

An Inside Time column rejected by the paper....

Tuesday, 26 January 2010

A wonderful thing happened to me last week. I have a guilty pleasure - warm sausage rolls from Greggs (they are a superb and successful High Street baker chain). Queuing for one, a young man approached me.

"Are you Jonathan King? I recognised you from your photo in Inside Time. Can I say I love your column; it cheers me up every time I read it".

Turns out he's been resident in most of Her Majesty's London jails - he was young enough to be my grandson and had never heard of my previous career or the reasons for my incarceration; he simply enjoyed reading my columns.

Which is why I write them. To cheer you up.

It's almost 5 years now since I left HMP Maidstone and started writing these pieces. He was my first "fan" from this new branch of my career. I've made many friends in the Prison Reform world and every year attend the Longford Lecture. I was lucky enough to meet Lord Longford long before I faced legal problems and not only admired him but regard him as one of the few people who, if I believed in religion, which I don't, deserved to be made a saint.

His daughter Rachel (a fellow Inside Time columnist) was superb sitting in for Jon Snow, who couldn't do his usual introduction this year. She was witty, funny, bright and interesting.

Unlike the speaker, Sir Hugh Orde, who I renamed Sir Hugh Bored, which he did. As the new Head of Acpo (the Police Chiefs Association) I expected revelations. We just got a droning account of his time in Northern Ireland - incredibly dull.

Now we reformists are a polite bunch. We tend not to heckle or criticise, especially when someone has been kind enough, I suspect for free, to come and talk to us and take questions. But one man did break the code of manners afterwards and, without much sympathy from the audience, ranted on in lunatic fashion before the microphone was dragged away from him. However, he had a point.

Sir Hugh should have addressed the fact that our police force is crumbling morally. Lazy, corrupt, only interested in convictions and targets and not in the truth or in justice. That's why we get killings like De Menezes and Tomlinson. That's why we get such gross miscarriages of justice as Sally Clark, Sean Hodgson, Barry George, Sion Jenkins - the list could take up this entire page, let alone the bulk of the iceberg beneath the tip, those unable or unwilling to fight the system.

I suspect the rest of Inside Time will carry complimentary comments about Sir Hugh but the beauty of this publication is that they allow alternative views and I'm starting to feel we should stop being so polite. Instead of words, the time has come to DO something. Enough waffle and worthy debate; 50% of the people in prison should not be there.

RELEASE THEM!

The courts and the law suffocates truth with the weasel words of Archbold and the polite manners of silly wigs and crumpled gowns and tradition.

Meanwhile, misery, unfairness, inequality and inhumanity reign supreme.

So I start 2010 by breaking the rules and declaring - the time has come for action to get results. Don't bore us all to death with studied explanation, Sir Hugh. The code word is ACCOUNTABILITY. Make sure the police, now under your control, behave with honesty and decency and fairness.

That ends my own King Lecture.

Now back to the sausage rolls.
Happy New Year.