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E. Stagg Whitin

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## SELF-SUPPORTING PRISONS

E. STAGG WHITIN<sup>1</sup>

The control over prisons throughout the United States is decentralized. There are three federal prisons under the Federal Department of Prisons; forty-eight state penal systems, each with a different organization, which often divides authority among several boards; two hundred city or municipal penal departments, and approximately twenty-five hundred county jails, the latter having state supervision in only ten states. The 1916 census puts the cost of operating penal institutions throughout the United States at approximately \$37,451,400 per year. Approximately 165,000 persons are incarcerated, making a daily per capita cost of .631c.

England and France have centralized their penal systems. This is impossible in the United States from a governmental point of view. The movement for centralization is tending to draw the county penal institutions under the same control as the state system, but even this will have its limitations where the county and city are one. Unless the "home-rule movement" for cities is to be given up, the city penal system will never become part of the state system. In turn, as long as the state system of government in this country lasts, the state prison systems will not become integral parts of the federal prison system.

The management of the penal institutions in twenty-five out of the forty-eight states is joined with that of the eleemosynary institutions. In the state and state-aided eleemosynary institutions, including the correctional, there are 520,138 people to be housed and fed. To this number must be added the 64,321 persons in service for the care of these people, who are also housed, fed and clothed. The term "welfare" is coming into use to cover the combined penal and eleemosynary departments which, in round figures, cost \$118,152,548 per annum.

In the purchase of supplies for their welfare departments, 41 states have a centralized, or group centralized, purchasing system. All the larger cities have a central purchasing office. One hundred and twenty offices, therefore, purchase the supplies for the welfare departments. It is estimated that \$700,000,000 is spent annually by the forty-eight states and thirty-three cities for the purchase of their supplies, of which 60 per cent is for the welfare departments.

The cost of operating these welfare departments is lessened by the work which is performed by the wards of the state. The value

<sup>1</sup>Committee on Prison Labor, New York City.

of this work, as a whole, is impossible to ascertain, as no estimate is ever made of the value of the labor of inmates employed in the running of institutions or in repair and reclamation work, while little is known of the value of farm products and supplies manufactured by the institutions for their own consumption. We know that institutional farms aggregating 409,140 acres, owned and leased, produce supplies for institutions in the prison group, the hospitals for the insane and the institutions for the feeble-minded.

It will be seen that on the information available it is impossible to estimate accurately the value of the intermural work of persons confined in prisons throughout the United States, and the question might be raised as to what would be the fair way to estimate the value of such work. Should it be estimated on the value of free labor secured to do this work, it must be borne in mind that a premium would have to be given free laborers to induce them to do many of the menial tasks now performed by inmates.

For general discussion it is unnecessary to endeavor to ascertain the value of this work, because the public never figures on this labor and believes the cost of maintaining the institutions to be the amount for which it is taxed. In the movement to make prisons self-supporting the public conception is based upon a reduction in the rate of taxes to the point where the taxpayer will not find the cost of these institutions reflected in his tax bill. If, therefore, we credit the prisoner with the value of this labor, we must in turn, under a wage system, charge him his pro rata of the cost of running the institution. This is the only legitimate means whereby the burden of maintaining prisons can be lifted off the taxpayer.

Self-supporting prisons mean, of course, that every prisoner shall work who is capable of working and by the sweat of his brow pay for his maintenance and the other costs of his incarceration. There are many humane persons who do not believe that the question of the prisoner paying his way is as important as his rehabilitation and his return to society in a physical and mental condition that will insure his leading an honest and productive life as a member of the community. Still others go further and contend that his success after his release depends upon his having learned a trade, having earned wages in that trade which went regularly to the support of his home and his dependents, who are awaiting him upon his release. A compromise between these two ideas is found in the executive order issued by Woodrow Wilson, which was drafted by Samuel Gompers and others interested in the betterment of prison industries. It provided for

wages for prisoners based upon the wages prevailing in the vicinity in which the institution was located and from which were to be deducted the pro rata cost of maintaining the inmates. Such a proposal, developing as it did out of the war period, postulates an adequate prison system as a fundamental basis for its success.

All attempts to develop an adequate prison system have been thwarted by the difficulty of installing productive labor with product marketable in a manner not inimical to the best interests of industries throughout the country.

An effort was made to solve these difficulties by the restriction of prison production to consumption within state institutions and departments. This proved too limited when applied to any but states with a large institutional population. An adequate program, developing out of the work of the War Prison Labor Section of the War Industries Board, known as "States' Use," was pressed as a war emergency. Under the centralizing power of the War Industries Board a beginning had just been made when the Armistice caused the dissolution of the War Industries Board, leaving to the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, which has been a part of its prison section, the responsibility for carrying on the development, despite the fact that the power of the War Industries Board was gone.

The forty-eight states, the cities and counties needed to be brought into accord, securing their co-operation without offending their sovereignty. The facts as to the prison industries in the forty-eight states, the cities and counties and their supply requirements had to be gathered by the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor. With these facts gathered, a conference of the official prison plant managers was called in Washington. This conference accepted the principle of "States' Use" and emphasized the need for the application to state purchase of the War Industries Board principles of standardization of supply specifications and allocation to each state of the commodities which it is advisable it should produce.

This conference recognized officially the Associates for Government Service, Inc., which had been organized to carry out, on a public service and non-profit making basis, the marketing phases which the dissolution of the War Industries Board left to private initiative.

The Prison Industrial Conference, through a Committee on Standards, gave initiative sufficient for the Associates for Government Service to interest the Secretary of Commerce in the appointment of a special Committee on Standard Specifications, made up of representatives of organizations which, like the Associates for Gov-

ernment Service, the United States Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, were interested in standardization.

The Secretary of Commerce also called together the official purchasing agents for the states and cities and the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor. They unanimously agreed to accept the standards which the Advisory Committee should work out in both the fields of state purchase and state production.

To secure co-ordination of all the states in the broad program, an appeal was made by the Governor of Virginia to the Conference of Governors, held at West Baden, Indiana, October, 1923. He pointed out that the State of Virginia was ready to buy, and had already bought, prison goods manufactured in other states through the Associates for Government Service, and that it was anxious to sell through that same medium its own prison products.

The Governor of New Jersey, presiding at the meeting, urged the governors to purchase the products of each other's prisons and to join in the allocation of prison industries. By unanimous vote the representative of the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor was asked to explain how participation in this work could be brought about. The need of zone conferences to carry on the details of the allocation of prison industries was presented and, by general consent, the idea of these conferences was accepted.

The announcement in September, 1923, that large business interests, which had been exploiting the prison industries for their private gain, were willing to withdraw, precipitated the demand of certain states that the work on allocation should begin at once. The State of Utah faced idleness because of the withdrawal, as the result of court action, of the prison contractor. The Governor of Utah demanded immediate action and, within three weeks, was supplied with recommendations which solved his immediate problem and met with the approval of the Utah Manufacturers' Association, which had forced the court action prohibiting the contract. The Governor, in accordance with the recommendations presented to him, issued the call for the first zone conference on the allocation of prison industries. His letters calling the conference were personally delivered by a representative of the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor to the governors of the other states in the inter-mountain zone—New Mexico, Arizona, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Colorado and Wyoming. The invitation to send a representative was accepted by all the governors and the delegations planning to attend in practically every instance

include the governor, members of the prison boards, wardens, state purchasing agents and representatives of the local manufacturers' associations and federations of labor.

The report of this practical and comprehensive development, made to a special conference called by the annual meeting of the American Federation of Labor, led that organization to join with the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor and the General Federation of Women's Clubs in an unqualified endorsement of the "States' Use" principle. Following this declaration, the Executive Committee of the United States Chamber of Commerce and the Executive Committee of the National Association of Manufacturers asked for invitations for their representatives to the Utah Conference, and delegates have already been appointed from these associations and the American Federation of Labor.

Legislative approval has been received from the only Legislature in session in the zone—Montana—which, while called for retrenchment and cutting down of a budget previously passed, appropriated liberally for the expenses of the Montana delegates to the conference.

The Utah conference will take place April 9th, 10th and 11th. The southern states, led by Alabama, are demanding that a zone conference be held at once in that section. The completion of the work of allocation in these zones will be followed, as rapidly as possible, by conferences in other zones as the pressing emergency presents itself. These conferences will help the states by enabling them to get to work on their own prison industrial problems, with the assurance of cooperation on the part of the forces which previously retarded their development. The National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor will organize the backing of state officials by its own local organizations, the State Federations of Women's Clubs, the State Federations of Labor, the Manufacturers' Associations and Chambers of Commerce. State appropriations, secured through the moral sentiment of these groups in each state, can be relied on to build up the state prison systems. The marketing of the prison product will also aid in this development and the Associates for Government Service is organized to do this work.

Freed in their industrial development to grow along the lines efficiency and sanity suggest, the prison systems throughout the United States, federal, state and city, are destined not only to become self-supporting but to include in the service they render the prisoners, in return for the payment made by the prisoners, many facilities which have been impossible under the extravagant system of inefficiency

which has prevailed while the taxpayers' money has been used. The rehabilitation of the prisoner by a method of "remaking" is destined to supersede the present inane methods of prison discipline. The physical defects of the prisoner, his mental vagaries, will become a necessary part of the study of penal experts and their correction will be necessitated by the daily exigencies of the penal industrial system. To those whose interest is in this remake process it needs to be pointed out that it will be some years before the "hard-boiled" taxpayer will support a political regime which appropriates lavishly for this most necessary work. Given half a chance, however, the new penal industrial system will meet the demand of the taxpayer that prisons be self-supporting, while these facilities will be added thereunto because they are necessary to its growth.

Thus we are contemplating much more than self-supporting prisons. Out of the present movement there will be definite economic gain. As was pointed out in a recent article in *The Survey*, "To estimate the economic gain we have but to figure the saving from the new methods in purchasing public supplies, the saving in maintenance of the prisoners who will become self-supporting, the saving to the charitable institutions which will not longer be called upon to care for their dependents. What it will mean to turn out competent workmen from our prisons, rather than confirmed criminals, it is for the insurance companies, the surety companies and the police to estimate."