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Thorsten Sellin

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HISTORICAL GLIMPSES OF TRAINING FOR PRISON SERVICE

THORSTEN SELLIN¹

We have in recent years been experimenting with training schools for prison officers, the best known being the schools conducted, for the training of future guards, by the U. S. Bureau of Prisons and the New Jersey Department of Institutions and Agencies. These schools—not mentioning the lecture courses conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Correction in 1921 and for some years thereafter for guards already in service, and the Prison Keeper's School of the New York City Department of Correction—have become known as the first of their kind in the United States and claims have been made that they have had but few predecessors, the school at Wakefield, England, established in 1925, and that of Japan, established in 1908 after a decade and a half of experimentation, being most prominently mentioned.²

As a matter of fact, prison training schools have had a long history and were preceded by considerable discussion over a long period of years. In affording the following glimpses into the growth of this movement, no claim is made for completeness. Some leads have not been explored, nor have the schools mentioned been studied in any detail.

Already in 1791, Wagnitz³ suggested the establishment of a "seminar" in each place where a state prison is found, in order that prison administrators and guards might be given training and in which "not only their moral character and mental powers be tested—which would, no doubt, be most important—but where they would also be instructed for their future service." Stevens⁴ claims that a regular school existed in the prison of Ghent in 1834, that it had 30

¹Professor of Sociology in the University of Pennsylvania.

²On the Wakefield School, see Hart, H. H., *Training Schools for Prison Officers*, N. Y. 1930; on the Japanese school, see Gillin, J., *Taming the Criminal*, New York, 1931, and "The World's Oldest Training School for Prison Officials." In this *Journal*, May-June, 1932: Cf. also Vasaly, C. E., in the *Proceedings*, Am. Prison Ass'n, 1921: 311-15.

³Wagnitz, H. B., *Historische Nachrichten und Bemerkungen über die merkwürdigsten Zuchthäuser in Deutschland*. 3 vol., Halle, 1791, pp. 99-100 of vol. I.

⁴In symposium on *L'école des gardiens*, *Bul. de la Société des Prisons*, 1892, p. 568.

students and was successful, but that it was soon discontinued. E. C. Wines⁵ on one occasion called attention to the fact that "when Mr. Demetz established the agricultural colony at Mettray [1839—for juvenile delinquents] with his colleague, he felt that the task of training bad boys and men into good should not be entrusted to the first comer. He therefore established a preparatory school and spent six months with his colleague and chaplain in training twelve or fifteen young men as officers. The School had been kept up ever since, with twenty-five or thirty young men at a time having a three years' course of training." The International Congress of Charities in Brussels in 1856 declared in favor of a special training for prison guards, and the Frankfurt Congress of 1857 expressed a similar opinion.⁶ A real school appeared soon afterwards when the "Aufseher-Aspiranten-Institut" or institute for prison guard recruits was established at the Lüneburg prison in Hanover in 1859.⁷ This school was planned the year before at a meeting of higher prison officials of Hanover, who proposed to establish it in connection with a penal institution for young offenders, also in the planning stage. When the construction of this institution was delayed, the director of the prison mentioned suggested that the school be attached to his institution. Early in 1859 it began operation and by September eight young workmen were in training.

The school was run on the following principles: (1) Although soldiers were given preference by law, the prison administration was permitted to admit not more than six qualified civilians at a time to training and later to service. (2) Applicants had to be unmarried and between 25 to 35 years of age, of good character. Other penal institutions in the province were to aid in securing good recruits. (3) If accepted, the applicant was admitted for one year under promise to obey all prison rules and under assurance that he would be placed in service at the end of the training period if vacancies existed, and if he had shown fitness for the work. (4) Because of the importance of having guards who would exert a "healthful" influence over the prisoners, applicants were to be chosen with care. (5) Each man in training received 150 thalers for the year. (6) Practical training was given him as assistant to some regular prison officer. (7) Instruction was given in military drill, fire arms, etc.; study of service rules and

⁵Pears, E., ed., *Prisons and reformatories at home and abroad*, London, 1872, pp. 400-1.

⁶Wines, E. C., *The state of prisons and of child-saving institutions in the civilized world*, Cambridge, 1880, p. 66.

⁷Hoyns, *Das Aufseher-Aspiranten-Institut zu Lüneburg*. *Blätter für Gefängniskunde* 9: 49-65, 1875.

regulations, writing, arithmetic, composition of reports; lectures on the aims of prisons and on the professional duties of the administrative personnel and the guard. These lectures were given by the chaplain and the higher officials. A certificate with a statement of the candidate's fitness for prison service was given him at the end of his training.

At the end of the first year there were 16 students in this school, to which 21 were added early in 1860. While this reduced the opportunity for individual instruction, we are told that administrators of institutions to which the guards were sent upon their graduation generally regarded these men as useful to the service and better able than the old guards to understand their relations with the prisoners. That does not appear unreasonable for "the candidate was constantly reminded to see the man in the prisoner and to remember that worry over home, wife, children, coupled with a realization of his own helpless condition, might call forth in a prison a mental state, which were he not properly treated might produce bitterness, even despair, and as a rule, disobedience, stubbornness and enduring dissatisfaction." What excellent mental hygiene counsel! Because the need for new personnel soon almost disappeared, the entrance requirements were in 1864 considerably raised, and in 1868 the school was discontinued after having trained 127 men, 118 of whom were taken into the service.

Out of lectures given in the fall of 1889 there grew even a manual for prison guards and recruits.⁸ It was divided into four parts. Part One was of a general nature and dealt with the different branches of administrative service and the regulations governing the qualifications of guards (good past, moral character, etc.). Part Two discussed the aids in evaluating the prisoner in the institution, special attention to be given to his conduct during his confinement as well as his social environment before commitment. Part Three gave detailed rules of how the guard should act in his relations with the prisoner, and Part Four gave special consideration to the prisoner of the workhouse and the jail. In addition, two appendixes dealt respectively with juvenile offenders and women prisoners and their treatment.

In 1867, Stevens⁹ began an evening school for prison guards at

⁸Fienemann, F. A., *Handbuch für Gefangenen—Aufseher und Gefangenen-Aufseher-Aspiranten*. viii+88 pp. Lüneburg, 1864.

⁹*Loc. cit.*, Beltrani-Scalia in his report to the Int. Prison Congress at Stockholm states that beginning with 1876, the curriculum of this school was enlarged to include special lectures on theoretical prison questions and that 170 guards

the Louvain prison and two years later a circular issued by the French Minister of the Interior urged the establishment of guard schools in the central prisons of France, apparently without effect so far as I have discovered.¹⁰ The London International Penitentiary Congress of 1872 gave new life to the movement. The training question formed the subject of one session and while opinions were divided, it is significant that two of its proponents soon afterwards put their ideas into action. In 1873 a decree of July 27, instituted, through the efforts of Beltrani-Scalia,¹¹ head of the Italian prison system, a number of "normal" schools for prison guards. To begin with only one was actually organized in Rome at the Regina Coeli convent which was restored for this purpose and made into barracks. The dormitories with a total of 230 beds, an infirmary with 10 beds, large halls for class rooms, library, kitchen, mess, arsenal, etc., were arranged and the large interior court was used as drill ground. Enrollment was on a military plan. Applicants were accepted at the various prefectures in the country. They had to be unmarried, of good character, and willing to enlist for eight years of service, which in the final analysis depended on the successful completion of the course which was not to exceed six months in length. The training was rigorous, from six to nine hours a day, in the three R's; military drill; gymnastics; lectures on professional duties, the organization of the prison service, etc. Figures for the first five years showed an average annual attendance of 420. During this time the training period had increased from 2-3 months to 5-6 months. The results were apparently gratifying. Questionnaires sent to 83 prison administrators in the Kingdom showed very favorable reactions on their part. By 1885, 4492 ex-soldiers and 1802 civilians had gone through the school; the average training period had decreased to three months.

In 1874, Dr. Guillaume,¹² director of the Neuchatel prison, Switzerland, organized a training course for employees in service. This lasted but one week and six students were enrolled, four of them chief guards at other central prisons. Both theoretical and practical instruction was given from 6 a. m. to 7 p. m. daily.

took the course in 1877. *Des écoles normales pour préparer à leur mission les agents chargés de la surveillance des prisons.* Bul. de la Soc. des Prisons, 1878: 417-30, p. 421.

¹⁰Stevens, *loc. cit.*

¹¹*Op. cit.* About this institution, E. C. Wines (*op. cit.*, p. 66) says that Italy was "the first (*sic!*), by founding her normal school . . . to inaugurate the system of the professional education of prison employes."

¹²*Rapport concernant le cours de répétition donné aux employés de prisons suisses.* Verhandl. des Schweiz. Ver. f. Straf- und Gefängniswesen. . . . 1875, pp. 76-87.

The International Prison Congress of Stockholm in 1878 had the training question on the program. Among others, Beltrani-Scalia and Dr. Guillaume reported on their experiences and after considerable argument between those who believed in training as well as character and those who believed in character and practical experience, a resolution was voted that "the Congress is of the opinion, that it is important that guards should be theoretically and practically trained before they are finally taken into service. It is also of the opinion that a main condition for the securing of good guards is the safeguarding of working conditions which attract and hold the right persons and give them a fair degree of security in their position."¹³

Even earlier, in 1872, George L. Harrison, President of the Board of Public Charities of the State of Pennsylvania, had proposed in the annual report of the Board, the establishment by the state of a "normal institute" or school for the training of prison personnel of every grade.¹⁴

In 1886, E. von Jagemann¹⁵ instituted some courses for the training of higher prison officials in Baden, and in 1887 a school for prison guards was opened at the Melun prison in France, followed two years later by a similar school at the *Santé* in Paris.¹⁶ These were organized for guards already in service. Lectures were given on prison organization and administration; arrests, warrants and commitments; releases and transfers, rules, regulations, written reports, etc.; French grammar and history; elementary mathematics and geography. A decree of August 12, 1893, "instituted in the central prisons, the prison colonies and the large departmental prisons, elementary schools for guards . . ."¹⁷ Another decree of the same date established the *Ecole supérieure pénitentiaire* which was opened in Paris at the police detention jail. Twenty-four guards, some of higher rank, chosen from among the most intelligent men of their grade in the prisons of France were brought together daily for lectures and exercises in ad-

¹³It may have been this movement, which caused Michael J. Cassidy, warden of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania in the '80's to claim in his annual reports that his "instruction school" for guards was a great asset to his institution. This "school" which at first was a daily and later a weekly affair until notice of it disappears about 1890, seems to have been what we call a staff conference, which assembled in the warden's office to discuss the administrative details of the prison.

¹⁴See his *Chapters on Social Science as connected with the administration of state charities*. (Philadelphia, 1877), pp. 175-6.

¹⁵*Zur Frage der Vorbildung der Gefängnisbeamten*. Blätter f. Gefängnis-kunde 20: 229-56, 1886.

¹⁶Bul. de la Soc. des Prisons, 1891: 510-14, 705-8.

¹⁷Cuche, P., *Traité de science et de législation pénitentiaires*, Paris, 1905, pp. 258-9.

vanced French composition, arithmetic and geography, criminal law and procedure, prison industries, prison discipline, anthropometry, etc. This school continued until 1908.¹⁸

In Spain a Royal Decree of March 12, 1903, established a School of Criminology (*Escuela de Criminología*). It began to function in January, 1906, since which time a number of acts and decrees have been passed to improve its work. Its establishment had been foreshadowed since 1844, when a Royal Decree proposed the construction of a model prison, which would at the same time serve as a training school for officers. The prison was built, but the school never materialized. A decree of November 11, 1889, which tried to remedy this deficiency, also remained a dead letter.¹⁹

It is clear from this brief résumé that the question of the training of the prison staff has been considered for almost a century and a half, at any rate, and that the practical experiments in training extend over a century in time and over a considerable number of countries.

One is bound to wonder why so many of these experiments were so short-lived. Most of the schools or courses established in recent years in the United States have met the same fate as the Lüneburg school and for the same reason. They were designed to train recruits. When these were absorbed into the prison system, nothing short of an enormous turn-over in the staff could keep the school in constant operation, unless the prison system was exceedingly large. We are becoming increasingly aware of the need for trained prison personnel, not only in the custodial ranks, but in the higher administrative positions. Not only should recruits be trained *before* they enter the service, but there should be definite programs for training *in service*. Since the majority of states of the Union are too small to permit the maintenance of good permanent schools for recruits, it would be desirable to devise some method of co-operation between the states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons whereby the latter could maintain three or four permanent training centers for recruits, the states detailing well-selected prospective guards to these centers for schooling. Such a plan would permit the development of a professional and

¹⁸Cadalso y Manzano, F., *Instituciones penitenciarias y similares en España*. Madrid, 1922.

¹⁹Mossé, A., *Les prisons*, Paris, 1929, p. 154. In 1927, the French prison administration established a new school at the Fresnes prison near Paris. "The guards assigned to it must take a course of six months of theoretical and practical training. They are given a diploma at the end of the course. The conditions of admission and rules for the functioning of the school have been fixed by the orders of July 26 and August 24, 1927." *Ibid.*

permanent teaching staff and a program on a high level. There might even be included courses designed for administrative officers already in service, although in this respect all but the smaller states should consider the necessity for the creation of lecture and discussion courses or round-table sessions which regularly may bring to the various branches of the prison service, whether custodial or administrative, the best of recent thought on penal questions.