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Edward R. Cass

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CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE POST-WAR ERA

Edward R. Cass¹

It is, of course, a matter of great satisfaction to administrators, wardens and superintendents of penal institutions and all others interested in modern penological advancements, to witness the recognition which has been accorded on all sides during the past two years to the contribution of our correctional institutions in the furtherance of the war effort. Never before, I venture to say, has the general public of this country, eyed with such awareness and understanding the achievements of modern penological purposes and achievements. The daily press, Government agencies, and other news transmittal sources have to so great an extent publicized the contributions of the prisoners, individually and collectively, to the national effort, in the manufacture of essential war commodities, increased farm activities, donations of blood, purchase of war bonds and stamps, and enrollment in the armed forces upon their release, that a reiteration of the totals here would be superfluous. It is just because present day prisons and their populations have so forcefully brought to public attention their established position in the various communities, besides looming large in the national scheme, that we who have the best interests of our particular profession at heart, must needs pour even further effort into establishing modern and postwar penology on an acceptable footing, and projecting it as a necessary adjunct of good government.

It is unquestionable that the record of the past few years is directly attributable to the efforts made during the past decades to integrate more closely in the various institutions, a desire to understand why certain people have left the path of rectitude; an attempt to teach and inculcate a spirit of good citizenship; and a spirit of willingness to help those who need such assistance. Our modern penal institutions with their intelligently developed program of inmate classification, education, both academic and vocational, modernly equipped industrial shops, vitalized religious personnel and procedure, and well organized medical services, have been in the best position to take advantage of what might be called "boom days" in prison.

How then, especially after the war, shall we hold to our gains and achieve still greater goals? How sustain society's faith in our efforts and increase its understanding of our aims? How shall we in the future bring to the individuals who come under our juris-

¹ General Secretary The Prison Association of New York, The American Prison Association and Member, New York State Commission of Correction. Member of the Editorial Advisory Council of the Journal.

diction, a renewal of the spark of desire to return to their communities as useful honest citizens? Certainly, we will not admit that only the holocaust of war can bring forth and sustain the achievements, both personal and impersonal, of which we can today be proud.

In the post-war world the demands on modern penology will undoubtedly be great. If we are to be guided by past trends we may expect an increase in our institution populations, surpassing our present enrollments, and those of the past few years. We must make our plans now for dealing with the future.

Let us consider the physical properties of the post-war prison. In the expected spurt of post-war building we certainly must not lose sight of the extreme need of replacing old, unsanitary structures which have long outlived their usefulness. I do not intend to enter here on the phases of maximum, intermediate and minimum security types. I am most interested that any modern penal institution, no matter for what type of confinement it may be used, be consonant with architectural progress—be of the greatest utilitarian value—functional rather than ornate. A plentitude of work shops—class rooms—facilities for industries—recreational facilities and, wherever possible, tillable ground for cultivation by the inmate population should be within the framework of our modern institution. Of course, in conjunction with this, it is to be expected that actual confinement quarters, will be commodious enough to accommodate in a civilized fashion those who will occupy them. There is certainly no sense in building an inviting facade if the inner structure, the cell blocks, dormitories, etc., are on a standard beneath the whole.

Now, as to our administrative and custodial personnel. We have learned through bitter experience that many of the difficulties of penology in the past have had their root in the incapacities of the personnel of the institutions. Why can't standards, salaries, emoluments and other necessary prerogatives, which will attract the young, capable, honest and energetic part of our population, be established. No matter how fine the physical property, the entire purpose of the institution is lost irretrievably if the personnel are of a strata unable or unwilling to work at or understand the intrinsic purposes and goals of penology. Civil service, untouched by political machinations, is one answer but it must be a civil service standard which offers a wage and living compatible with positions of similar scope and responsibility in other lines of endeavor.

And then—let us consider institution functions. These of course, are many and varied, dependent on the size of the particular plant in which they are established. However, just as now, one primary function of the correctional institution of surpassing im-

portance in the post-war period, will be the establishment and continuance of a successful system of individual classification. We have seen how good classification practices have earned the approbation which they so rightfully deserve. An intelligent, sincere approach to classification should be a primary objective. On classification, augmented by medical and psychiatric study, in a very great sense, lies the responsibility of adjusting the individual to his institutional environment. It can be and has been the bulwark to prevent misunderstandings of regulations, breaches of discipline and unsatisfactory technological progress. It can and should establish the stability of institutional progress. It is a procedure unto itself which if placed in competent hands, can return to the institution and the individuals it reaches, untold benefits and accomplishments.

In the industrial progress of the post-war institution, no one feature can be more important than that we have capable, understanding trade teachers and directors. We have had ample proof in the past two years that our inmate populations can be taught to practice trades which are of immediate benefit to the institution, the community and the nation but are also of immeasurable value in preparing the inmates for their return to civilian life. However, such successful results can be accomplished only if we are careful to place the responsibility for trade teaching in the hands of those best qualified. Again, standards should be promulgated and supported, which will attract competency and ability. We have it within our power to mold the talents and character of many individuals—to teach them gainful, honest trades and occupations. Is it too much to ask that in this important work, we demand and secure the highest and most conscientious type of instructor?

Many of our charges will require further elementary education before they can fit themselves to take their places in society. It is certainly the inherent responsibility of our institutions to utilize every possible method and opportunity to aid those requiring such help. Education within institution walls should not be a haphazard concomitant of a whole program. It should be definitely identified as a very necessary adjunct to the true fulfillment of the scope and diagram of the over-all plan. Intelligence, integrity, and ability of the teaching personnel are prime requisites. But there is also the need of understanding the inmate mind, background and desires. The greatest of pedagogues would fail miserably in such a scheme unless he could probe into the minds and hearts of his charges—unless he could instill in the individual a faith in the worthiness of learning—and an understanding of its benefits.

As I have indicated before, wherever possible, the cultivation of the land represents an influence of great value to the institu-

tion and its population. Again, slipshod methods should be discarded. There is no reason why a feeling for agriculture cannot be instilled in receptive minds and hearts. Certainly, if we as a nation are for the immediate post-war years to assume the responsibility of feeding most of the civilized world, as seems entirely probable until it can recover from the ravages of war, the need for those individuals in whom there is a deep-grained understanding of the earth, will be limitless.

I personally think that the part played by the institutional chaplains of the various religious denominations should be expanded wherever possible. These men of the cloth have created an excellent record—but a closer integration of their work and efforts with the entire inmate bodies seems to me both highly desirable and possible. The standards of clergymen are of the highest. Well then, why not transmit these standards to the greatest possible number. I don't expect to witness proselytism on behalf of individual religious beliefs—neither would I want it. But I would like in the post-war prison for the chaplain's position to be on a plane which permits complete exercise of his responsibilities and duties unhampered and unfettered. Needless to say, I hold to the same standards for present day practice. Penology's problems would long since have faded into the shadows if our institutional chaplains had been successful in instilling in the minds and hearts of their charges the high principles of their respective faiths. That such has not been the case is of course, not alone the fault of the clergy. I am wondering if the failure may have been caused in some part by restrictions or limitations of one sort or another which have hampered a full exposition by these men, of their duties. The influence of religion cannot be surpassed—we do ourselves less than justice if we do not strive to establish its practices and purposes in all of our institutions.

It is unfortunate but true, that in the post-war years we will receive into our institutions, for one reason or another, an admixture of those of our young people who today are fighting on far-flung fields, the battles of the nation. We would be remiss in our duties and responsibilities as citizens, if we did not engage every effort and energy to inculcate in their hearts and minds, as in those of all of our charges, a spirit of good citizenship, clean, honest thinking, wholesome initiative and ambition. Whatever else can be said of war, it certainly can never be described as the best elemental classroom for righteous thinking, sincerity, honor and good will to all men. It is admitted by all, particularly those engaged in the fighting of it, to be a rotten business. How then are we to overcome its brutish effects on those upon whom its worst influences have borne too heavily, resulting in their coming into conflict

with the civilian code of conduct. We of a certainty, owe to these young people on whom we now lavish praise, no less attention in the days to come, when they will need our guidance and help in ways immeasurable.

Penology has taken mighty strides towards the goal of individual rehabilitation and restoration of understanding to the individual of his responsibility to self and community. To recede from the high objectives into the slough of inadequate institutional housing, poorly planned and executed programs of training and development, acceptance of old forms of brutish punishments with all the connate degradation of mind and spirit, would be a greater crime to all of the citizenry, than the sum total of the offenses committed by the maladjusted committed to our charge.

In the post-war era we shall have frequently to tap the reservoir of public good will which our inmates and institutions have erected during these war days. I express the sincere hope that in our plans for the future that reservoir will be of an abundance which will permit of the fulfillment of many of our ideals. It would be tragic to the whole progress of America if we did not now and in the future receive the whole-hearted support of all of our citizenry in establishing the highest plane as our goal.