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Briefer Contributions: Responsibility for Prison Conditions

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A good description of how they work.

Saposs, D. J. Cut the racket. *Labor Age*, Aug., 1930, v. 19, p. 9-11.

The author says that racketeering is the most sinister of all the dangerous tendencies sapping at the foundations of labor. This article tells about labor racketeering of the common variety and of the subtler forms.

Schnurmacher, Doc. Yo, ho! ho! and the jolly racketeers! *Commerce and Finance*, Jan. 2, 1929, v. 18, p. 11-13.

The author claims that the racketeer has become an industrial pirate and parasite, and that racketeering is spreading and becoming a menace to working people as well as to business.

Shepherd, W. G. Meet the Colonel. *Collier's*, Mar. 2, 1929, v. 83, p. 8-9.

Tells of Chicago racketeers who interfered with the federal government in the field of interstate commerce and how they were dealt with by William J. Donovan and Mary J. Connor.

_____. The Cuban lottery racket. *Collier's*, May 30, 1931, v. 87, p. 16-17+.

Tells about the conditions in Cuba where there is a close tie-up between politics and the lottery game. Government officials control the lottery racket and the author wonders if the United States Government might not have something to say about it under the Platt amendment.

_____. What's the racket? *Collier's*, Apr. 11, 1931, v. 87, p. 10-11+.

The author says that racketeering is an old Persian custom of paying tribute by merchants, and that racketeers are distinguished

from other criminals because they are protected criminals.

Smith, Bruce. Business can whip the racketeer. *Nation's Business*, Apr. 1931, v. 19, p. 27-30.

Brings out idea that if business men would accept their responsibility they could defeat the racketeers, and tells how it has been done in several outstanding cases. Blames those who submit to the racketeers as responsible for the extent of the evil and calls them guilty of treason.

Sparkes, Boyden. Club racket has you listed as a sucker. *Nation's Business*, Sept., 1930, v. 18, p. 44-47.

Tells how racketeers have found a way of exploiting people by becoming promoters of clubs which are really rackets.

States and the racketeers. *World's Work*, Feb., 1931, v. 60, p. 18.

This is a short article that tells of President Hoover saying he would not ask Congress to extend federal criminal laws to cover racketeering, because the states all have ample laws to govern criminality.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PRISON CONDITIONS

E. R. CASS¹

The American Prison Association Congress welcomes the many recent evidences of an aroused public interest in the problems of prison management. Hitherto, public indifference and apathy toward the prisons have tolerated conditions

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that made possible the unfortunate disorders and sensational difficulties in recent months. In the war against crime the public generally has been satisfied when a man has been sent away to prison, ignoring the fact that 95% are returned to their communities within a few years. The best efforts of prison administrators, wardens, boards and commissions to secure adequate funds for decent housing, proper personnel and sufficient employment in prisons, have, in many places, fallen on the deaf ears of an unresponsive public.

Speaking before the 60th Annual Congress of the American Prison Association, of which he is a past President, Hon. George W. Wickersham expressed the conviction that:

"Public opinion on the subject of crime and its punishment is aroused as it has not been for a long time. This Association, speaking with the authority which the wide experience of its members gives it, may lead public opinion to advocate and compel substantial and useful reforms in the conduct of our penal system."

No single cause can be offered as the complete explanation for the tragedies that have occurred. Official investigations and the testimony of those experienced in prison work have clearly demonstrated that many so-called riots are not in fact riots at all, but the desperate effort of a very few daring, hopeless men to gain their freedom by violent means. The rank and file of prisoners are generally obedient to the regulations of the prison, except when intolerable living conditions produce a spirit of revolt.

Over-crowding

Over-crowding in prisons is a direct result of public indifference and its consequent parsimony. Prison housing has not kept pace with the rapid increase in prison populations. The old badly ventilated, unsanitary vault-like cells, well described as "human filing cabinets," have been bulging with two and three prisoners in a space unfit for one human being. This packing of men into close and irritating association has aggravated the prison problem and made for increased tension. It has complicated all phases of internal prison administration.

Loss of Hope Due to Unwise Restrictions

Excessively severe sentences in some jurisdictions, and unwise restrictions as to rewards for good conduct and earned release have further aggravated the difficulties of prison administration. Loss of hope, has in many States, been the first evident result of unwise laws that hamper prison administrators and parole boards. Without hope of release, the major incentive to good conduct and reformation is lost. Bitterness, hopelessness, and resentment are the fuel that feed the fires of revolt and rebellion in prisons as in the world outside.

Idleness

Idleness is a major contributing cause to the problems of prison management. Productive labor, vocational training, wholesome recreation and appropriate educational programs are essential elements of a modern prison routine. Without work, there is bound to be deterioration and a break down of prison discipline. This phase of prison

management demands constructive action on the part of legislators and administrators supported by an understanding public opinion. Adequate finances, trained personnel, and a cooperative public are all needed for the solution of the problems of idleness in prisons.

Need for Religious and Moral Training

A prison, more than any other institution, demands a virile, dynamic, moral and spiritual program. The neglect of this phase of prison life cannot be condoned. While much good work is being done, there is vast room for improvement everywhere in these fundamental measures for reformation and rehabilitation. Here is a field for the best efforts of our religious and spiritual leaders.

Prisons Are Too Large

Our prisons are generally planned for too large a number of prisoners. This leads to mass treatment. It is responsible for the mingling of the unexperienced in crime with the repeater and the hardened offender. It nullifies the efforts of prison officials to treat men as individuals and to bring to bear reformatory influences. This Association has repeatedly called attention to the mis-

take of building prisons housing more than a moderate sized population. The Toronto Congress set the maximum at about 1200.

Prison executives have for years called attention to the fact that they have underpaid and insufficient personnel. This is a condition which prevails in some degree everywhere and must be corrected if prisons are to function properly.

Within the prison system, there must be provision for segregating offenders as to type and experience on a basis of scientific classification. This is best accomplished by a diversity of institutions, adapted to the differing groups under care.

The problem brought into prominence by the disturbances of the last year calls for a frank presentation of the facts to the public and a united front in the demand for remedial action. This involves and requires the cooperation and active assistance of the public, the press, public officials, and members of the legislature.

Legislators, interested citizens, or organizations desirous of assisting in the solution of such problems, either locally or generally, may communicate with the General Secretary of the American Prison Association, at 135 East 15th Street, New York City.