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Michael Stone - CCRC to Look Again at His Conviction

Michael Stone's murder convictions will be reviewed again by the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) following a request from his representatives. In 2001, Mr Stone was sentenced to life imprisonment at Nottingham Crown Court for the murders of Dr Lin Russell and her six-year-old daughter Megan, and the attempted murder of Dr Russell's nine-year-old daughter Josie, in 1996.

The CCRC's previous reviews found no credible evidence or argument that raised a real possibility of the convictions being quashed – these conclusions are not affected by the new review. A CCRC spokesperson said: "We have agreed to a request from Mr Stone's representatives to carry out a further review. While we can't comment on the specifics of an investigation, it is not unusual for different reviews to focus on different arguments or evidence. Our commitment to thoroughly investigate all eligible applications extends to undertaking additional work related to cases we have previously reviewed."

Half a Million Pounds - The Cost of Brian Buckle's Innocence

Ben Leapman/Inside Time: A man wrongly convicted of historic child sex offences spent more than five years in prison before eventually clearing his name – yet he and his family have been left almost half a million pounds out of pocket. Brian Buckle, 51, was accused of abusing a girl in the 1990s when she was aged between eight and 10. He insisted the allegations were false, but after a three-and-a-half-day trial at Swansea Crown Court in 2017, he was convicted on 16 counts and sentenced to a combined 33 years in prison, to be served over 15 years. The key prosecution exhibit was the girl's childhood diary. She claimed that he had masturbated over it at the time of the abuse. A DNA test showed it was stained with Buckle's semen. Prosecutors held it up in court to show the jury. Buckle said he had never seen it before, and claimed the semen stain must have been planted on it to frame him – perhaps from a used condom.

For his appeal, he and his wife Elaine hired a new legal team led by barrister Stephen Vullo KC. They found a forensic specialist in Florida who retested the diary and showed that the semen stain contained traces of lubricant used in condoms – indicating that it was Buckle, not his accuser, who was telling the truth. Last year the Court of Appeal quashed the convictions. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) sought a retrial, which heard evidence from a hypnotherapist who had seen the complainant before she came forward with her allegations. Following the hypnotherapist's testimony, the complainant admitted in court that she had been abused two years before she ever met Buckle. Prosecutors claimed at the retrial that by holding up the diary in court during the first trial, they may have contaminated it, making the retesting invalid – but this was rejected on the advice of the forensic specialist. In May of this year, after the three-week retrial, the jury returned unanimous not-guilty verdicts on all counts.

Brian, a construction manager, is now back home in Fishguard, Pembrokeshire. He is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He and his family spent nearly £500,000 on clearing his name, mostly the proceeds of inheritance, and have been told they may not get any of it back. They were not eligible for Legal Aid, and since a change in the law in 2014,

most people whose convictions are quashed get no compensation. Elaine told Inside Time: "I'm chuffed for Brian. When it comes to the money, I always said that I would be happy to sell my home to clear his name – but why the hell should I have to? If we hadn't had all that money, Brian would still be in prison." Brian said: "If the police had done a proper investigation and followed up all the lines of inquiry, this would never have gone to court."

Dyfed-Powys Police declined to comment. A CPS spokesperson said: "Following an investigation by Dyfed-Powys Police, we charged Brian Buckle in 2016 with multiple sexual offences after our legal test was met. The Court of Appeal subsequently set aside his conviction in 2022 and referred the case back to the CPS. Following a review of the evidence, we concluded our legal test was still met and proceeded with a second trial. The jury found Mr Buckle not guilty and we respect its decision." The case, raises questions over the police policy of "believing victims" and the potential it brings for miscarriages of justice.

Prison and Met Failures Contributed to Suicide of Young Prisoner on Remand

Doughty Street Chambers: An inquest jury has concluded that the suicide of a 23-year-old man in HMP Wormwood Scrubs was contributed to by multiple significant failures by police, prison and prison healthcare staff responsible for his care, and that more should have been done to support and manage his risks of suicide. Jack Zarrop died on 20 March 2021 after having been found ligatured in his cell at HMP Wormwood Scrubs. Jack had been at Wormwood Scrubs for less than 48 hours when he died. Jack's is one of a series of deaths at the London prison, where there have been 13 self-inflicted deaths since 2018. Jack was the youngest of those 13.

Jack was described in the inquest as 'intelligent and charismatic'. He was a former care-leaver, and had a history of attempted suicide, alcohol and substance misuse, and mental ill-health. Jack was arrested and taken into police custody at Heathrow Polar Park on 17 March 2021, where he was kept overnight. The following day (18 March 2021) Jack was taken by Serco transit officers to Uxbridge Magistrates' Court, and a Suicide and Self-Harm ("SASH") warning form was completed noting that Jack "would hang himself if he was remanded to prison". Despite this and other key information about Jack's risks of suicide and self-harm being available to prison and healthcare reception staff, he was not assessed as being at risk of suicide or self-harm. During a nursing assessment on the morning 19 March 2021, Jack expressed a wish to see the prison mental health team but was never referred to them. Asked what mental health meant to him he replied: "A lot. I have a monologue in my head that tells me am not good enough and also instructs me to harm myself". Jack reported a recent overdose attempt in the days before being remanded into custody, and that he had been due to see a mental health crisis team in the community but did not because he came to prison.

The inquest jury concluded that Jack died by suicide, which was contributed to by: the failure of Metropolitan Police custody officers and staff to refer Jack to Liaison and Diversion specialist mental health services while at Heathrow Police Station; the failure of prison officers and healthcare staff at Wormwood Scrubs to manage Jack under prison suicide support procedures (known as ACCT), which would have triggered more thorough risk assessment of him; the difficulties in accessing and sharing relevant and important risk information about Jack's history of vulnerability; and the failure of prison officers to remove a ligature and to take steps to prevent Jack creating a fatal ligature point. The jury also commented that police, prison and healthcare staff had overemphasised Jack's presentation as against clear evidence of previous suicide and self-harm risks and attempts, despite that information being available to them.

A highly critical independent review by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), which included a specialist clinical review of the healthcare provided to Jack, also found multiple failures in his care. Despite evidence of significant change in prison reception processes, the coroner, Dr Anton van Dellen, announced that he would be writing a Prevention of Future Deaths report to: NHS England, as the commissioning body for healthcare provision in prisons, in relation to a concern that there is not a requirement that all healthcare staff, including agency nurses, employed in prisons are required to have ACCT training prior to working with prisoners. The Home Office, as the department with responsibility for a Circular setting out requirements for the deployment and operation of healthcare professionals in custody suites, regarding concerns the coroner expressed in relation to the training of custody nurse practitioners in relation to mental health and recognition of suicide and self-harm, and the manner in which they work alongside doctors.

Exporting Prisoners A Half-Baked Idea

"The government's response to dangerous and growing levels of overcrowding in our prisons is a half-baked idea to rent foreign prison places. Prison leaders will be in despair at such a superficial response to their very real and urgent concerns. The red warning light of a looming capacity crisis has been flashing on the prison service dashboard for a number of months. Ministers can't say they haven't been warned. They urgently need to bring forward practical plans to reduce pressure on the system, including the executive release of some prisoners. The risks of not doing so are too perilous to ignore." Pia Sinha, Chief Executive of the Prison Reform Trust

Bloody Sunday: Patsy O'Donnell's Family Awarded £130k

BBC News: The family of a man shot and beaten on Bloody Sunday is to receive £130,000 in damages, a High Court judge has ruled. Patsy O'Donnell, then aged 40, was shot in the shoulder as he tried to take cover from the gunfire. Thirteen people died after members of the Army's Parachute Regiment opened fire on civil rights demonstrators. The judge said Mr O'Donnell, a father of six, had "lived under a stigma, with a feeling of being blamed for what had happened to him on Bloody Sunday". He died in 2006. The court heard Mr O'Donnell was shot as he attempted to take cover in Glenfada Park. He was among a number of civilians arrested, the court was told, and made to stand against a wall. His head was pulled back by a paratrooper who subjected Mr O'Donnell to sectarian abuse and threatened that he would be shot again, the court heard. Mr O'Donnell was released but was subsequently pulled from a taxi depot by a soldier who struck him on the head with a baton. Mr O'Donnell's wound required eight stitches. Mr Justice McAlinden told Belfast High Court on Friday Mr O'Donnell had been a victim of "outrageous conduct". "A man was shot, he was obviously wounded and he was made to adopt a search position in front of the press," he said. "He then was dragged out of a taxi office and struck."

Counsel for his family, Karen Quinlivan KC, said Mr O'Donnell, who in subsequent years established and worked in his own roofing business until retirement in 2004, had died before being vindicated. In 2010, the Saville Inquiry found that those killed or injured on Bloody Sunday were innocent. The then prime minister, David Cameron, issued a public apology for the actions of the soldiers, describing the killings as "unjustified and unjustifiable". Speaking after the court's decision, solicitor Fearghal Shiels of Madden & Finucane said Mr O'Donnell had carried psychological scars following Bloody Sunday. "Regrettably Patsy went to his death in 2006 without his total innocence being declared. "The findings of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry restored his impeccable reputation and today's judgment is a further vindication of Patsy and his family," he said.

Use of Pepper Spray on Prisoner - Violation of Article 3

Disregard of legal safeguards and an inadequate investigation into use of pepper spray on prisoner: In Chamber judgment¹ in the case of *El-Asmar v. Denmark* (application no. 27753/19) the European Court of Human Rights held, unanimously, that there had been: a violation of Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) of the European Convention on Human Rights as regards the allegation of excessive use of force, and a further violation of Article 3 concerning the lack of an effective investigation.

The case concerned the applicant's being pepper sprayed by two guards while held in an observational cell in prison in April 2017. The Court found in particular that the investigation had not carefully addressed whether the legal procedural safeguards for the use of pepper spray had been complied with. It therefore considered that the Danish authorities had failed to carry out an effective investigation into Mr El-Asmar's allegations of ill-treatment. Moreover, several important questions, which could and should have been addressed to show that the use of pepper spray in this case had been "made strictly necessary by the appli

Repeşco and Repeşcu Conviction by Moldova Violation of Article 6 § 1

ECtHR: The applicants, Adrian Repeşcu and Constantin Repeşco, are two Moldovan nationals who were born in 1979 and 1987 respectively and live in Chişinău. They submit that they were convicted on the basis of incriminating statements that were extracted by the police using unlawful methods. Their complaint, which was lodged under Article 3 of the European Convention, was the subject of a previous application to the Court, which struck it out of its list following a unilateral declaration by the Government that was accepted by the applicants. In the present case, they criticise the national courts' refusal of a retrial, notwithstanding the implicit friendly settlement reached in that previous case. Relying on Articles 6 § 1 (right to a fair trial) and 46 (binding force and execution of judgments) of the European Convention on Human Rights, the applicants allege that their conviction was based on evidence obtained by way of ill-treatment. They complain about the Supreme Court of Justice's refusal of a retrial, despite the Court's decision in their previous case, which they claim confirmed the ill-treatment in question.

UK Could Rent Space in Foreign Jails to Ease Shortage of Cells

Haroon Siddique, Guardian: The UK will seek to rent prison space from foreign countries to combat the shortage of domestic jail places, under plans announced at the Conservative party conference. The Tories said that they have already begun exploratory discussions with possible partners in Europe, with plans that would be introduced when parliamentary time permits. The Conservatives cited the example of Norway and Belgium, which both struck similar deals with the Netherlands. But the announcement was described by prison reformers and Labour as indicative of a failure to find an alternative solution to the problem. Under any agreement struck, inmates could be moved to another country provided the facilities, regime and rehabilitation met British standards. Those standards were recently deemed to be so poor that a German court refused to extradite a prisoner to the UK.

The lord chancellor and justice secretary, Alex Chalk, told the conference: "This government is doing more than any since the Victorian era to expand prison capacity. "Alongside our extra 20,000 prison places programme, refurbishment of old prisons and rapid deployment cells, renting prison places in other countries will ensure that we always have the space to keep the public safe from the most dangerous offenders." Announcing the measure, the Conservatives said

the average custodial sentence has increased by 57% since they entered power in the coalition government in 2010. While prison reformers argue that more should be done to keep people out of jail, the Tories said they were “committed to protecting the public by taking the most dangerous offenders off our streets for longer, by clamping down on crime, toughening sentences for the worst offenders, and increasing their time behind bars”.

Andrew Neilson, director of campaigns at the Howard League for penal reform, described the move as “desperation” on X, formerly known as Twitter. Shabana Mahmood MP, the shadow justice secretary, said: “There’s no greater symbol of the way in which the Tories have run our criminal justice system into the ground than the fact they are ‘exploring’ putting prisoners in foreign jails because they are incapable of building the prisons places this country needs to keep our people safe. “After 10 justice secretaries in 10 years, we saw no acknowledgment of their failings across the criminal justice system – from the crumbling prison estate, to the courts backlog and sky-high reoffending rates. Labour will get on top of the prison crisis by delivering all 20,000 prison places we need, driving down the courts backlog by increasing the number of crown prosecutors to put criminals behind bars and by opening specialist rape courts.”

Suella Braverman - ‘Multiculturalism’ has Proved ‘Toxic’ for Europe

Nicholas Reed Langen, Justice Gap: Multi-culturalism has failed, according to the Home Secretary. Delivering a speech to the American Enterprise Institution, a hard right think tank based in Washington DC, Braverman laid out her political anti-philosophy. There was no positive vision in this speech – which also served as part of Braverman’s leadership pitch to the firmly right-wing membership of the Conservative Party, should Sunak lose next year’s general election – but a screed against what Braverman fears Britain is becoming under the pressure of ‘uncontrolled and illegal migration’.

According to this narrative, the national and cultural identities of the European nation states are being eroded by the swell of refugees washing up on European shores. Rather than slowly blending into and enriching the cultural character of Europe, new arrivals are juxtaposing themselves against it. They are asserting the right of their culture to be transplanted into British soil, existing as an alternative to British cultural norms rather than merging with and becoming a part of British culture.

Given Braverman’s background, the implication is that this is not what refugees and migrants used to do. Her vision is one of migrant assimilation, where pre-existing social shibboleths and cultural touchstones are absorbed by society’s newest members. This, perhaps, is what Braverman thinks her family did. Her parents, the Fernandes, made their way from Kenya and Mauritius to London in the 1960s, with Braverman born in 1980. She grew up in Harrow and was christened Sue-Ellen (after a character from Dallas), attending state and fee-paying schools nearby before studying at the University of Cambridge and at the Sorbonne Paris. Her mother (a Hindu Tamil from Mauritius) worked as a nurse before becoming involved in local politics, while her father (a Goan Christian from India) worked at a housing association. Superficially, nothing could be more representative of aspirational middle-class Britain.

But even migrants and refugees who strive to slip into British cultural waters with barely a ripple, like the Fernandes, will affect and shape their new society. The inevitable consequence of any migration is diversity and difference, whether it be in skin colour, in language, in food, or in norms and cultural behaviours. Couple this with globalisation, where even people who live their entire lives with their feet on British soil are exposed to the world and its variegated values, and the norms and culture of any society will change and evolve in faster and more novel ways. Braverman’s conclusion is that the emergence of multi-culturalism has meant that the accepting society ‘places no

demands on the incomer to integrate’. Other cultures are welcomed and given the space to bloom, but rather than enriching fundamental British values, these new migrants try to distinguish themselves and their values, remaining separate and distinct.

It is easy to dismiss this as bigotry and hypocrisy, as many have reasonably done. But setting this aside, what makes analysing Braverman’s philosophy more difficult is the absence of any tangible evidence. She begins her speech with concrete figures, discussing the sudden arrival of thousands of migrants on the beach at Lampedusa, in Italy, before pointing to the exponential increases in migration that Europe has seen this century from parts of the developing world. However, from here, she descends into rhetoric and hypotheticals. There has been ‘too much, too quick’, with the – in her view, inevitable – consequence that ‘what [culture] was there...will disappear’.

Throughout her speech, there was little explaining why there is too much immigration, and even less explaining why such levels of immigration are eroding British values and culture (which she barely, if ever, defines). Tangible, discrete examples are almost totally absent. This makes it near impossible to evaluate the claim she eventually comes to, where she tries to leap from a questionable ‘is’ to an even more dubious ‘ought’. There is too much immigration, therefore we ought to amend the Refugee Convention. Somehow, Braverman thinks that if we amend the Refugee Convention (by which she principally seems to mean amending it so as to exclude Britain from abiding by it) we will solve the immediate migrant crisis.

Few others agree. In a world where authoritarian politicians rail against the liberal tenets of international law and the overreaching of its institutions, no one else has turned their ire on the Refugee Convention. Erdoğan in Turkey, Duda in Poland, and Orbán in Hungary, three autocratic, anti-liberal leaders of countries that border war-zones and receive a surfeit of refugees, have said nothing against the Convention. Enacted as part of the new liberal world order in 1951, the Convention sought to protect the rights of refugees and to negate the risk of atrocities like those committed by the Nazis in WWII from ever happening again. If there is reason to reform the Convention (which is doubtful, not least since Braverman’s primary concern with homosexuality goes to domestic interpretation rather than the Convention’s text), it should be done in a measured and mature way that reflects its integral role in the modern international order. Not by being hung up as red meat by a proto-fascist British Home Secretary in order to win plaudits on the right of her party.

What Braverman also assumes is that it is the refugees and the illegal entrants that are changing Britain’s culture. Reduce the number of refugees and keep Britain British, so the logic goes. Such logic is self-evidently moronic. Refugees make up a disproportionately tiny percentage of the people entering Britain each year. Even if they are from countries with values at complete odds from the UK’s, they are too statistically insignificant to have any real impact- to say nothing of the fact they are unlikely to be the most ardent proselytisers for the cultural values that forced them to flee for their lives.

Speeches like this one are continued examples of the Tories’ determination to create rods for their own back. There are few success stories in Conservative-governed Britain, and yet some sado-masochistic nature draws Conservative ministers back again and again to the most irrelevant issues that make them look nothing but incompetent. The small boats and the comparatively infinitesimal number of refugees Britain receives are not and were not an issue with the public until the government stood on the cliffs, pointing at the occasional boat on the horizon and yelling ‘there’. But having done so without a plan or with the wherewithal to create one, the only option is to construct ever more fanciful solutions or look to ever more absurd. Speeches like Braverman’s aren’t given in the hope of changing the world for the better, but in the hope they’ll keep the Tories in power for the worse.

Chalk ‘Plans U-turn on Licences’

People serving IPP sentences could have their licence period shortened under new rules being considered by the Government. At present, the Parole Board will consider terminating an IPP licence 10 years after the person is first released from prison, regardless of whether they have been recalled in the meantime. The possible rule-change would see that period halved, to five years. A report by MPs on the Justice Select Committee last year called for the period to be shortened from 10 years to five alongside its headline recommendation, which was that all IPP prisoners be resentenced. At the time, then-justice secretary Dominic Raab rejected both suggestions. However, the current Justice Secretary, Alex Chalk, was reported by national newspapers to be considering accepting the five-year change, in what would be his latest U-turn on his predecessor’s policies regarding parole.

‘Canteen is Too Pricey’

A watchdog has accused the prison canteen service of selling “very expensive” groceries to prisoners, delivering the wrong products and failing to provide refunds. The criticisms were made by the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) at HMP Ranby. The canteen service is provided at all English and Welsh prisons by DHL Supply Chain under a contract with the Ministry of Justice, and the same prices are charged at every jail. In its annual report, the IMB said: “Prisoners are having to buy food from their canteen to supplement their daily food. The cost of goods from their canteen is very expensive and many prisoners cannot afford this as they have no private spends. Canteen has also not been delivered in accordance with what was ordered by the prisoner. The delays in refunds have an adverse effect on the attitudes and morale of prisoners.”

Dead Man Denied Parole

A man who came up for parole in the US state of Alabama had a great reason why he was very unlikely to reoffend – as he had died 10 days before the hearing. Nevertheless, his application for release was rejected. The Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles claimed it had been unaware of the man’s death, which was thought to have been from a drug overdose. Nevertheless, campaigners for prisoners’ rights in the state claimed that the case shone a light and on how hard it is to gain parole, with only 6 per cent of applicants granted release, as well as highlighting poor communication between government agencies. Carla Crowder, executive director of Alabama Appleaseed, said: “This absurd situation just proves how automatic, thoughtless, and routine parole denials are in Alabama; but it does seem to be a new low, if that’s possible.”

Prisoners Sew Their Mouths Shut

Four men in a prison in western Iran sewed their mouths shut and began a hunger strike last month in protest at appalling conditions. Norway-based Hengaw group, which monitors rights violations in Iran’s Kurdish regions, said one of the men was in critical condition because he had continually been administered ‘nerve-agents’. The men were arrested in a dissident crack-down ahead of the first anniversary of a woman, Masha Amini, dying in police custody.

What Can They Do – Jail Me?

Australians will be voting this month in a controversial referendum – and prisoners in the country have been reminded that they have a legal duty to vote. Unlike in the UK, it is compulsory to vote in Australian elections, for all Australians and also for British subjects living in the country who are entitled to vote there. Non-voters face a relatively small fine of A\$20 (£16) for a first offence – but repeat offenders who do not pay the fines can ultimately be jailed for refusing to vote. Also unlike the UK, prisoners serving less than three years in jail are eligible, and required, to vote in elections – raising the prospect that a serial non-voter in jail could get added time

for failing to cast their ballot. Prisoners can register as postal voters or may vote at mobile polling booths which visit jails. The referendum, being held on October 14, is on whether to establish an assembly for Indigenous Australians – also known as Aborigines – which would advise the country’s government on issues affecting their communities. Indigenous Australians are a disadvantaged group who are hugely over-represented in the country’s jails, accounting for only 3 per cent of the general population but 28 per cent of the prison population.

The Prison That Really is Like a Holiday Camp

Fancy a dip? Men detained at Tocarón prison in Venezuela had use of this swimming pool, as well as a nightclub, restaurant, and zoo. For more than 20 years the jail was controlled by a drug cartel, which ran its operations from the site while its chiefs lived there with their families. Authorities in the South American nation turned a blind eye – until last month, when 11,000 soldiers and police were sent in to take back control. A fire broke out as they seized the gang’s armoury of automatic rifles and ammunition. Up to 500 prisoners were reported to have fled through tunnels, including Tren de Aragua cartel leader Héctor Guerrero Flores, known as Niño Guerrero (Boy Warrior), who is serving 17 years for murder and drug trafficking

Mother of Murdered Schoolgirl Receives Settlement and Apology From the BBC

The BBC has reached a confidential settlement and restated its apology to Michelle Hadaway, mother of Brighton schoolgirl Karen Hadaway, who with her friend Nicola Fellows was sexually assaulted and strangled in Brighton in 1986 at the age of nine in what became known as the Babes in the Wood murders. In 1991, Michelle Hadaway claimed that the former disgraced BBC reporter Martin Bashir requested her daughter’s clothes for DNA tests for the BBC Two social affairs programme Public Eye. Subsequently the investigation was never aired. Ms Hadaway’s calls for the return of her daughter’s clothes were ignored by the Broadcaster, and despite a review of the case in a fresh effort to try to locate the clothing in 2021, the clothes were never returned. The families of the two girls spent decades fighting for justice after their killer, Russell Bishop, was initially acquitted of their murders in 1987. After another trial in 2018, Bishop was found guilty of the murders and was jailed for a minimum of 36 years and died in 2022.

Over 100,000 Children in England and Wales Have A Parent in Prison

Rajeev Syal, Guardian: An official Ministry of Justice estimate says that each male prisoner has, on average, 1.14 children, meaning that an estimated 100,084 children have a parent in prison, the charity said. Many children with a parent in prison go on to lead positive and fulfilling lives. However, research shows that the children of prisoners are more likely to get involved in crime, suffer from mental health problems, homelessness and poverty later in life, Pact said. Andy Keen-Downs, Pact’s chief executive, said the government should reconsider its prison expansion programme. “This is a grim milestone. By imprisoning record numbers of parents we are storing up a whole raft of problems, the impact of which will be felt for decades to come. In a rush to get ‘tough on crime’ and imprison ever greater numbers of people, ministers seem to have given little consideration to the long-lasting damage this policy will wreak on children and families,” he said.

The average custodial sentence has increased by 57% since the Conservatives entered power in the coalition government in 2010. A £4bn plan to build 20,000 additional prison places by the mid-2020s is not expected to be completed until 2030 because of planning delays. As of last week, only 768 places were available in jails across England and Wales. The UK govern-

ment is in discussions with other European countries to rent spare prison cells, Alex Chalk, the justice secretary, said in a speech to the Conservative party conference on Tuesday. In a further development, Rait Kuuse, Estonia's deputy secretary general for the ministry of justice, told reporters that his officials have held talks with the UK government over a possible "rental option". Kuuse told ERR News that the talks were at a preliminary stage, and would have to be approved by Estonia's legislature. The number of inmates in Estonia's three prisons – with places for a maximum of 3,200 – is falling, while cell occupancy rates are already among the lowest in the EU. A Ministry of Justice spokesperson said: "While courts already take into account the impact custody can have on dependants, we appreciate the challenges faced by the families of offenders and are improving our understanding of the number of children affected by parental imprisonment. "This includes new screening processes to better identify offenders who have caring responsibilities and investing £20m into a cross-government data programme to improve support for people with complex needs, including those with parents in prison."

Acquittal of Man Charged With Offensive Weapon Offence and Intimidation

OH stood trial at Reading Crown Court on charges of witness intimidation and possession of a bladed article in a public place. The complainant was the ex-partner of OH and accused him of holding her at knifepoint to threaten her to withdraw an allegation of common assault against him, which was listed for trial. Their young son was said to be present during the incident, which took place in November 2020, and was reported by the complainant in 2022. The prosecution relied upon the evidence of the complainant and a pre-recorded video interview of their 9-year-old son. The defence successfully argued that a pocketknife found at the defendant's address, which the Crown sought to introduce as evidence, was inadmissible.

The defence argued that the complainant had fabricated the incident and coached her young son to corroborate. The ongoing custody proceedings was cited as the motivation for the complainant's allegation. The unused evidence revealed that, prior to 2022 and post-November 2020, the complainant had made multiple allegations against OH, which were all NFA'd. The defence highlighted the fact that, on none of these occasions did the complainant mention the 2020 incident. It was also highlighted that the complainant had not informed the police that her son was a witness, when first reporting the intimidation incident. In addition to this, the bad character of the complainant was adduced under s.100 (b)(i) of CJA 2003. Following a three-day trial, and after 24 minutes of jury deliberation, OH was unanimously acquitted of both charges.

Free Joe Outlaw! No to IPP!

Revolutionary Communist Group: On Saturday 23 September, South London FRFI supporters organised a protest outside Belmarsh prison in solidarity with all IPP prisoners and especially to highlight the fightback of Joe Outlaw. We were joined by comrades from FRFI North and West London, as well as from Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association (JENGbA), Anarchist Black Cross and TRAPPED. Introduced in 2005 by a Labour government which had sworn to be 'tough on crime' and which presided over a massive rise in the prison population, the sentence of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) is a draconian indeterminate sentence with a short custodial minimum period followed by indefinite detention unless the Parole Board directs that someone is safe to be released. Although officially abolished in 2012 this was not retrospective and some 3,000 IPP prisoners remain behind bars.

Moving toward the front of Belmarsh Prison together with over 40 friends of Julian Assange,

who were setting off on a solidarity bike ride protest, we held an open microphone, with demands to free all IPP prisoners, calling the prison system for what it is: an instrument of class repression under capitalism. The protest heard from FRFI supporters, former prisoners, and JengBa and Assange campaigners. Speakers highlighted different forms of the struggle against the prison system, whilst expressing solidarity with Joe. Joe Outlaw had sent us a letter, which was read out to the demonstration. Joe has valiantly fought back against the prison system by staging two prison rooftop protests, highlighting the brutality inflicted upon IPP prisoners. As a punishment for these actions, he is being held in solitary confinement.

The government has refused to implement recommendations which would result in the freeing of IPP prisoners and is planning to build yet more prisons and step up the repressive use of imprisonment both for political activists and for people whose main 'crime' is being poor. We must continue to organise from beyond the walls and see the fight against prisons as a fight for the entirety of the working-class.

Prisoners Right to Vote: Tingarov and Others v. Bulgaria

The case concerned the right to vote for prisoners in Bulgaria. The applicants, eight Bulgarian nationals, were all serving prison sentences in Pazardzhik Prison, when legislative elections for Bulgarian Parliament were held on 4 April 2021 and 11 July 2021. They were automatically prevented from voting in those elections pursuant to the relevant legislation. Relying on Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 (right to free elections) to the European Convention, the applicants complain that as convicted prisoners they were subject to a blanket ban on voting in elections. Violation of Article 3 of Protocol No. 1

Providing a Summary of Parole Board Decisions to the Public

The Parole Board Rules permit the provision of a document, referred to as a summary, to interested parties. The summary document is a succinct explanation of how a panel reached its decision to release or not release a prisoner. Summaries will be produced for each case when an actionable request has been made prior to, at or following the adjudication of a panel. A summary will provide detail as to the reasons the Parole Board has reached its decision, based on the facts of the particular case. It will include information about the hearing, risk factors considered and a prisoner's progress in custody. Any summary provided may refer to the prisoner by their name at the time of their original offence or that by which they are publicly known. The Board will use its discretion to protect any new identity taken on by the offender as part of their rehabilitation and release.

When a summary will be provided: The Board, to meet its obligation of creating a more open and transparent process, will be working on the assumption that summaries will be made available when requested. However, the Board has the discretion to refuse the provision of a summary or redact details or amend as necessary a summary of a panel's decision where the information contained could or does:

- Adversely affect the successful rehabilitation or progress towards rehabilitation of any offender;
- Place the safety of any person/s in jeopardy, through threats or other harmful behaviour;
- Pertain to a young offender - under the age of 18;
- Pertain to any offender released from a secure Mental Health Unit;
- Breach any outstanding court orders;
- Relate to any ongoing investigations;
- Threaten national security;

The Board will notify the requestor where any summary is deemed not to be disclosable. In all summaries provided, the Board will not disclose information which breaches any person's rights as covered in Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), Data Protection Act (DPA) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In order to assist the Parole

Board in determining if any of the above criteria apply, representations should be made by the offender, their representative or any interested party at the time of the making of the decision to allow or refuse release from custody. The Board will not be seeking representations from offenders, however where any offender believes information not known to the Board may affect disclosure as per the above criteria, they may make representations to the Board.

Provision: Any victim registered with the Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) may request a summary of an upcoming decision, through their Victim Liaison Officer (VLO) provided there is an active Parole Review at time of request. Where a victim requests a summary of a decision, the Parole Board will provide this, via the VLO. Any member of the public may request a summary by providing as much identifying information about the offender as possible as well as their own name, contact details and reason for their request. Summaries will be sent to the requestor via the email or postal address they provide at the time of the request. All summaries should be obtained by submission of a request to either summaries@paroleboard.gov.uk or via our postal address. The Parole Board will consider requests from interested parties up to six months after any decision is made. A summary will be provided as soon as is practicable. This policy is subject to regular review by the Board.

Call for Ban of AI Facial Recognition in Public Spaces

Rajagopal, Justice Gap: The BBC reports that politicians and campaigners have asked for an immediate ban of AI facial recognition technology following plans that the government would allow the police to access passport photos. Facial recognition technology scans people's faces and compares them with a 'watch list' of people who may be wanted. The policing minister has called for the police to have access to a wider range of databases because their current ones only give them information on people who have been arrested in the past. MPs from the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties joined campaign bodies such as Amnesty and Big Brother Watch in calling for a ban on this technology due to "a lack of democratic mandate" and concerns about discrimination and human rights.

The UK's surveillance camera commissioner said that this could make passport holders and other members of the public feel that they are in a "digital line-up". However, the police do ensure that the public are informed in advance when they are stepping into a monitored area and the system will only be alerted when it detects a person on the watch list. It can also be used to search for missing or vulnerable people and free up officers' time according to the Home Office.

As reported by the Justice Gap, facial recognition has been used in public spaces and events since 2020. The use of such technology had been held as unlawful in a major Court of Appeal case against South Wales Police in 2020. However, since then, changes by police forces in the use of facial recognition has seen the return of the technology to large-scale events such as the King's coronation and concerts by Beyonce and Harry Styles. The Home Office maintains that the use of facial recognition is based on "a sound legal basis that has been confirmed by the courts" and has enabled the capture of a "large number of serious criminals" including for murder and sexual offences.

However, the Justice Gap reported that an audit into the use of facial recognition showed a failure in meeting "minimum ethical and legal standards". BBC News report that the technology has also been rolled out in shops like Sports Direct, Flannels and House of Fraser. The owners of these shops have supported it by saying that "since installing this technology, we have seen a significant reduction in the number of criminal offences taking place in our stores". Silkie Carlo, the director of the privacy organisation Big Brother Watch, said "This dangerously authoritarian technology has the potential to turn populations into walking ID cards in a constant police line-up".

HMP Wandsworth Staff Faced '10 Assaults a Week' Before Prisoner Escaped

Rajeev Syal, Guardian: The prison's independent monitoring board said the shortage of staff and resources made it "very difficult" to operate a "fully effective security regime" in the year to 1 June. The findings, in the board's annual report, came after the former soldier Daniel Khalife pleaded not guilty to escaping from the prison in September, where he was on remand after being charged with terrorism offences. Board members visited the prison on 642 occasions during the year. In a highly critical report, they found: The prison was not safe, with more than 10 assaults on staff every week. The number of available officers was rarely more than half while attacks on them increased by 25% to 1,048 in a year, the board said. Staff turnover was high and the experience of many staff limited. The management team had no input over selection and the process to remove unsuitable staff was long and complex. Prisoners had easy access to contraband, with the confiscation of 1,900 litres of illicitly brewed alcohol – about five litres every day – over the year. More than 300 mobile telephones were found, with drones used to send goods over the prison walls. The prison repeatedly had no heating or hot water during the winter months. In two wings, there were only 11 shower stalls for 265 men, who all wanted showers in the very limited time available, the board said. Regular flooding of cells disrupted whole wings while men often endured several weeks without a full kit change. A new multimillion pound healthcare centre remained unused, more than a year after its scheduled opening date. The report concluded: "The shortage of resources – human, financial and physical – made it very difficult to operate a fully effective security regime. The management team at the prison worked very hard to deliver a regime despite very limited resources. This problem will continue until staff availability improves and facilities are upgraded."

Stabbing Victim's Brother Protests for Release of Man Convicted of his Murder

Jason Moore has spent nearly a decade in prison over the fatal stabbing of Robert Darby in an East End pub car park in 2005. The victim's older brother, Tim Darby, is so convinced that the justice system got the wrong man he has joined the Moore family's campaign. Speaking alongside dozens of protesters who had gathered with placards saying "Free Jason Moore", Darby said: "I think the authorities know he didn't do it but they don't want to put things right. There's just too much evidence now that he didn't do it ... You don't bang a man up for life for something he hasn't done." Moore, now 53, was sentenced to 18 years in prison for the killing in 2013 and continues to insist on his innocence, meaning he has no prospect of early release. The bishop of Stepney, Joanne Grenfell, accused the miscarriage of justice watchdog, the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), of failing to investigate the case properly. The CCRC refused to refer Moore's conviction for appeal in 2021 despite a dossier of evidence compiled by retired Metropolitan police detectives which cast serious doubt on it. Standing in front of Downing Street in her purple robes, Grenfell said: "We are here today to protest about the way that the Criminal Cases Review Commission has so far refused to listen to the evidence that shows this is an unsafe conviction; evidence that is so overwhelming that anyone who reads it can hardly believe that it has been allowed to stand, and to keep an innocent man in prison for the last nine years. A new application is being prepared to send to the CCRC this month with fresh evidence, including that a key witness has now told the Romford Recorder newspaper this year he was drunk at the time and did not see much in a fleeting glance. The witness initially chose someone who looked totally different to Moore in a video identity parade before picking out Moore eight years later. Speaking about the almost 10 years her son has spent incarcerated, Moore's mother, Jenny Moore, 77, said: "Every day is difficult. It never gets any easier."