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DEVELOPING COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF PROBATION AND PAROLE WORK¹

J. O. Reinemann²

Probation and parole are governmental functions. They are maintained by the people through the taxpayers' contributions. Moreover, beyond the financial support, governmental agencies in a democratic state need the moral support, the understanding, and the consent of the public-at-large.

This describes the ideal status. But what is the actual situation?

Probation and parole belong to the most misunderstood activities of government. There are several reasons for popular misconceptions about these services. Let us examine a few while comparing the public's and the correctional worker's viewpoints.

As a rule, public reaction towards the criminal is emotional,³ full of primitive instincts, such as indignation, hatred, revenge, self-righteousness. The correctional worker views the individual offender as a case and approaches him in an objective, detached manner.

The public knowledge of the "crime situation" is mostly confined to the widely publicized acts of professional gangsters or to sensational cases of capital and sex offenses. The probation and parole officer knows that this is a comparatively small group and that the big majority of his cases have to deal with average human beings who through some lack of adjustment between their personalities and the situations which they had to face have come into conflict with the law.

Recidivism of individual probationers and parolees has been given wide publicity; and public criticism, prone to generalize, has frequently condemned and rejected the whole idea of probation and parole, "lock, stock and barrel."

The fact that success figures are overwhelmingly higher than violation percentages is not considered "news," and, therefore, known only to the inside worker, but unknown to the public.

Probation and parole are often condemned as means of "coddling the criminal" and of neglecting the protection of society. The probation and parole officer applies modern methods of social and

¹This article, in its essential form, has been included as a special chapter in "Principles and Methods in Dealing with Offenders," an in-service training manual for Pennsylvania Correctional and Penal Workers, published by the Pennsylvania Municipal Publications Service, State College, Pa. (1941)

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³Cf. Nathaniel Cantor, *Crime and Society*, 1939, p. 393.

medical sciences to the diagnosis and treatment of the individual case in order to help and guide the offender in his rehabilitative process; through the rehabilitation of the individual offender the probation and parole officer strives for the protection of society as a whole.

To recognize and evaluate the reasons for the gap between correctional work and its public appreciation is the first step in the attempt at bridging the gap. To accomplish this, every worker in the field of probation and parole should consider it as one of his assignments to do his part in the publicity campaign of his profession.

(1) *Newspapers and Magazines*

The usual reaction of the probation and parole officer to the question of newspaper publicity is that of complaint about the unfairness of the press towards the difficulties of his job. Is this complaint justified? If so, whose fault is it, the editor's, the reader's, or the probation (parole) officer's? What can be done to bring about a better relationship between these groups?

"A good newspaper is devoted to the presentation of facts which will interest the reader. The unusual act, either because it is more important or contrary to the ordinary run of happenings, forms the basis of judgment of what will interest the reader."⁴ How to go about supplying newspapers with news from the correctional field which meet these requirements? "The trick is to relate a specialized subject (probation and parole) to general reader interest." Gilbert Cosulich, Director of Publicity of the National Probation Association, suggests the following types of newspaper publicity:⁵

- (a) information which, as he says, can be constructive without being dull, in the form of interviews, statements made at public meetings or professional conferences;
- (b) the editorial ("many of the smaller dailies and most of the rural weeklies will use a well written non-controversial comment prepared by outsiders");
- (c) the "human interest" or feature story ("success stories about unnamed probationers or parolees might well be used");
- (d) the straight news story ("this includes information regarding annual reports, case loads, new appointments, distinguished visitors to the probation and parole offices, field trips, in-service training institutes, city, county, state and national conferences").

While the correctional worker can thus contribute to good publicity of his work, he should not resent criticism by the press as long as it is constructive. It is one of the objectives of the press to

⁴Joseph J. Canavan, *Newspapers and Crime*, Yearbook 1939 of the National Probation Association, p. 295.

⁵Gilbert Cosulich, *Probation and Parole Publicity in the Press*, Yearbook 1940 of the National Probation Association, pp. 271-281.

scrutinize the activities of public agencies. No one should feel that "probation or probation departments should be considered sacred or immune from criticism. In fact, some of the censure aimed at probation and at probation departments has been justified and has had salutary results. After all, the elimination of political controls, the extension of the merit system in this field, and the rising standards in probation methodologies and probation personnel were not brought about by the magic of Aladdin's lamp."⁶

The probation (parole) administrator should not regard the press as something hostile, but "as craftsmen of one field to craftsmen in another, we should have a frank and open relationship, taking the consequences of our mistakes as well as the consequences of our achievements. When we refuse the newspapers access to us we are in the position of either having something to hide which for the public good they should be publishing, or of taking the very stupid course of seeming to have something to hide when we have not."⁷ There are, of course, certain rules of limitation which have to be observed, especially in the giving out of names of offenders. "A safe rule for all probation or parole departments, whether they handle juvenile or adult cases, is not to give out names of their charges. Many states prohibit publication of the names of children handled by the juvenile court, but in practice the same rule should be extended to adult probationers or parolees. The task of rehabilitation is hampered if the name of the individual is blazoned forth in the newspapers."⁸

(2) *Talks and Lectures*

There is a growing demand for good speakers on subjects dealing with crime and correctional work coming from local community organizations, civic clubs, church groups, lodges, young people's and students' associations, etc. If a probation (parole) officer is asked to make an address before one of these groups, he has to consider the type of the audience he is going to address before he organizes his speech. The infinite variety of possible audiences demands a certain versatility from the speaker. He has to take into consideration the size of the meeting, the average educational background of his audience, the age of his listeners. A very different approach to the subject is called for if the speaker addresses a

⁶Irving W. Halpern, *Probation and the Press*, in "Probation," bi-monthly magazine of the National Probation Association, December 1939, p. 49.

⁷Joseph J. Canavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 296-7.

In a similar fashion, Frank A. Clarvoe, editor of the San Francisco News, in a speech before the Western Probation and Parole Conference in San Francisco in August 1941 (in conjunction with the American Prison Congress) placed the principal blame for lack of results in public education on the inability or unwillingness of probation officers and other public welfare workers to cultivate the newspaper fraternity, and to talk matters over frankly with those responsible for newspaper policies (See: "Probation," October 1941, p. 26).

⁸Cosulich, *op.cit.*, p. 278.

mass meeting of citizens coming from all walks of life, or a small study group of a women's club, or a class of college students.

There are some rules which ought to be followed.⁹ Use actual cases as the most concrete and comprehensible way of interpretation. Beware of two extremes—do not talk down as a professional to lay people (thinking condescendingly that “they don't know a thing about it”); on the other side, do not take very much for granted (thinking, “after all, my job is so important in the community that everybody knows at least the essentials of it”). It is good to stick to the middle of the road: although in most cases there is an eager readiness to gain information, the average audience has a rather hazy notion of the meaning, underlying philosophy and machinery of probation and parole, but resents being made too conscious of its lack of knowledge. Beware of two other extremes—do not speak in an apologetic or defensive manner even if there was some unjust public criticism of your work or some newspaper attack on your agency or department; on the other hand, do not speak too boastfully about the “wonderful work” which is done by your department, thus publicly patting yourself on the back. Admit that there are failures, explain why they are bound to happen, that there is no panacea for combating crime. Always let the audience know that you as a public official consider yourself a servant of the community, and that in your work you need the moral support and the co-operation of the community. Ask for this co-operation, acquaint your listeners with your problems, and give, if feasible, practical examples of help which the particular group you are addressing can render.¹⁰ As a general rule, ask the chairman of the meeting to provide, if at all possible, sufficient time for a discussion or at least a question period after your lecture.

(3) *Radio Broadcasts*

The most essential element of every radio presentation is its dramatic value. All devices of modern radio-drama technique ought to be employed when subjects from the field of probation and parole are presented “on the air.” They include music, good radio voices, dramatized action, sound effects. The form of the dialogue-interview is preferable to a mere radio talk.¹¹ The best form is that

⁹ It is self-understood that the general rules for “public speaking” as outlined and taught in numerous publications apply here to the fullest. They do not need to be reiterated in this chapter which concerns itself solely and especially with talks and lectures on probation, parole and related fields.

¹⁰ Cf. Robert L. Sutherland, *Implication of Youth Studies for Prevention and Treatment of Delinquency and Crime* (in “Federal Probation,” January-March 1941, p. 38): “. . . Such workers (in charge of delinquent youth) need to see the great opportunity which they have for inventing new social patterns, devising new incentives, and helping others in the community gain new insight into their joint responsibility for avoiding the tremendous social waste which failures in personality adjustment to group life inevitably bring.”

¹¹ Also see Lowell J. Carr, *Interpreting Probation and Parole through the Radio*; Yearbook 1940, National Probation Association, pp. 282-287.

of the radio-drama; if this form is chosen, explanatory remarks by the announcer should be brief and serve as leads to the following action scenes rather than be self-sufficient. Statistical data should be most sparingly quoted, and if so, only in round figures.

The series "Youth in the Toils," presented in spring 1940 by the American Law Institute, successfully employed the above-mentioned techniques. Professional radio actors were used in the dramatic episodes; and on each program one leading expert in the correctional field, a judge, sociologist, criminologist, or psychiatrist, participated as commenting speaker. The series of 13 broadcasts was widely publicized in advance and while it was in progress, through newspapers, periodicals, and leaflets. This is essential for all programs like this. They are usually given during a less advantageous radio-time and often as sustaining programs over smaller stations. They cannot count on a "ready-made" audience such as listens to regular nation- or state-wide sponsored broadcasts.

A good radio play, "A Friend in Deed," was presented by the National Probation Association in April, 1941, commemorating the centennial of probation through a dramatization of the story of John Augustus and the first probation case.¹² The radio script shows that only slightly over 25 per cent of the spoken words were assigned to the announcer, the entire rest being dedicated to dramatic action.

Both radio presentations were part of a wide publicity campaign by these organizations. The American Law Institute intended to draw public attention to the problem of the adolescent criminal and to win support for its plan of a "Youth Correction Authority" for all offenders between juvenile court age and 21. The National Probation Association used the centennial celebration of probation as a dramatic appeal to the public for a better understanding of the philosophy of probation and parole, for their maintenance and improvement throughout the nation.

The fundamental principles as outlined in connection with nation-wide broadcasts are equally valid for radio presentations over local stations. Already some probation and parole departments have recently made use of local broadcasting facilities,¹³ but this means of acquainting the public with probation and parole should be used to a much larger extent. The case records are full of material which—with the proper safeguards regarding identity—lends itself very well to dramatization. Radio presentations of this kind have to be carefully prepared, and suggestions and advice by

¹²Three radio plays written by Muriel Goodfellow, publicity secretary of the Community Chest in Phoenix, Arizona, were broadcast during the Juvenile Court Week of Arizona (July 13 to 19) which in 1941 tied in particularly with the John Augustus Centennial celebration.

¹³In Pennsylvania, during recent years the Juvenile Court of Pittsburgh (see "Probation," June 1938, p. 73) and the Municipal Court of Philadelphia have interpreted their work in a series of broadcasts over local stations.

broadcasting experts should be sought after and followed. Fifteen minutes, the usual length of time for such a program, is a very long time on the air. The listeners' interest must not only be gained from the start but constantly held if he should be kept from "tuning off."

(4) *Motion Pictures*

There are two types of motion pictures which can convey to the public the idea and scope of modern correctional work—, the documentary film and the fictional (or feature) film.

As examples of documentary films may be cited the 1936 "March of Time" release, "Youth and Crime"; "Boy in Court," 1940 production of the National Probation Association depicting the story of the Juvenile Court and Probation; "Forestry Camps" by the Los Angeles County Probation Department. The life in penal and correctional institutions has been portrayed in a number of short reels, silent or sound, produced by government agencies.

Documentary films of this kind may serve their purpose either as shorts shown as part of an ordinary motion picture theatre program, or as special attraction illustrating a lecture or an exhibit.¹⁴ The showing of a motion picture in addition to a speech is always bound to enliven the interest of the audience, and should be announced in advance publication.

Looking at the motion picture of the fiction type, we discover that in recent years the public demanded and the industry produced a growing number of films of social significance.¹⁵ Crime had always been a favorite subject of motion pictures. Only lately, however, the social aspects of crime and its causes have found their way into film stories. Naturally, film production as a commercial enterprise is influenced by such factors as stardom, novelty of story plots, box-office success, rather than by the purpose of true interpretation of social conditions and problems. It is, therefore, difficult for the critical eye of the correctional worker to find a completely satisfactory presentation of his work among the great number of photoplays which—from "Dead End" in 1937 to "Men of Boys' Town" in 1941—have touched upon the problems of juvenile delinquency, the gang, the reformatory, the penitentiary and similar subjects. It is equally difficult to gauge the effect of these pictures upon the public from the viewpoint of community interpretation of correctional work. It should not be denied that some of these pictures have had an adverse effect on some young movie-goers.¹⁶ On the whole, the

¹⁴Cf. Section No. 6, *infra*.

¹⁵See the author's "Films of Social Significance," in "The Prison Journal," Philadelphia, July-October 1938, pp. 476-480.

¹⁶This was indicated, for instance, by a gang of five boys, 16 to 20 years of age, who were recently arrested in Philadelphia and accused of staging 25 holdups and stealing 10 automobiles. Each of the five had taken a "Dead End" name as a nickname and tried to adapt the movie adventures of the tough "Dead End Kids" to real life.

fact that pictures of this kind have been produced in growing numbers shows that they obviously satisfy a public demand. In fairness to the producers it must be said that a majority of these films have seriously attempted a realistic approach to the causes of crime and delinquency, such as poverty, broken homes, slum conditions, lack of sanitation and recreation. Even if the correctional worker who is interested in publicity for his profession may not accept all of these pictures as true interpreters of his efforts, he should, for instance, in his lectures and talks refer to them and comment upon them. Merely to disregard them, would mean to disregard one of the strongest and most extensive influences upon the public mind.

(5) *Dramatic Plays*

Only in a few instances¹⁷ has the amateur dramatic play been used as a means of acquainting the public with probation and parole work. A great effort is required from the persons who plan and prepare such a show. It is impossible to outline general rules for an undertaking of this kind as it is largely dependent on local conditions. In a similar way as the documentary film, a dramatic play can be successfully employed in connection with lectures and talks and at national or state conferences.

(6) *Exhibits*

Exhibits interpreting probation and parole are used either in connection with general state or local exhibitions and fairs, in which the agencies having jurisdiction over correctional matters participate; or as a part of specific exhibits relating only to welfare work and affiliated topics; or at special occasions, such as professional conferences, anniversary celebrations, "juvenile court weeks."^{17a}

Whoever plans and prepares an exhibit on probation and parole, has to keep in mind that his purpose is "to catch the eye" of the visitor. The visitor's eye is probably tired and strained from looking at many other exhibits; and in the case of general exhibitions of a diversified nature, the fact that the average visitor is only superficially interested in correctional work, is an additional obstacle to be met.

Visualization is, therefore, of utmost importance. Which modern techniques are at our disposal? Photography, including the special form of photomontage; movable lantern slides, if possible, in technicolor; silent or sound motion picture reels; panoramas and cycloramas, are now most frequently used. Statistical curves should be

¹⁷ "As the Twig is Bent," produced by the staff of the Juvenile Court of Toledo (Ohio); "Passing the Buck," presented at the 9th Annual Conference for Delinquency Prevention in May 1940, in Rock Island (Illinois); "From the Shadows of Dead End" (a juvenile mock trial), produced and presented by the Catholic Big Brothers of Cincinnati (Ohio).

^{17a} Phoenix, Arizona, has held such "Juvenile Court Weeks" each year since 1938.

sparingly shown, and preferably in connection with photographs or other visual aids. The new isotype method¹⁸ has developed a comprehensive but easily intelligible picture language based on a system of symbols of various colors, sizes and forms.

"Catchy slogans" are another requirement for efficient exhibits. They may be used in connection with statistical, photographic or other pictorial illustrations, as shown in the exhibits of the Department of Correction, the Domestic Relations and Family Courts, the Courts of Special Sessions and the Juvenile Aid Bureau of the Police, at the City of New York Pavilion of the "New York World's Fair" 1939-40. "The Parole Commission builds character, not jails"; "to confine in prison costs 22 times the cost of parole supervision"; "humane custody and rehabilitation of prisoners"; "a healthy person is returned to society" (referring to the medical examination and treatment of prisoners) may be cited as examples. "Investigation and Probation Aid Humanized Justice," "Examination, Diagnosis and Treatment Cure Social Ills," are similar slogans which are inscribed on murals of the New Municipal Court Building of Philadelphia.

(7) *Leaflets and Circulars*

Various public and private agencies¹⁹ which deal with delinquents have distributed leaflets describing their functions. In some cases, monthly bulletins are being issued. Case histories have been included in these circulars. The contents and the terminology of such a publication depend on the type of reader it is meant to reach. Is it destined for the general public, for groups and individuals with a special interest in problems of delinquency,²⁰ or for the probationer himself or, in juvenile cases, his parents?

(8) *Research*

In court records, probation and parole reports all over the country invaluable material is hidden which can be made available for research purposes to a much larger extent than has as yet been done.

The Uniform Crime Reports of the U. S. Department of Justice although at present restricted to the compilation of crime statistics have set a high standard. The report on "Federal Offenders 1940," published by the U. S. Bureau of Prisons, containing reports, statistical tables and charts on commitments, prison population, discharges of prisoners, juvenile offenders, probation, parole and con-

¹⁸See: Otto Neurath, *Modern Man in the Making*, 1939 (Alfred Knopf), Otto Neurath, Director, International Foundation for Visual Education, has been the originator of the isotype method.

¹⁹See, for instance, "Probation," April 1941, p. 118.

²⁰Cf., for instance, "Delinquency News Letter," issued monthly by the Michigan Child Guidance Institute, and (mimeographed) periodic bulletins of the U. S. Department of Justice on "Sentences Imposed in Criminal Cases."

ditional release, is an excellent example of a useful and informative publication. Naturally, it covers only those sentenced for federal offenses who constitute a fraction of all offenders in the country. A similar publication of uniform reports by state and county probation and parole departments throughout the country should be contemplated.

Preliminary to such an undertaking, the various state agencies having jurisdiction over probation and parole matters, must strive for some form of uniform reporting in their own states and political sub-divisions. Such uniform standards would increase the value of the numerous reports on probation and parole which are now published annually or in shorter or longer intervals by federal, state, city and county administrations. Often these reports, though of general interest, frighten the ordinary reader away through their unattractive appearance and exclusively statistical contents. Responsible department heads who are anxious to reach a wider public through these publications, will make use of such "streamlining" devices as diagrams and symbols.

Even in their present form these reports contain much material which can be used for research purposes. Closer collaboration between courts, probation and parole departments and colleges, universities, schools of social work and institutes should be striven for in order to evaluate statistical and case record material. There is still comparatively little use made of this material in scientific periodicals and magazines. Although such publicity is likely to reach only a specific sector of the population, it should be considered a legitimate part of community interpretation of probation and parole work. For, the findings of research and science ultimately serve the whole community.

It has been said that "it is easy to remember the list of agencies and methods which must be utilized and co-ordinated to deal effectively with delinquency and crime. They all begin with the letter "P." More and better *Police*, better *Prosecution*, better *Probation*, better *Prisons*, better *Parole*, more effective programs of *Prevention*."²¹

To this list one more item must be added, better and more effective *Publicity*.

²¹Austin H. McCormick in "Teamwork Against Crime," "Probation," April 1941, p. 120.