

## From Over the Wall



Terry Waite CBE

About 75 years ago I set out from home to walk to my second primary school. I actually started school when I was four years of age but then we moved house and went to live in a small Cheshire village where we stayed for the next eight years or so. The village to which we moved was built around a cotton mill, established some couple of hundred years earlier by one Samuel Gregg, who recognized that he could harness the power of the river Bollin to operate the machinery. He built houses for his employees and, being concerned for the overall welfare of his workers, provided the village school.

When I started school we were approaching the end of World War Two and many teachers had left home to join the armed forces, which meant that older people were left to fill the vacancies. They had probably been trained, if they were trained at all, in Victorian times and consequently the standard of education was not of the highest. In ten years, only one pupil from my primary school passed the 11 plus examination which determined the type of secondary education you were to receive after the age of eleven. Those who passed went to a Grammar School; those who failed went to what was called a Secondary Modern. Many of those who did not pass (of which I was one) felt we were failures and this fact dogged some for the rest of their lives.

“One person said to me, when referring to the lady who served her, ‘She seems very nice. Is she a prisoner?’ I assured her that she was and you do meet some ‘very nice’ people in prison.”

Well, this is all by way of introducing the fact that a few days ago, about 50 of us who lived in the village all those years ago met for a reunion. In the past we had met for lunch at the Mill, which is now a National Trust Tourist attraction. This year we met at The Clink, situated at Styal Prison. In my younger days, Styal Prison was a home for young people who came from difficult backgrounds. Years later, long after I had left Styal, it became a prison for women and The Clink restaurant is a recent addition.

Most prisoners will have heard of the Clink restaurants attached to several different prisons across the country. They are living proof that if you provide worthwhile training for those who are serving a sentence then it pays in the long run. If you don't know the Clink, they train serving prisoners to be excellent cooks, and I do mean excellent cooks, not just those who serve up beans on toast! Members of the public pay to come and eat there and the whole enterprise is most successful.

We need more enterprises such as the Clink. What use is it to sit day after day removing CD's from their plastic covers, as I remember seeing in some prison or other some years ago. For those prisoners who have had a difficult start in life and drifted into crime then prison ought

to provide an opportunity for them to gain a skill that will enable them to do well on leaving jail. It all seems so obvious to me.

It is quite remarkable that 50 people who lived in the same village 70 years ago would meet up. It goes to show what a strong community we were then. As I looked around, some people were instantly recognizable. Others had changed beyond measure and I would not have recognized them from Adam. A couple of the boys who were real tearaways in their young days had gone on to become quite successful businessmen. The majority had led fairly uneventful lives.

I was asked to speak after the meal and was able to tell them about the Clink and life in prison today. For most of the gathering it was the first time they had ever got close to the prison, let alone prisoners. One person said to me, when referring to the lady who served her, ‘She seems very nice. Is she a prisoner?’ I assured her that she was and you do meet some ‘very nice’ people in prison. But for the grace of God, as we say, any of us could have landed up behind bars. I am all for making it possible for more of the general public to be aware of what our prisons are like by visiting such places as the Clink, or attending the occasional opera performance staged by the organization that encourages music in prison.

I know, as you do, there are some pretty nasty people around, but it is often true to say that if you look for the good in people you will often find it. Our whole punitive system needs to be geared towards the positive so that those who have failed in one way or another can have an opportunity to make something of their lives.

So, in conclusion, on behalf of all those from Styal who came to the Clink the other week, thanks a lot; unknown to yourselves you did a great deal to show that prisoners are people with hopes and aspirations and quite capable of providing the highest possible service, given a chance. By the way, there is a wing in Styal prison named the Waite wing, after myself. It's not a good name, as many who go there imagine that it is so-called because they will be waiting there a long time! I have suggested time and time again that if they want to call a wing after myself then call it the Terry Waite wing ... but nothing has happened. If anyone is reading this with the authority to change the name why not do it? I have waited long enough!

Until next month - Terry Waite



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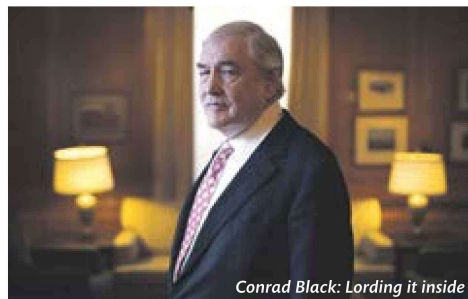
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## Outside Voices

### Why prison doesn't discriminate



Conrad Black: Lording it inside

Elliot Tyler

Prison is, in my view, one of the few places where you'll find true diversity. It is generally the case that, from birth, the less privileged follow a similar, modest path to one another, whereas the rich and powerful can retreat into a lifestyle of luxury and 'private' schools, roads, jets, etc. But once a criminal sentence is passed, all of that changes and the individual is stripped to only their basic resources. They lose the superiority they once yielded over others and rarely have any choice but to associate with people from every background. Prison doesn't discriminate and the case of Lord Conrad Black, which has been consistently newsworthy for the last decade, and is now even more relevant due to the involvement of the President of the United States, demonstrates this rather clearly. Lord Black would not have crossed paths with hundreds, if not thousands, of underprivileged prisoners had he not received a criminal sentence twelve years ago.

Conrad Black was born into a life of privilege in Montreal, Quebec in August 1944, the son of a wealthy brewery executive. He was educated at the prestigious Upper Canada College in Toronto. Black was far from a model student and was expelled from school for selling stolen exam papers, a serious matter, and for insubordinate behaviour. He eventually finished his education, graduating from Carlton University with a degree in History. Lord Black's early business ventures began when he was at university, starting with the purchase of a local newspaper. When his parents died in 1976, just ten days apart, Black and his brother

found themselves with significant stakes in five major corporations. Over time, Black focused on the newspaper publishing industry and gained control of Britain's Telegraph Group for a mere £30 million. Conrad Black's newspaper chain, Hollinger, once had a revenue of \$2 billion and was the world's third largest English-language newspaper company. He had a reputation for making deep cuts in order to turn a profit, and also hated journalists, describing them as 'inadequately supervised hacks'.

“In prison he was known as ‘Lordy’ and organised his cellmate to act as his butler and cleaner; and later found himself a job in the library.”

In 1999, Conservative Party leader William Hague recommended Conrad Black for a life peerage with the title Baron Black of Crossharbour. His sponsors included Lady Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the UK. After a two-year battle with the Canadian government, who had attempted to block Black's peerage due to his dual citizenship, Black took his seat on the Conservative benches of the House of Lords where he remained until 2007, voting on matters including education, crime and security and employment equality.

In 2007, Black was convicted of defrauding shareholders of Hollinger, his own company, out of £4.7 million by paying himself a tax-free bonus from the sale of newspaper assets without the approval of the

company's board. He had been forced out of the company by shareholders in 2003. David Radler, Black's business partner for more than 30 years, had pleaded guilty to a single fraud charge and was a key witness for the prosecution. Black did not testify in his defence saying, through his lawyer, that he had done nothing wrong and was instead the victim.

“He famously stated that prison was ‘better than expected’ and in describing it used the metaphor of a ‘sociological laboratory’.”

Following his conviction for fraud and obstruction of justice, the disgraced Lord Black swapped a £17.5 million mansion for a cell in federal prison. He arrived at Coleman Prison in 2008 to start a six-year eight-month sentence, possessing only a pair of glasses. He had been optimistic about his appeal, hoping his stay would prove a short one, but this was soon rejected, with his business conduct described as ‘ridiculous’. In prison he was known as ‘Lordy’ and organised his cellmate to act as his butler and cleaner; and later found himself a job in the library. For nine years he penned a regular column in an American newspaper, the National Post, which he founded in 1998, writing about political issues amongst other topics. He famously stated that prison was ‘better than expected’ and in describing it used the metaphor of a ‘sociological laboratory’.

In the end, it wasn't an appeal that caused Lord Black to be officially pardoned. According to many news outlets it was a glowing book he had written about Donald Trump; the man who issued this pardon. The book, entitled ‘A President Like No Other’, analysed Trump's political rise and spoke highly of ‘his friend’. Conrad Black, who unbelievably compared himself to the revolutionary Nelson Mandela, has stated that he will return to the House of Lords in due course.