

Probation

JOURNAL

JUNE 1983



Oskar sets up a booming enamel crockery business in Crakow. Through the book and his commercial proximity to and economic benefit from his largely Jewish workforce, Oskar becomes a rebel, siding more and more with the Jews, retaining his view of them as individual workers (and thus firing his zeal to the end), bribing, cajoling, charming all varieties of the Nazi hierarchy in order to save as many Jews as possible by employing them in his 'ark', the labour camp annexed to his factory where the inmates will not be subjected to the random and gratuitous brutality and killing, nor to the stinking ersatz food such inmates receive in the 'ordinary' camps such as Plaszow, Auschwitz and Gross-Rosen. He becomes fanatical in his cause (laughed at and humoured by his Aryan associates for being so afflicted with the Jewish disease) but retains throughout individualizing relationships with his workforce. He refuses to see only a mass; refuses therefore to contribute to the pile, the lump.

We are taken deeper and deeper into darker and more isolated places. At first the Jewish council is created to look after Jewish affairs (a minor inconvenience to most of the Jews). Then they are moved into a ghetto in Crakow. But even there some of the more orthodox are pleased since the ghetto itself 'consecrated the Jews to their own special-

ness, to a richness of shared scholarship'. The special treatment (i.e. killings and random selection for the cattle wagons) is a prelude to removal of healthy Jews to the forced labour camp of Plaszow, just outside Crakow. And from there it was the blessed relief of a shooting on the hill, or a three day journey in a sealed and frozen wagon with Auschwitz and the wonder chemical Zyklon B as the final solution. We undertake this journey with an awesome compulsion. We see the darkness inside, feel the frozen corpses as they roll not to the Madagascan homeland of their erstwhile dreams, but to the 'disinfectant chambers' which will be unnecessary for them, at least. The breadth of horror ('the heart of the darkness') is conveyed without fuss, without purple patches, through the sensitive portrayal of Oskar's responses to what he witnesses. It is a horror that lives, that makes us understand, but which is ironically pierced through by a sense of survival and hope of the Jews themselves and of a kind of unconscious moral discrimination and care exercised throughout by Oskar. We can truly touch our past; draw sustenance from it; enter a world unlocked.

ANDY STELMAN

Probation Officer, Rotherham
[Schindler's Ark, Thomas Kenally (1982) Hodder; £7.95]

'Well, Brian. . .'

At the end of my CQSW course I wrote up a case study for my long essay. I started to write quite a respectable looking piece of work on a lad I was supervising on Borstal Licence, with some impressive linking of theory and practice, only to find that at the end of my placement the lad re-offended and was sent down again. Refusing to panic, I nonchalantly wiped away this custard pie from my face and began my summary passage arguing that I had done some good work and that the lad had made some real progress, even though the

direct influence on what actually happens to his players/clients on the field of play. The social worker is perhaps fortunate that (at present) he can claim that his work was good and that his client did well even though the material result was the wrong one, and yet that social worker will not get the sack—unlike Sir Alf Ramsey.

This whimsical analogy has continued to give me pleasure in subsequent years. I have noticed (as have the Home Office Research Unit) that the profoundness of our interpretations of past events is only matched by our complete inability to predict the future. All football pundits (players, managers, writers and TV presenters) put the same confident authority into their match reports as we do into our social inquiries. When I'm writing a social inquiry or parole report I am tempted to echo the style of a football match report. Perhaps the result was inevitable from the beginning — 'never had a chance . . . couldn't even string a couple of good moves together . . . not enough money to buy way out of trouble'. Or perhaps the defendant has been gallant but unlucky on this occasion — 'good build-up, poor finishing . . . much improved performance, but catastrophic last-minute mistake. . . Only one thing I am really sure of—my ability to predict the next 'result' is about the same as that of the football pundit.

Now I find myself looking quizzically at colleagues in the Probation Service, and being reminded of various football personality 'types'. Bobby Moore was a magnificent player, captaining England to the 1966 World Cup win, but in TV interviews he was an incoherent flop. This style has been suitably mocked over the years by the 'sick as a parrot' joke and the John Cleese football interview sketch. In contrast, the journalists who write for the heavyweight newspapers express the most forceful opinions in the

most pretentious language, while remaining safely out of the way of where the action really takes place—Brian Glanville is just one example of these. Fortunately it is possible both to play well and talk sensibly about the game; the ex-Arsenal goalkeeper Bob Wilson continues to prove this every week on 'Match of the Day' but there seem to be few like him, either in football or probation, who can talk well and deliver the goods in practice.

So whenever I find myself carried away by the charisma of officers whose superb rhetoric de-skills their more incoherent colleagues (making them feel as if they've got two left feet) I remind myself that if I were picking my own team I would choose a Bobby Moore in preference to a Brian Glanville any day of the week.

ANDREW BRIDGES

Probation Officer, Epsom Prison

Melitta Schimideberg, MD

Dr Schimideberg, Managing Editor of the *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, since 1957, died suddenly on February 10th, 1983, aged 79. Originally a prominent follower of psychoanalysis, she came to believe that this was highly unsuitable in dealing with offenders. She helped found the ISTD and pioneered modern psychiatric approaches to delinquency in this country and the United States. Her ideas can be summarized in her statement: 'The psychoanalytic situation is an abnormal one and necessarily abnormalizes. The constant dwelling on painful pathological and irrational aspects, the minimizing and undermining of rational thinking and objective achievement, the attacks on social values and the isolation of the patient from ordinary people can only be harmful and warp the personality.'

NAPO AGM 1983. This takes place at Southport, October 13th-16th. We hope to produce a Conference Edition featuring more light-hearted aspects of Probation Service and NAPO activity. Send your anecdotes and whimsy to the Editor by September 1st.