral, anachronistic, financially bloated, repressive, and blind to humanitarian practices that have borne fruit in countries similar to ours in the so-called 'developed' world. It is overdue for a thorough shake-up. Even in economic terms it is senseless, and its malign consequences are widespread.

After giving some background to Quaker beliefs and history, the lecture traces the development of the New Zealand prison system and reflects the continuing tension between enlightened and repressive forces. It pays tribute to the work of pioneer penal reformers, inspirational judges and others whose perceptive insights are often largely forgotten.

The present state of affairs points to the need for a Penal Commission, acting free of political interference, with power to rectify matters. Such a commission should emphasise the rehabilitation of offenders, lessen the impact of prison on families of prisoners, respect the needs of primary victims of crime, and make economic sense.

A.J.W Taylor is an Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington. He joined the Department of Justice in 1951, where he became a prison psychologist and psychotherapist. In 1961 he moved into academia, while at the same time maintaining professional links with the prison service and establishing clinical and teaching links with the Department of Psychiatry at Wellington Hospital. After retirement in 1992, he revived his interest in crime and delinquency, and broadened his concern for victims to include victims of crime. He has written extensively on topics such as criminality, the effects of isolation, psychopathology and disaster work.



Quakers

The Religious Society of Friends
Te Haahi Tuuhauwiri

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has its origins in England in the 1650s at a time of religious turmoil. George Fox's message was that there is "that of God", or goodness or the Light in every person and that we can communicate with God directly. Fox and Friends were persecuted for refusing to pay tithes and adopting their own style of worship based in silence. Many were imprisoned and died in the hideous conditions of those times. Thus began a continuing concern for prisoners and the conditions in prisons.

In Aotearoa, Friends support both the Howard League for Penal Reform and the Robson Hanan Trust, both of which look to the causes of incarceration and how imprisonment affects the wider society. Friends have campaigned for the improvement of the conditions of prisoners, advocating for changing the structures and laws that imprison people unnecessarily and so often with adverse outcomes; they have been active in establishing a restorative justice rather than a punitive response, as well as tackling the social conditions at the root of much crime.

As Aotearoa has the second highest rate of imprisonment in the western world, (following the USA) this should be of concern to us all.