

**ICPMS**

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**The President's office**

## THE PRISONER MAN

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### **Prison is prison.**

Prison is bad, because it inflicts pains and mutilations.

In a list of the most tragic existential events, according to a survey on a sample of American people, imprisonment comes third, after the death of a child and the death of one's wife.

Prison produces sufferings and sufferers, sicknesses and sick people, in different forms and to different degrees.

It's a handicap factory.

Etymologically, *carcere* (gaol) seems to come from the Hebrew *carcar*, which means to bury.

The gloomy bottom of this establishment is inherent in the origin of the word itself.

### **A place of people buried alive.**

Today, prison is perceived as a black hole, that swallows up and makes one lose all sense of reality, like a place of no-return, also because the prisoner identity and personality are fixed forever as unchangeable in relation to his legal status and the

determination of the crime committed, without making any exception to the transformations, to the changes of the soul.

The prison continues to be the ultimate frontier of desperation and human tragedy, that society disowns because they do not know how or do not want to solve them.

By imagining to get rid of them, they pass the buck to the prisons, where they become, instead, more distressing, more difficult.

At present, prisons are a sort of reservoirs where society has no too many qualms about locking up a sea of drug-addicts, immigrants, mentally ill people.

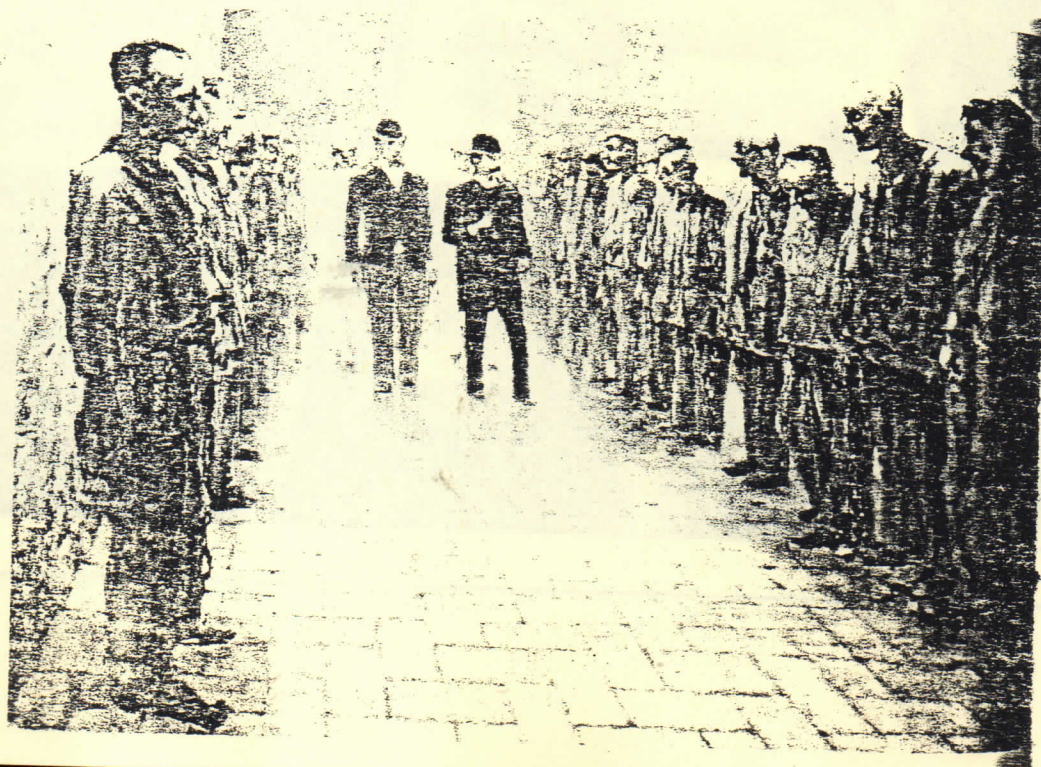
The prison has become again, as in the time of the General Hospital, a container of social outcasts, the misfits' obligatory passage and often a terminus.

**The "poor devils", the so-called "collar-less dogs", prevail, all from the weakest and poorest social ranks, brought up in the streets and in the suburbs.**

As in Dickens' time, the prison is the hell of the poor.

### **Drug-addicts and immigrants steal the limelight.**

Drug-addicts make up 40% of prisoners. Individuals who use drugs bring along elements of affective disorganisation, communication problems, inability to grasp the daily relation entreaties. They opt for drugs in an attempt to solve the topicality of their presence by connecting their existence to others'. Unable to find in themselves any chance of fitting in, any acceptance, they artificially search some apparent condition for survival. In prison, drug-addicts will experience again, in a more despairing way, the misery and tragedy of their own daily life. Drug-addicts have no future behind bars.



**Drug-addiction requires prevention and treatment, not punishment.**

**It requires solidarity, not segregation.**

Serious existential problems, serious adjustment problems afflict the drug-addicts' lives in prison, but they do not give up to anything when it comes to get their "fix". Here they are, then, managing to smell, with their head in a plastic bag, vapours from a gas stove, or conjuring up drug cocktails. It has been said that prisons can act as a sort of protective barrier against drug-addiction. There's nothing falser than that, also because drugs get around in the prison and can make even more converts (they managed to get in through stuffed cannelloni, under shoe heels, under stamps, through kisses given during talks or camouflaged in vaginal or anal areas after a permit). Excessive prohibition has proven ineffective. We have to be brave enough as to look through things, also with a view to adopting a higher-impact damage-reduction strategy.



Prisons cannot therefore be a social response to drug-addiction.

Drug-addicts have to be helped to cultivate feelings, while unfortunately feelings have been replaced by cravings by now.

### **Cravings for things and for everything.**

The drug-prison binomial leads, in all its topical tragic force, to the drug-AIDS binomial.

Terrified by the disease and by death in prison, seropositive convicts ask for attention, respect, human contact, since, after all, their experience of desperate loneliness never dies.

*“I strive to survive AIDS in prison – told me a patient one day, at Pisa’s Clinical Centre –, a horrible disease which is worse than the worst gaols. In all honesty, I wish I had a cancer, instead. I would be doomed by a “noble” disease, before which people hold their tongues out of respect. I could have discovered the mystery of a clean, though unfair, death. Now, instead, I have to fear other people’s fear”.*

Who is the deviating immigrant? The image we have taken along so far was the rather reassuring, after all harmless, one of the Tunisian boy washing car windscreens at traffic-lights or that of the peddler, the so-called “*vù cumprà*”. Immigrants’ life in prison is certainly hell on earth.

One of them said:

*“The calm that reigns there is not however of the same type as the one in Africa, actually the calm of the gaol is only apparent, it is rather very much like acquiescence”.*

Immigrants under arrest are at a disadvantage, mainly due to loneliness, a loneliness that takes up more and more space, more and more time. They mostly miss the support of their families and friends, of their fellow countrymen, sometimes even of the diplomatic officers. They don’t understand the language, don’t understand the laws, don’t understand the regulations, the value codes, the signals, the gestures, the balances, the contrasts. In prison, they take along the economical and social weaknesses that too often brand and persecute them. The number of problems that the lack of knowledge of the language, the diet, the religious issue, may cause is clear. Uprooting and segregation are overbearing risk factors. In these circumstances, the way to gaol looks more and more like a compulsory passage. A gesture of charity, a charitable action are not enough. We cannot, we must not give something of our things, maybe to set our consciences at rest, but we have to give something of ourselves and make room in our lives, in our time, in our culture. Today, immigrants, because they are homeless, bereft of affections, bereft of their own geographical and anthropological territory, are certainly the “last”, for whom, with whom we cannot but take up the challenge of a new and thought-provoking solidarity.

The number of prisoners has terribly increased, resulting in tragic overcrowding and promiscuity conditions.

**Demands for health are rising, while such serious pathologies as AIDS, tuberculosis, syphilis, infectious hepatitis, are impending.**

Ultimately, the prison is sickness and is sick itself, as an institutions that has completely failed to fulfil the purposes for which it was meant.

On the other hand, we have to bear in mind that prisons have also been more and more frequently neglected by research, by interest, by the utopias of every political party, even by the protests of the left wing, ending up confined to a hopeless no man's land, bordering on nothingness.

Prisoners are human leftovers, who live outside the cycles of nature. They no longer wear striped pyjamas, they do not bear their registration numbers on their jackets or caps, but they are still a number, sometimes a case file.

Rhythms, habits, existential boundaries. Everything is changed by a reality which is light-years away from normal everyday tracks. Prisons change everything: your being, your smile, your thoughts, the way you walk, you love, you believe, you hope, you dream.

One even gets to be afraid of thinking, of dreaming.

Prisons are responsible for this human, social depriving of man, it's an experimental world of regression. Everyday reality is alarming, full of desolation. It is a semblance of life, with deep psychological wounds, which often turns them into brutes and breeds crime. Loneliness in prison becomes a painful root of man's deterioration, of feelings getting old.

After all, it is easy to sense the mood of those who, uprooted all of a sudden from the objects of their affections, their habits, their interests, their surroundings, are forced, one day, to cross the prison's door.

They see everything relentlessly collapsing around themselves. Strong emotional anxieties caused by the stress of the prison (segregation, failure to fit in with the surroundings, unbearable feeling of constraint, fear of aggressions).

The idea of ruin, anguish, existential emptiness, a feeling of being a social outcast, the humiliation inherent in their status as convicts, the uncertainty and fear of the future and very often pressing pangs of conscience, take shape with vigour.

They are by now torn individuals.

***After all, none of us is just oneself. We are the feelings of esteem and contempt, of friendship and hostility that we sense, we are the love we can give and feel, the successes and the failures that we experience, the enthusiasm that excites us or the indifference that dulls us, the hope of the future or the fear to live to see that day.***