

Preparing for Prison

Being found guilty is shit, being found guilty and being sent to prison is even shittier – you are now a captive of one of your worst enemies, the state. But don't let the bastards grind you down, stand up for yourself in there, and be prepared.

You will usually have a fair idea before your sentencing in court if you are about to be sent down, so get your affairs in order if you can, and be prepared for it.

The following 2 articles have been written by 2 anti-fascists in August 2011, shortly after they were sent down for 21 months. Although specific to the prison they were sent to, much of the advice/info will apply across the prison regimes. We've made some very minor edits. Read on.

1. From Trial to Prison – What to expect

By SC, political prisoner

I hope this guide is useful to activists facing a prison term. I also hope you never need it! The information included is specific at the time of writing to Wormwood Scrubs.

Things you can bring into Prison.

Clothing: Socks, underpants, spare trainers or shoes (no steel or toe caps), shower slippers/flip flops.

Money: Make sure you have some cash - this will go into your account. You may have to wait up to a week for 'canteen' (Prison Shop). 15 pounds from your account will be placed into your 'spends' which you can spend on your canteen. You may be waiting for anything up to 6 weeks before you are allocated a job or education and as this is your only means to earning money in your 'spends' it is as well to have sufficient money in your account to cover this initial period. You will start prison time as a 'standard' prisoner. You can become 'enhanced' after 3 months. Also £1 a week will be deducted from your account for your tv. Money can be sent in for you, payable to 'The Governor', via cheque or postal order.

Medication: Bring any medication you are prescribed with you.

Tobacco: Any tobacco/fags may or may not be taken from you on arrival at prison. You will be given a smokers pack (12.5g of tobacco, Rizlas and a lighter). This will be deducted from your spends (cost 3.50 ish) at 50p a week. Non-smokers get a pack of sweets, biscuits and squash (juice) to the equivalent amount.

Toiletries: Bring a wash bag. They will chuck any soaps/deodorants and so forth away but you can bring in your own toothbrush.

Stationary, books and music: You may wish to bring in some stamps, a diary, notebook, writing paper and envelopes. You will be given two 'free' 2nd class envelopes a week with some prison writing paper but in our case that stopped after a few weeks. Books can be sent in but only via Amazon (and direct from Amazon-Prison only). Newspapers can be ordered from the local newsagent (in the case of Wormwood Scrubs – Du Cane Stores - 020 8743 5295). If you want music, bring in a 'sealed' i.e. new, Walkman/CD player. You won't be allowed batteries but you can buy these from the canteen. CD players take a lot of battery power. You can buy a CD/radio player from your spends but this can take a while before a) You can afford it and b) It can take up to a month to arrive after ordering.

Phone

Obviously no mobiles are allowed. After the first night's induction you will be given the chance to put credit on your phone account. Again, this will come from whatever money is in your personal account. 50 pounds should be enough to see you through the first two months. This phone system is in operation throughout the prison system and you make calls by way of a code number which will also be issued to you after your first night's induction. As your phone will be taken from you, it is an idea to have numbers from your phone written down. Your phone will be taken from you while in the cells at court. Calls are monitored in prison (as are letters and emails – www.emailaprisoner.com).

Putting affairs in order

You should have someone that you trust to sort out your affairs if you are sentenced. Outstanding bills/fines and any money management can be sorted by someone outside. You may want to leave your cards/pin number with a trusted person. It's worth noting the C.A.B can try and get fines/parking tickets waived on your behalf whilst you are in prison.

In the Court

During your trial, remember your behaviour will be scrutinised by the jury and judge. Remain composed in the dock and keep any talking between yourselves to a minimum. Do not laugh and joke amongst yourselves in the courtroom and try to do the same outside the courtroom. It's a good idea to designate a pub you can all retire to at the end of the day to relax and discuss the day's proceedings. Try to keep your conversations in the pub quiet when discussing court related stuff. Be aware of strangers in the public gallery. If friends and family are attending, ask them to make an effort, appearance wise and also to observe the same discipline as the defendants. Sweets and drinks are allowed in the dock but refrain from munching on cow pies! Your behaviour in the court will be a factor noted by the judge when considering sentence.

The Trial

In a case such as ours, allow about four weeks. The trial will run in order as follows. The jury will be selected and sworn in. The prosecution will have an opening speech, outline the charges etc. The prosecutor will call witnesses or read out witness statements. The defence will call witnesses i.e. You and you will give evidence and then be cross examined by the C.P.S. There will be a final speech by the prosecution and defence. The judge will sum up and direct the jury on points of law. The jury will retire and eventually a verdict will be returned on each of you. The judge will then sentence those who are found guilty. You will not receive any more than 21 months*. (*In our case only).

Sentencing

If and when you are sentenced, you will be taken to the court cells. You will be asked questions by a court guard and depending on what day of the week it is you will then be transported to prison in a 'sweatbox' (prison van). These usually leave the courts at the end of each day at around 5pm. You will be handcuffed to a guard as they walk you to the van. Once in the van these will be removed and you will be placed in a cubicle on the van. The journey in our case was about an hour.

Arrival at Prison

On arrival you will enter at 'reception', where you will be asked to confirm your name, what you were sentenced for and for how long. Your fingerprints and photo will be taken. You will be given a prison number. You will also be given something to eat. You will then be taken to a room where you will be strip searched and then given a prison uniform, bedding and some plastic cutlery. Your 'civvy' clothes will be stored in 'property'.

After a brief time in a holding cell, you will be taken upstairs to the 'first night' landing. You will be placed in a cell or shared cell for a short time, before being brought to a room where you will be given a speech by a few people on what to expect. You will be seen by a nurse who will give you a short medical. You will be issued with a smokers or non smokers pack and allowed to make a phone call. You will then be locked up for the night. Try and get some sleep!

In the morning you will get further speeches from various people. C.A.B, Carot (Drugs and Alcohol), Job Centre Plus etc. After another short wait in the cell you will be transferred to the 'induction' wing, in our case, 'B' wing. You will be shown to a cell which will be a shared cell. If you have co-defendants with you, ask to share. They are usually ok with this. They are also obliged to put smokers together, likewise non smokers.

Here begins life on the wing. It will seem very intimidating and confusing for the first few days, especially if you are alone and have no previous experience of prison. Trying to work out the routine

can be very frustrating but it will get easier. People will tell you conflicting stories so do not take anything as 'gospel'! The environment can be pretty noisy and you will have to get used to hearing lots of shouting etc from behind doors. Try to remain calm when on the wing and look confident in yourself. In my experience no-one should bother you. No –one really needs time added to their sentence and if you don't bother anyone then you can expect the same in return.

You should see the C.A.B, Job Centre Plus, gym, library and education rep in your first few days. The routine differs from wing to wing and prison to prison but a typical day will go as follows...

Morning: There is no morning 'alarm call'. You get a 'breakfast pack' with your evening meal. This contains a choice of cereal (their choice!), sugar, tea-bags, whitener (milk) and a jam spread. You eat all meals in your cell. Lunch is between 11.30-12. Dinner or tea is between 4.30-5. Do not expect mums home cooking. The food is pretty grim. Be prepared for lots of boiled veg, sponge pudding and custard!

In theory you should get 'exercise', 'domestics' (cleaning your cell) and 'association' (social time) each day. Each should last an hour but don't rely on it happening on a regular basis. They tend to shuffle things around so, for example, the 1st and 3rd landing on a wing will be out for association one night and the 2nd and 4th the next. As the induction wing is quite sporadic and transient there is no real rhyme or reason to it. Once you get moved to another wing things should be a bit more regimented and settled.

You can get stuck on 'B' wing for months. They tend to move the more unruly prisoners off the wing. 'A' and 'D' wing are known to be the worst for fights etc and 'C' wing (where detox prisoners are moved to) is little better. We were very lucky to be moved to 'E' wing after 11 days. It is meant to be for those with jobs or education courses only but one of ours just blagged it by pestering a screw and they moved the four of us over. None of us had jobs or education at that time. You do not have to work or enter into education but it may mean more time in your cell and no money in your 'spends' if you opt for neither. Our advice is to pester the fuckers until they are sick of you.

'E' wing is the best wing in the Scrubs. The food is slightly better, everyone has a single cell and the regime is more relaxed as generally the prisoners are older. You will also get regular exercise, domestics and association. The weekends are more restricted and it is unlikely you will get evening association.

Exercise: 1 hour or thereabouts to walk around the yard.

Domestics: 1 hour. To clean your cell, have a shower or use the phone. No games allowed.

Association: 1 hour. Play pool, table tennis, get a haircut, shower, use the phone or just shoot the breeze on the wing.

You will be able to visit the library once a week and can take out upto 6 books. If you want to attend a church service you must put your name down on the list the day before. This also applies to the gym. If you have a single cell, remember to lock it before you go anywhere out of sight of it.

Paperwork

Anything you want or need in prison is done by way of an application. If you need to see the doctor or dentist, query a decision or ask why you haven't received something, you should fill in an 'app'. There are post boxes on each landing that all 'apps' and outgoing letters go into. A lot of things can be rectified by just asking a screw or prisoner. There is a 'social phone numbers' form for adding people to your phone lists. This takes a few days to process. This also goes in the mail box, as do your visiting orders (VO's).

It is advisable to send all of them out at the end of each month for the coming month. To avoid these being sent straight out (they have to be processed first!), write 'VO's on the front of the addressed

envelope so the screw will see it. We had some trouble with VO's being delayed as they just sent them out unchecked. You must also make sure you fill in the name, address, date of birth and phone number on the VO itself...and get it right!

Visits

As a sentenced prisoner you will be entitled to three visits a month, with up to three visitors on each visit. A 'VO' can be used on every day except Sunday, a 'PVO' can only be used Monday to Friday. You should get a slip confirming your VO/PVO has been processed and your name will be on a list for visits on the wing. Any stuff that has been put in property, i.e. things they wouldn't let you have, can be handed out to your visitor on a visit. You will get a slip which you can bring to your visit. The screws will get your stuff whilst the visit is in progress and the visitor can take away at the end. If you don't, the property will be destroyed.

Most visits last for around 2 hours. Weekend visits are busier as more people visit then. You may be waiting for quite a while in the 'holding room' for your visit (especially legal visits). You can take a book to read. You will be searched and made to wear a yellow bib before going on your visit. You will be searched afterwards. Your visitor can buy drinks and snacks from the prison shop. You are expected to clear any rubbish at the end of your visit.

Miscellaneous

You should be given a sentence plan within the first few weeks. This will show the days of your sentence and your earliest release date. It should also show if/when you are eligible for HDC (home detention curfew/tagging). You can claim back one day of your sentence – the day of your arrest. You can make an application to this effect.

You will also get a form from 'OMU' (Offender Management Unit). They will ask general questions about your circumstances and about your offence (are you sorry?...and so on). After interview with the OMU you should receive your category status, A, B, C or D. These indicate how serious a threat you are and how likely you are to attempt to abscond. A is the highest category, D is the lowest. You will most likely be categorised as C category.

You may be 'shipped out' to a C cat prison at any time. This is entirely in their hands but they are obliged (allegedly) to move you somewhere that is not too far from family. You can delay being moved by being on certain education courses or by having certain jobs but none of this is guaranteed! As the four of us are on the same wing and have a cell to ourselves, we are happy to stay put. (Note by editor – after 6 weeks SC was moved to a C Cat, others are also on the move). If you are alone I would recommend taking the move as there may be more benefits at a C category prison.

This is a rough guide to what to expect if you are facing trial and a possible prison sentence. It is based on Wormwood Scrubs and it should be noted that it may not apply to other prisons. Saying that, it should help familiarise activists with what to expect in general. I hope it helps and again I hope you never have to use it!

**In solidarity and struggle,
SC.**

2. Jailcraft – What is it and How to Do It!

By AB, political prisoner

A quick guide to the essentials!

Ready Bag contents:

Socks x 5, Underwear x 5, Books x 5, Cash (£50 max for phone – any amount for account)
Wash Bag, Toothbrush, Envelopes, Writing paper, Notebook*, Address Book*, Diary* (*Not wire ring books), Pens – may or may not get through, Vegan Info (Membership card), Some cigarettes (we were allowed ours)

1. If you go in with co-defendants try and stay in multiples of 2. They like to ship you around the prison this way.
2. When you go to the induction wing, everything will be in short supply, even pens and washing up liquid! Hustle around and hoard everything: Toiletries should be available from your landing office.
3. Get to know the wing cleaners, hot plate workers, kit orderlies (all cons who are employed).
4. Keep clean and sharp. Clothes are in short supply. 1x prison t-shirt, 1 x tracksuit bottoms, 1 x sweat top (all changed with bedding every Saturday).
Hair clippers are available from landing wings. Get together and cut each other's hair.
Sometimes the 'barber' will charge a tin of fish! Fuck that. DIY!
If in doubt, strip wash every morning and wash clothes in hand basin. Also use basin to wash cutlery and plates after every meal.
5. It's not that bad. Inside. After a few weeks you will settle into a routine. Local B cats are totally disorganised and the screws and staff don't give a fuck, or don't have the answers to questions. Be prepared for them to tell you one thing, and people on the outside something else!

You have to get your 'jailcraft', i.e. blagging/hustling skills sorted ASAP. Most cons will answer craft related questions. The better screws will become apparent as you go along. Address them as 'Miss' or 'Guv' until you get to know their name. Then it's Mr 'Screw' or 'Miss' Screw.

Jailcraft is best learnt by observing and listening to others. Mimic the good parts of what you see going on. Good luck!

Recommended reading list:

1. Screwed – Novel by Ronnie Thomson
2. The Archer Prison Diaries trilogy

Thanks to L, Leeds ABC and of course J.

3. Links *(edited & corrected by Bristol ABC)*

ABC Brighton, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK.

[Http://www.brightonabc.org.uk](http://www.brightonabc.org.uk)

ABC Bristol, c/o Kebele, 14 Robertson Rd, Easton, Bristol, BS5 6JY, UK.

[Http://bristolabc.wordpress.com/](http://bristolabc.wordpress.com/)

ABC Leeds, 145 - 149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ, UK.

<http://leedsabc.org/>

ABC London – <http://londonabc.wordpress.com>

325 Magazine online Anti-capitalist, anti-repression magazine '325', with articles, interviews, wrtings by political prisoners, and a distro. For a world without borders or prisons!

<Http://325.nostate.net/>

Anarchist Solidarity, c/o PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK.

<Http://anarchistsolidarity.wordpress.com>

Campaign Against Prison Slavery, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK.

<Http://www.againstprisonslavery.org>

Earth Liberation Prisoners, BM Box 2407, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

e-mail: ELP4321@Hotmail.com

Green and Black Cross: Provide legal support for some demonstrations, so far based in London.

<http://greenandblackcross.org>

Haven Free Books to Prisoners scheme: BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX. UK.

<Http://www.havendistribution.org.uk>

Inside Time and Inside Info – prisoners' newspaper and guide to prisons & regimes

<http://www.insidetime.org/> and <http://www.insidetime.org/info-home.asp>

Legal Defence & Monitoring Group (LDMG): Volunteers for the Defence of Civil Protest & the Right of Public Assembly. The new edition of "No Comment - The Defendants Guide to Arrest" is now available as a PDF on the website.

<Http://www.ldmg.org.uk>

Miscarriages of Justice UK (MOJUK)

<http://www.mojuk.org.uk>

Prisoners Advice Service – free legal advice for all prisoners

<http://www.prisonersadvice.org.uk>

tel: 020 7253 3323 or 0845 430 8923 – numbers should be available in every prison

Vegan Prisoners Support Group, PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 3HD, UK.

<http://www.vpsg.org/>

And finally - HM Prison Service – know your enemy!

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/converged-sites/hmps/>