

CRIMINOLOGISCH INSTITUUT

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT, AMSTERDAM

ICOPA NEWSLETTER nr. 4
November 1984

dear friends,

It took a long time to finish this fourth newsletter. Lots of important things happened, and each time we decided to wait for the latest hot news, so the letter wouldn't be outdated the very moment it was sent out. The last thing we waited for were the minutes of a meeting Herman Bianchi had with the American abolitionists in Kingston, Canada. They were not the only ones that met; the French did too. This newsletter contains lots of their ideas and recommendations.

Within our steeringgroup Louk Hulsman from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam offered his assistance in organizing -mainly- the european part of the conference. Since this newsletter is the first one to receive for lots of people, and the fact that the last letter was sent out in May, it seems useful to make this one as complete as possible to refresh your memories. Former newsletters will not be necessary for reference anymore. I will start with a survey of our aims and plans.

SURVEY

By request of the organizers of the first abolitionists-conference in Toronto in 1983, the Criminological Institute of the Free University of Amsterdam is willing to organize a second International Conference On Prison Abolition (ICOPA) in this town from the 22nd to the 25th of June 1985. Our aim is to be a think-tank for exploration of well-thought-out abolitionist strategies, rooted in a deep dissatisfaction with the present-day criminal law system. Researchers, as well as activists and politicians are, or are to be invited. In our program three components can be distinguished: 1) the theoretical framework, 2) the practical application and alternatives, and 3) direct actions and strategies that are to be followed. Only few lectures are considered. It is meant to be an active working-congress with lots of little discussiongroups (sections and workshops). The leading language will be English, but however French-, Dutch-, or German-speaking sections are possible.

THEME

The first title we had in mind -Abolition through negotiation-, so close related to the ideas of Herman Bianchi, was considered to be too confusing and too confined. To leave all possible discussions more open we propose the simple title 'ICOPA 85' now, with "an exploration and exchange of ideas, methods and strategies" as subtitle, as the American group in Boston suggested.

SECTIONS

The basis of the conference is laid down in sections of + 25 people, discussing on mostly theoretical themes. About ten subjects will be discussed, based on papers we hope to receive from the participants. In next April a pre-registration for the sections will be organized, to see how often each section will have to take place, according to the fact how many groups of 25 people can be formed on the several sections. Each participant will be asked to make a selection of three subjects he or she wants to discuss on. Hereby we ask for initiators and discussionleaders willing to write a paper on a particular subject. The results of the groupdiscussion will be summarized by the initiator, and will be used for an article in the congressbook that is to be distributed after the conference. The ten section-subjects are as follows: (the order from 1 to 10 has nothing to do with the considered importance, but is, however some subjects have been changed, maintained in accordance to former newsletters)

- 1) non-governmental alternatives: e.g. sanctuary, assensus, dispute-settlement, palaver, moot, tsedeka etc.
- 2) legal alternatives: e.g. community service order, diversion/dienstverlening, a new interpretation of the law of tort/onrechtmatige daad as a civil-law alternative to criminal law etc.
- 3) historical backgrounds of imprisonment: considered are e.g. Michel Foucault's ideas on the 'Great Incarceration' in the late 18th century. It is a great pity he can't be with us anymore.
- 4) the symbolic function of criminal-law: why do social minorities -blacks, feminists, homosexuals- so often ask for help of the criminal-law system, since it intends to continue their discrimination? How can we make these people interested in abolitionism?
- 5) strategy: people are afraid of crime, we have to take away this fear by offering other possibilities to deal with crime, without taking the risk of absorption by and integration in the system. Are links possible with victim-, prisoners- or peace/freeze/pacifist-movements?
- 6) first moves: do we start with a reduction of imprisonment, or does this only lead to the problem of the remnants, the dangerous few, and do we have to start with the law-system as a whole?
- 7) within prisons: hidden torture as isolation, sensory-deprivation, medicalisation, forced labour etc. to keep prisoners quiet.
- 8) control outside the prison: the soft preventive control by the church, the job and the direct surroundings, via control-techniques as camera's in public places, computerization of personal data and neighbourhood-watch-programs, to the psychiatrization of all deviance. Also can be thought of pain-inflicting for political reasons, though we have to be very careful for too close association with Amnesty International and other human-rights-groups.
- 9) the struggle against capital punishment: can the death-penalty be seen as a punishment, or can't it because there is no possibility for reconciliation?
- 10) Abolition in its socio-political setting: the anticipating role of the movement towards a fundamental change of society.

PAPERS

We strongly emphasize the importance of the papers. They determine the success of the sections. We hope to have received all promises for paper-writing before January. The papers themselves must be sent to us before May. The length of the paper is considered to be three to ten pages,

suitable as a basis for group discussions, plus eventually an extended version meant as an article for the congressbook.

I will try to make a list of people who offered to write already, or who are only asked by us to do so. The numbers corresponds with the sections.

- 1) Herman Bianchi, Nils Christie, Raymond Shonholtz
- 2) Frank Dunbaugh, Russ Immaregeon (he asks for people to write with him about community service order), Dutch Probation and Parole Board/Reclassering, Coornhert Liga, Crime Does Pay/Willem Damen (a group of students writing about the law of tort)
- 3) Catherine Baker, Sjoerd Faber, Sibbo van Ruller
- 4) Howard Zehr, Tony Ward/RAP
- 5) Louk Hulsman, Thomas Mathiesen
- 6) Kay Harris, Carol Bergman, Virginia Mackey, Fay Honey Knopp
- 7) PROP, Dutch Prisoners ' movements, Canadian, KROM, KRUM, KRIM
- 8) Bart de Smit (mainly psychiatrisation)
- 9) Morton Paterson
- 10) Sebastian Scheerer, Jacques Jan Wirken, René van Swaaningen

The sections take place more than once. Therefore it is useful that more papers per section are written.

WORKSHOPS

The idea of the workshop is that the discussion leads to practical steps towards abolition by exchanging experiences and ideas on publicity-making, to make abolitionism to a less sectarian movement. The subjects are still very open, so that workshop initiators have a rather free choice in the specific details of the discussions. For the workshops little papers of + five pages are to be presented before May, promises in this matter before January. Workshop items can be:

- 1) The press is a very strong medium that feeds the very non-abolitionistic minded public opinion. How exactly do they influence people?
- 2) How can tendentious reporting be opposed?
- 3) How to bring abolitionist aims in the media?
- 4) non-violent civil disobedience
- 5) boycott actions
- 6) other (e.g. legal) actions to achieve abolition
- 7) How to ask support from United Nations or Amnesty International?
- 8) How to contact actiongroups, jurists and politicians?
- 9) How to translate abolitionism into a politically interesting item?
- 10) Which reforms within prisons do not strengthen the system?

We don't have any workshop initiators and paperwriters yet, so please don't hesitate to enrol yourself in this position. The workshops will also take place in groups of + 25 people. The pre-registration is in accordance to the sections in May. The results will be published in the congressbook.

LECTURES

Three general lectures are considered; one at the beginning of the conference by Herman Bianchi, mainly concerning abolitionist ideology, one on the second day of the conference (the theme of this lecture is still open), and one on the last day, concerning the future of abolitionism. The right person for this lecture has not been found yet. An influential person is considered.

NATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Abolitionist items have different meaning in the diverse partaking countries. In the national presentation each group of comparable countries stresses the particular problems they cope with in their part of the world. Till now we have come to three groups of countries: 1) the American continent, 2) Southern-Europe, 3) Northern-Europe, but however an other grouping is also possible. The meetings will be plenary. Each group will give a short speech of one hour to make clear what abolitionism means in their country. A well organized national delegation can be of great help in this matter. In the Netherlands, Canada, France (Catherine Baker, Pierre Lascoumes), the Federal Republic of Germany (Seb. Scheerer), Italy (Baratta, Sbriccoli, Berlinguer) this is arranged quite well -we hope-. For Scandinavia we asked Nils Christie and Thomas Mathiesen, but they didn't answer in this matter till now. In Belgium and Great Britain we asked several people, but no reaction was given. For these, and all other partaking countries we ask for delegation-leaders, willing to arrange contacts between participants in their country.

FILMS

Next to the sections and workshops we plan to show films and video-productions. Do you have audio-visual material of which you think it could be useful to the conference, please let us know what it is about before January, and take it with you to Amsterdam. Three films made by our own institute are available already. After showing the film or video a short discussion is planned.

CRITICISM

From America we received criticism on the number of 200 participants, that was considered to be too little. Though we think too many people will influence the quality of the conference negatively, we have found possibilities to enlarge this number to 300. The pre-registration and the organization of more meetings are ways to achieve such.

The conference is quite strongly orientated on the western part of the world. Though we don't know if people in so-called third-world or soviet-block countries debate on abolitionist items (with the latter group of countries we have the experience that one doesn't get any inside information that is to be discussed), useful suggestions would be very welcome.

EX- CONVICTS

Ex-convicts are warmly invited to participate. We don't plan to organize the umpteenth congress about them and without them. They are considered as members of the activist part. Contacts have been made with the Dutch union of lawbreakers/Bond van Wets Overtreders, stichting Vrij, the British PROP and the Canadian Prisoners' Rights Movement. Perhaps Thomas Mathiesen is willing to contact KROM, KRUM and KRIM. It is evident that some knowledge of the English language is necessary for a useful discussion. We can't guarantee funds for people coming from abroad, but we did lower the entrance-fee for people who can't afford the full amount.

POLITICIANS

Politicians interested in the field of criminal-law are mostly bad informed about the other side of the system. That is one reason why their presence at the conference could be useful. On the other hand they can inform us, by participating in a workshop, how to make abolitionism to a politically interesting issue, without taking the risks of integration by the system. Up till now however we only have found few politicians interested. Therefore all delegation-leaders are asked to inform parliamentarians in their country about our conference.

CONGRESSBOOK

We plan to distribute a book, which might be become an abolitionist manual. Apart from some of the papers, the book will contain a resumé of the section- and workshop-results. We are still looking for a publisher willing to distribute the book, which must be available in academic bookshops in all partaking countries. Russ Immaregeon already offered his assistance in this matter, but all other suggestions will be appreciated. The participants can order the book in advance during the conference for a reduced price.

MONEY

The entrance-fee per participant will be f200,-- (US \$65,--), and f100,-- (US \$30,--) for ex-convicts, unemployed and students, for the whole congress, including coffee, tea and lunches. Other costs you will have during your stay in Amsterdam will be on eveningmeals and accomodation. We have a list available with cheap and good restaurants in the city of Amsterdam. Dutch universities don't have campuses, so accomodation has to be organized differently. Please let us know before January if you want a: 1) cheap hotel (about f45,-- = US \$14,-- p.p.p.n.), 2) more expensive hotel, or 3) a place on the camping-site near the university, so that places can be reserved.

Our own possibilities are strongly depending on the grants we are receive. Till now we have promises by the Free University, the Dutch Probation and Parole board/Reclassering, AFSC and CFSC. Endowements can be deposited on Rabobank Amsterdam account nr. 3835.36448 on behalf of René van Swaaningen inz. ICOPA'85. All suggestions on fundraising will be appreciated.

PROGRAM

We plan to start the day at 9.30h. and end it at 18.30h. Each day will be split up in five parts, with coffee, tea and lunch breakes in between. Part I (9.30h.-10.30h.) and III (13.45h.-14.45h.) reserved for lectures and national presentations will -as you can see- take one hour, and are plenary. The sections, workshops and films take 1½ hour, and are split up in groups of 25 people on daypart II (11.00h.-12.30h.), IV (15.15h.-16.45h.) and V (17.00h.-18.30h.). The provisional program will be as follows:

Monday 22nd : arrival + informaf meeting at the university in the evening
Tuesday 23rd : I Lecture Herman Bianchi
 II Sections/Workshops/Films

III National Presentation group 1
IV Sections/Workshops/Films
V Sections/Workshops/Films

Wednesday 24th: I National Presentation group 2
II Sections/Workshops/Films
III Lecture
IV Sections/Workshops/Films
V Reception in the city of Amsterdam

Thursday 25th: I National Presentation group 3
II Sections/Workshops/Films
III Lecture on the future of abolitionism
IV Plenary discussion, evaluation and resolutions
V idem

Friday 26th: Excursions (if any)

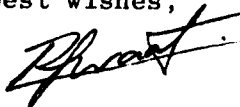
REQUESTS

At the end of this newsletter I'd like to summarize all questions that are posed to you:

- 1) we ask for initiators and discussion leaders for the sections
- 2) closely related to this we ask people willing to write papers to inform us before January 1985.
- 3) Also for the workshops we ask for initiators and paperwriters, please also react before January 1985.
- 4) In only a few countries the national presentation is organized well. Please don't hesitate to enrol yourself in the position of delegation leader.
- 5) Please provide us with audio-visual material to show at the conference.
- 6) If you know publisher who might be interested to distribute our book, please contact them.
- 7) all suggestions for fundraising will be very welcome.
- 8) inform politicians in your country on our conference please.

I hope this is enough information for the moment. If you have further questions, you can always reach us at: Criminologisch Instituut der Vrije Universiteit, Postbus 7161, 1007 MC Amsterdam, telephonenr. 020 (Amsterdam) 548 2602. Please all react on this newsletter as soon as possible.

best wishes,



René van Swaaningen