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A BRIEF STUDY OF SOME AMERICAN PENAL WELFARE SOCIETIES

WALTER WEBSTER ARGOW¹

I. *Introduction*

Most study projects begin with some sort of apologia or synopsis of purpose. This may vary in definition all along the sliding scale of what the student means and what he thinks sounds best to the group before whom he is to report. It is always good to seek out some precedent-establishing phrase formulated by an older and more recognized group. In 1870, the American Prison Association gave penology just such a phrase. From the Declaration of Principles:

“Article 22—More systematic and comprehensive methods should be adopted to save discharged prisoners, by providing them with work and encouraging them to redeem their character and regain their lost position in society. The State has not discharged its whole duty to the criminal when it has punished him, nor even when it has reformed him. Having raised him up, it is the future duty to aid in holding him up”

This is a day of questions: questions for the old to answer as well as the young; and one group is prone to chuckle in turn at the other's expense. In re-reading the quotation above, quite a list of questions comes to mind regarding its validity now as well as then. First, refraining from cynicism, we must accept the honesty of the groups intentions, and also remember that 1870 was a time when high-sounding phraseology was in vogue. Now, the questions:

1. What “systematic and comprehensive methods” should be adopted to save the discharged prisoner?
2. Will “work and encouragement” help them “redeem their characters”?
3. Can an ex-convict regain his position in society without society's cooperation?
4. Is it the State's duty to punish the criminal?
5. Can the State, avowing its purpose of punishment, reform or help reform the criminal?
6. Is reformation a “raising-up” process?

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7. If the State is to "hold him up," what will happen to the criminal's sense of esteem?
8. What has been society's answer to such a declaration?

To answer these questions would take many hours of survey and research; and the ensuing report would fill a large volume, albeit an interesting one. Excepting the last one, it is not the writer's purpose to try to answer any of them; he has neither the means nor the knowledge at his disposal. Previous writers have attacked similar questions with much gusto and some insight; we shall let them speak for themselves.

As one runs his finger down the tables of contents of the various volumes of the American Prison Association *Proceedings*, and then leafs through one article after another, he is likely to be overcome with a sense of futility: what's the use of deploying one's mind over a field which many an able scout has previously covered? Yet, as we peer into the lives of this vanishing legion, we are dumbfounded by the fact that these brilliant fighters, like others who have died in making the world safe for some principle, have valiantly died in vain. Year after year the press and conclave halls ring with the stalwart challenges of men outraged by the rottenness and waste in our various penal programs. But, as a poet whose identity I have forgotten puts it:

"For a moment we strike the black
Door with a fist of brightness,
And then it is over and spent,
And we sink back into life."

The echoes of the voices of past prison reformers may be drowned out by the shouting of the contemporary clan, but their thoughts and efforts will live in print as long as the *Proceedings'* bindings hold out. The names may stay; but the Public, final judge in these matters of policy, will soon forget the principles for which they staggered on.

There appeared in the 1917 issue of the *Proceedings* an article entitled "What Should Be the Aim of a Prisoners' Aid Society?" Again in 1921 there appeared "A Model Program for the Prisoners' Aid Society." 1923 had an article on the "Object of the Prisoner's Aid Society," and the 1930 book contained a "Modern Program" for the same group. We can also read articles on casework, the use of statistics, relief measures, and prevention of crime, all this in answer to the first question.

Warden Lawes, writing in the *World's Work* in 1928, portrayed the hard life of the ex-convict and his difficulty in getting a job. The *Current Opinion* for November, 1922, carried an article entitled, "Has the ex-convict a right to a job?" which re-paints Lawes' portrayal still more vividly. Replies to such a question asked of certain labor unionists by the writer indicated that they, too, lack interest in helping the "fallen men."

To answer the third question, one has but to look at the diminishing part popular subscription is carrying in prison welfare agency budgets; or to talk personally with adult church groups on the subject of helping the inmate return. They are mostly interested in the spectacular John Dillinger type. Sanford Bates, in addressing the Connecticut Prison Association, once said that he was being swamped with requests to help the inmates of Alcatraz, but no one seemed to care about the young reformatory lads.

Question four could be waived on the ground that the Prison Association fathers meant "treatment" when they said "punishment." Unfortunately there are other fathers today who still mean "punishment" when they say it. A Connecticut gaoler recently went on record in the press as advocating a whipping post on the public green for all first offenders.

In L. W. Fox's *Modern English Prison*, on page 34, there appears, in answer to question 5: "One might still hesitate to give a confidential answer to the question whether in any circumstance a prison system, rigid and standardized as it must be, and inevitably associated with the idea of punishment, is capable of bringing effectively to bear such influences as will bring about the change of mind or heart . . . or whatever else we understand by 'reform.'" In time even a dog will not be deceived by the wily smile on the face of the brutal master.

Ever since the beginning of government relief, social workers and social thinkers from all parts of the country have been writing in the *Survey* and other serious-minded magazines an answer to the sixth and seventh questions: the State is pauperizing the public by putting them on an extensive dole or direct relief system. Prison workers have also observed that a man "institutionalized" by the limited cell life is soon good for nothing else. Oscar Wilde wrote in his *De Profundis* that coming out of prison was just moving from one cell to another—the four walls still surrounded him.

The writer is aware, in looking back a few paragraphs, that he said quite clearly it was not his purpose to answer the first seven of the questions presented. However, he could not refrain from mentioning some material already published that seemed to have such appropriate bearing on them. He leaves them here without further comment.

II. *The Country's Answer to the Ex-Convict Problem*

When the writer first approached the field of criminology, his interest went through a series of evolutionary steps of acquaintanceship. These, strangely enough, took the form of a history of a criminal offense: first, there was the crime itself and its subsequent detection (this was probably a throw-back to "cops-and-robber days"); then there came the matter of Law and conviction. This was followed by the incarceration and problems of prison life. Up to this point a good bit of informative material was found so that he as a studious layman could acquire a working knowledge of the wheels of Justice. But here the spring of information ran dry and, so far as the writer could see, Society left the discharged prisoner dangling his feet over the prison doorstep, a free man and a bewildered one. That was several years ago. Since then many books and articles have been written and investigations made; but the writer, now having become a little better acquainted with the subject, is somewhat discouraged to find that in many cases, Society still leaves the "outmate" twiddling his thumbs, with an empty stare in his eyes. In comparison with other sociological efforts in America, the Prisoners' Aid Society (or Penal Welfare Agency) is still in the horse-and-buggy era; but in all fairness to some agencies in the field, it must be acknowledged that something has been done. And without question the most scathing critics of the present situation are those who are valiantly plugging along as members of the company itself.

There is a reason for the existence of such a condition of backwardness, and it is that reason which led to our projected study: Society in the main is still in ignorance as to who are the penai welfare workers and as to what they do. The National Prisoners' Aid Association has taken steps to get out a catalogue of the agencies and their locations. The writer had hoped at the onset of this study to go further than that and attempt a sociometrical classification on an impartial basis, but this had to be abandoned owing to the incommensurability of the data. The best

that can be offered for the present is the accompanying chart of statistics which, by itself, bears witness to the loose organization of the field and the absurdly large differences between agencies. The writer realizes the relativity of the value of this study. It is presented with full knowledge of the need for further field work.

On the 8th of May, 1935, a questionnaire form was sent out to forty societies which, it was assumed, were active in Penal Welfare. The list of names was supplied upon request by the office of the American Prison Association. Of these forty, twenty-one replied directly, eight were referred in via their national office, three were returned unclaimed, and the remaining eight had not replied at the time of writing although follow-up cards had been sent out. This gives a coverage of about 73% of the group.

Acknowledgments are due the New Haven Council of Churches for sponsoring the study and carrying the burden of the expense; Professors Hugh Hartshorne and Jerome Davis of Yale University for valuable guidance and advice; Claire Angevin Argow for checking the data and reading the proofs; and those in each agency who gave of their time to answer the questionnaire. Without the generous help and cooperation of those mentioned, this study would have been impossible.

The writer received many pamphlets and booklets from the agencies in response to his request for material. These were placed in Yale's Sterling Memorial Library to be on call for students in the field.

III. *Summary of the Chart and Individual Comments*

The chart, showing comparatively the type of work, budgets, and so forth, of the various agencies, speaks for itself. By taking the averages in some cases and by showing a line of fluctuation in others, it was possible to arrive at a fairly complete picture of the typical Prisoners' Aid Society.²

Such an agency would employ five full-time and two part-time workers, six paid, and four with social service training.

It would have a case load of about a thousand cases a year.

It would cooperate with other agencies of social service.

Its financial backing would come chiefly from Community Chest allotments, interest on investments, and gifts or subscriptions.

Its budget would average and fluctuate as follows: 1930:

²Dr. Hugh Hartshorne suggests that this is a dubious concept on the grounds that the data is not comparable. It is retained here merely to give a rough picture of the field. It is not intended as a standard of comparison.

\$27,000; 1931: \$22,000; 1932: \$21,000; 1933: \$22,000; 1934: \$18,000; 1935 (according to indications at present): \$11,000.

The stated aims show the following frequencies: charity relief: 50%; educational: 66%; recreational: 25%; medical: 30%; vocational guidance (and job-getting): 75%; religious: 33%; custodial: 50%. (Each agency had several aims.) In addition to this, some agencies have services peculiar to their organization, such as prison inspection, publicity on improved legislation, rehabilitational camps, informational service, and the like.

The agencies have a variety of restrictions as to types of cases served but predominantly it is a question of either inmate welfare or after care.

Sixty-six per cent of the Societies serve the same area with others.³ Eighty per cent keep histories of some kind. Systems have been in operation since from 1856 to 1931 with a corresponding difference in number of cases on file.

As regards *specific services rendered* by the twenty-nine⁴ agencies, the following numerical frequencies are recorded:

Relief to prisoner.....10	Conduct forums 3
Relief to ex-prisoner.....17	Sponsor shop training..... 1
Relief to family.....11	Use reading guides..... 5
	Sponsor character education 6
Use of medical clinic.....11	
Use of physician..... 2	Conduct religious services. 6
Use of visiting nurse..... 3	Religious counselling10
	Contact inmate's pastor....11
Use of psych. testing..... 5	
Personal guidance11	Trained probation officers.14
Vocational guidance11	Job-finding service12
Domestic relations counsel.11	Visit ex-prisoners12
	Have house of refuge..... 3
Legal investigator 6	
Use of lawyer..... 2	Have agency magazine.... 7
Use of legal agency..... 7	Give public lectures.....16
Sponsor elementary classes. 3	Control publicity10
Sponsor technical classes.. 2	Support prison library..... 4

Fifty per cent of the agencies use the Church in some way, varying in each case. Few agencies have any way of evaluating

³ However, the returns did not warrant the composition of an area-coverage map.

⁴ It will be remembered that eight agencies (in addition to the previously mentioned twenty-one) referred their replies to the main office which answered for them.

their work scientifically. Most judge their success by the number of repeater cases, or by using the figures in the report of cases completing parole successfully, or by the number now holding jobs successfully. The estimated per cent of clients not returning to crime averages 72.

A measuring stick can be only just so elastic and still remain useful. The incompleteness of the preceding picture shows how nearly futile a scaling system would be. Due to defects in the methods and definitions in the questionnaire, certain services of the various agencies may have been left out. This was not intentional on the writer's part, and he is sure that any misrepresentation was not intentional on the agencies' part. One way out of such a difficulty would be to visit each agency in turn and record the data on clear, uniform blanks. The obvious expense of this procedure is its greatest drawback. The writer earnestly hopes that some group will be able to find the support necessary for a more adequate study along this line. A survey of labor unions' and factories' policies on the question of employing discharged prisoners might prove an interesting supplement to a study of the welfare agencies.

IV. *Conclusion*

Some comments on the individual agencies are in order before closing this report. The booklets published gave valuable information, but were frequently in such form as to render them of interest to a comparatively small portion of society.

Outstanding among the booklets received from the agencies are those of the Central Howard Association, the New York Prison Association, and the Osborne Society. In addition to these reports are the *Handbooks of American Prisons and Reformatories*, and the *Proceedings of the American Prison Association*, both valuable sources of penological information. The *Prison Journal*, a quarterly published by the Pennsylvania Society, seems to be the only thing of its kind in America. It compares very favorably with the *Howard Journal*, published by the British Howard League for Penal Reform. Slightly out of this class is the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, the official organ of the American Institute of that name, which speaks for itself as a scholarly symposium on penal subjects.

As one reads over these publications, a slight feeling of their inadequacy creeps in. Should a lay reader happen to browse into

one, his effort would be stopped with a few paragraphs by its aridness. Of course it must be recognized that these are not written for the public at large but rather for the special group interested in the field. Sometimes the publications go to the other extreme and become filled with capital letters, trite phrases, and an overpowering sentimentalism. When we realize that we must compete for the public's interest with the current smartly attired and illustrated publications, the defense of the scholarly appearing periodical—that it does not cater to the mass taste—strikes the writer as a principle which defeats its own ends. The problem of the criminal and the plight of the ex-convict must be dramatized in a dignified way in a literature lighted by illustrations, such as the silhouette on cover of the 1932 report of the Salvation Army, to catch the public's eye, not mulled over in groups composed of those who know it all too well.

Lest the writer be branded as an iconoclast bent on tearing things down, may he suggest that a full time headquarters—a National Council of Penal Welfare Agencies—be set up and run on a national subsidy.⁵ The purpose of such an office would be the organization of all those agencies working in the field into a coordinating body with similar aims and programs. The bulletin of the Council could be made bright enough so as to penetrate into the corners of every community, like the work of the coordinating community councils recently begun in Los Angeles. "Prisoner's Aid" or "Penal Welfare" could thus become a familiar idea, with the kind of support such a transition would bring. And only with such support can any group hope to bring about the changes in legislation and practice so necessary in the field of clinical criminology.

The writer regrets that a comprehensive cataloguing of the Penal Welfare agencies was not possible at this time. This report is offered now to highlight the topography of the present scene.⁶ We Americans are prone to look to that omniscient power known as "the State" to shoulder the responsibility for mobilization for social needs, and to wait until that tide overtakes us. Philanthropy with

⁵ This could be handled either by an extension of the program of an already existing government sponsored group or be started in connection with an institution of higher learning on a social research grant. Its aim, however, should not be centralization of control.

⁶ It should be noted that this study was made in 1935, and the report has been awaiting publication since early in 1936. It is therefore conceivable that many changes have already been made in the field due to the extension of government aid projects; however, experience with penal agencies indicates that three years' time may not necessarily invalidate a survey.

its good-intentioned but often devitalizing support cannot go on much longer. Is it not up to the members of these social agencies to "sell" Society the idea of after-care by presenting an attractive front of enlightened, trained, and efficient organization?

V—CHART OF PENAL WELFARE

No.	Name of Organization	Address	Date Founded	Paid Employees	OPERATION		Financial Support
					No. of cases in last 5 yrs.	No. of cases at present	
1.	Colorado Prison Assn.	306-14 14th St., Denver, Colo.	1898	3	1,657	197	Community Chest and Donations
2.	Connecticut Prison Assn.	State Office Bldg., Hartford, Conn.	1875 inc. 1879	U	not known	about 1,000	State, investments, memberships, gifts
3.	Prisoners' Aid Society of Delaware.	807 West St., Wilmington.	1920	U	about 500	U	Contributions
4.	Bureau of Rehabilitation	424 Fifth St., N.W., Washington, D. C.	1929	3	7,500	360 monthly	Community chest
6.	Central Howard Association	608 S. Dearborn, Chicago.	1901	3	10,947	382	Contributions, securities
10.	Prisoners' Aid Assn. of Maryland	3 Court House, Baltimore.	1869	19	major 5,500	487 maj. 205 min.	Community fund, State, city, inv'st's
11.	Massachusetts Prison Assn.	1101 Barristers Hall, Boston.	1889	2	5,329	U	Membership, donations
12.	Massachusetts Society for Aiding Discharged Prisoner..	40 Pemberton St., Boston	1846	1	9,293	6-10 daily	Contributions, Investments
13.	Society of First Friends	St. James Hall, Minneapolis, Minn.	about 1915	U	not tabulated	U	Contributions
14.	Missouri Welfare League	1574 Arcade Bldg., St. Louis.	1920	4	no record	U	Community fund
15.	Society for the Friendless	518-19 Ridge Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.	1900	17	22,254	U	Contributions
16.	Pathfinders of America, Inc.	Detroit, Mich.	1914	?	no record	U	Gifts, Board of Education
22.	The Osborne Assn., Inc.	114 East 30th St., New York City.	1915	3	2,100	125	Memberships
23.	Prison Assn. of New York	135 East 15th St., New York City.	1844 inc. 1840	10	33,361	1,500	Gifts, investments
24.	Salvation Army Prison Dept.	120 West 14th St., New York City.	1885	U	about 30,000	about 8,000	Contributions
25.	Volunteers of America	34 West 28th St., New York City.	1896		Data marked available	not	Gifts, Proceeds of lectures and tours
26.	Women's Prison Assn. of New York.	110 Second Ave., New York City.	1845 inc. 1854	U	U	727	Subscriptions, investments
27.	Oregon Prison Assn.	815 DeKum Bldg., Portland.	1900 inc. 1903	1	U	U	Community Chest
32.	Pennsylvania Prison Society	311 S. Juniper St., Philadelphia.	1787	6	4,500	250	Endowment, Trust Fund, Gifts
36.	Washington-Howard Assn.	Seattle, Wash.	U	1	U	U	Community Chest, Gifts
38.	Big Brother and Big Sister Federation, Inc.	425 Fourth Ave., New York City.	1917	143	U	63,909	Gifts, Community Chests

(U = unknown or unmarked)

