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PENAL CLASSIFICATION

E. R. East

The recent emphasis upon classification of prisoners is a good omen. Such classification is the condition that makes individualized treatment possible. The author, who is of the Pennsylvania Industrial School at Camp Hill (now in the armed service) here describes the system of classification that he has developed and presents his views of classification in general.—Editor.

One of the most evident and recent trends in the history of American penal institutions has been toward classification of prisoners within an institution and individualization of treatment within these classes. For years a passive and stagnated penal policy, predicated on the premise of placing criminals in prisons in order to get revenge for crimes they had committed and then subjecting them to mass treatment failed in its avowed purpose of reformation. Thousands of men were released from institutions unable, through the lack of individualized training and, of greater importance, unwilling in attitude and outlook, to earn an honest living. These men became an ever increasing economic burden upon society and constituted a dangerous element in their respective communities.

Gradually, with the realization that 97% of the offenders committed to penal institutions must eventually be released to society and that a more constructive policy of treatment was needed to prepare them to cope adequately and satisfactorily with the problems of earning a livelihood and effecting acceptable social relationships, there has been a fundamental change in our ideas about the purposes of imprisonment. Today, protection of society rather than revenge against the criminal has become the guide to the treatment of prisoners.

During this same period that witnessed a change in our ideas about the purposes of imprisonment, there was also evidenced a cognizance of and emphasis upon the ever increasing knowledge of human beings and the causes of their behavior. Research and study in the various scientific fields pertaining to human activity changed many old ideas about the reasons for their behavior.

Individualization Compels Classification

With the introduction of this new trend of thought and the natural addition in prison services of specialists representing these different fields of study, together with the fundamental change in philosophy, attention was focused upon the individual prisoner. Rehabilitation and punishment now became a matter of individual treatment.

To put into effect such an individualized program among the

large number of prisoners, an inclusive, simple, yet practical system had to be developed. Thus, classification, an administrative process for individualized treatment, a method of operating, came into being.

Organization for Classification

In the various penal institutions throughout the country, classification programs differ somewhat in organization, procedure, and staff. Moreover, the basic principles and objectives underlying these systems are essentially the same. Classification, as defined by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and generally used in modern penology, means the systematic study and individual treatment of all offenders committed to penal or correctional institutions. The term "treatment", with some deviations, is generally used to include every influence or action that is brought to bear upon an inmate as an individual. It includes his housing, feeding, discipline, work, recreation, and whatever is done for him in the fields of physical health, mental health, education, vocational training, religion, and social service.

The classification program placed into effect at the Pennsylvania Industrial School at Camp Hill divides itself into three main activities:

1. A comprehensive study of the individual at the time of admission.
2. The coordination of the findings of this study and the planning of a program.
3. Follow-up studies and changes in the program during the period of incarceration. This latter activity includes automatic reclassification conducted on dates stipulated at the time of admission classification and other recommended reclassification consideration necessitated by institutional or observed individual needs.

In order to complete the initial step in this program a period known as Quarantine has been instituted. All commitments received at this school from the courts or by transfer from other institutions are placed directly into Quarantine and remain in this status for a period of thirty days. The length of this period varies in other institutions from fifteen to sixty days depending upon the administrative policy followed. During this period these cadets are garbed in distinctive clothing differing from the regular school issue and are at all times, whether participating in military drill, recreational, feeding, or work activities, segregated from the remainder of the school population.

The benefits to be derived from this period of segregation are many. First, it allows the medical department an early opportunity to determine whether the new commitment is suffering

from any communicable disease which might be transmitted to the balance of the school population. If such a condition is apparent, appropriate steps may be taken to provide suitable medical treatment to obviate this danger of transference. Second, it provides the administrative staff with an opportunity to become acquainted with the offender through observation, personal contact, and the various special methods of examination and investigation. It is generally agreed that, at this time, a factual and accurate insight can be gained into the background of the individual, prior criminal activities, and genesis of criminal behavior resulting in the present incarceration than at a later date following association with the general school population.

At this school all routine interviews with the new commitment during the first fifteen days are governed by a priority interview schedule. This procedure permits the mechanics for contacting interested community agencies for data concerning the individual to be set into operation at the earliest possible time and establishes a proper order in the ascertainment of data by interview and examination for the progressive use by other members of the professional staff.

Moreover, during this period close observation may be exercised by capable Quarantine custodial officers to determine the presence of unusual personality traits and habits which may be manifested in the behavior of the individual and any other difficulties in effecting normal social relationships with other cadets as well as his reaction to discipline. Attention may be called to the young and inexperienced who may demonstrate unusual emotionalism, naivete, and impressionability. Knowledge of these details, which might otherwise not have been gained through other methods of examination or investigation, is of great importance and assistance in an understanding of the cadet as an individual and the problems which he may face. Such knowledge is invaluable to the professional staff in their formulation of a program applicable to the needs of the individual yet consistent with his capabilities and aptitudes. It is invaluable, moreover, in aiding him thereafter to make as successful an adjustment to this program as is possible.

At this school a class in orientation is conducted during this period with instruction in rules and regulations. An attempt is made to interpret school life and the general treatment program in order that the offender can see his relationship to it more clearly and accept it with more understanding and with less resentment. In many institutions where there is no formal class procedure this objective is accomplished through interviews or lectures by various staff members. At this time the first constructive steps may be taken to develop proper attitudes and habits necessary for a successful adjustment to school routine. It is felt

by the administration of this school that such Quarantine procedure has helped considerably in reducing misconduct.

The data relative to the new commitment accumulated during this period of Quarantine by the members of the professional staff or their assistants and by other interested officers is presented for incorporation into a classification summary, or admission summary as it is known at this school, in the form of departmental abstracts. The submitting of these departmental abstracts to the Director of Classification is governed by a schedule outlined upon a weekly announcement listing the group admitted to the school during the previous week and the date for their initial classification consideration. Each contributing abstract, as well as the admission summary, follows at all times a definite schematic outline for the most favorable, comprehensive, and consistent presentation of the material obtained concerning the individual, the problems he presents in the particular field, and specific recommendations for remedial and corrective measures to be undertaken during the remainder of the period of incarceration. It is this summary, when supplemented by data determined thereafter, that serves as the medium of interpretation and understanding of individual behavior and becomes the guide to intelligent treatment by the institutional administrative staff and other law enforcement and social agencies in the community who may have later contact with the offender.

The Record Clerk

In every penal institution, the first member of the administrative personnel to actively share in the initial study of the new commitment is the Record Clerk. The specific procedures followed by this officer for the proper reception of the new inmate, the ascertainment of data concerning the prior criminal history of the individual and the circumstances of the offense for which he has been incarcerated, vary somewhat at each institution.

At this school the Record Clerk prepares on each case an abstract to be incorporated into the admission summary containing the following items: The general multiple commitment data received from the sentencing court, an official version of the offense committed together with the version as related by the offender immediately upon admission, a listing of all charges pending against the offender in other jurisdictions, a listing of the codefendants and their present status, and a chronological statement properly edited of the prior criminal activities of the inmate as known to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Pennsylvania Motor Police Fingerprint Division, and other official sources or as admitted by the inmate. It is the responsibility of this officer to secure and submit for incorporation in the admission summary or a later

progress report verifications of any reported offenses unsupported by fingerprint records and to clarify the records in those cases where disposition of previous charges are incomplete or inadequate.

The Social Worker

It is the responsibility of the social worker in a penal institution to compile a social history on every commitment. As viewed by the administration of this school the probing of the inmate's social and economic background has for its purpose a collection of information which will contribute to a knowledge of the individual and intelligent treatment by the institutional staff, provide an insight into the genesis of criminal behavior resulting in the present incarceration, and to suggest steps that might be initiated at this time to alleviate any social problems, and thereby attempting to prevent further delinquency upon his return to the community. In this respect the contribution of the social worker plays an integral part in the development and application of a good individualized treatment program.

At this school the data which forms the basis for the social abstract is secured during the course of the initial social interview with the inmate held shortly after admission. These statements are verified at the source. At the same time the services of some community agency are enlisted to adopt for case work service the family of the inmate in order to interpret the program of the school as it relates to the inmate, to prepare them to receive him upon his release, and to aid in the difficult period of adjustment following release.

The comprehensive data obtained by the social worker and submitted upon the social abstract is arranged under the following headings: (1) Family Data; a. parents, b. parental home, c. siblings (2) Marital Status (3) Personal Data; a. early life, b. education, c. employment, d. military service, e. leisure time activities, f. residence (4) Recommendations and Impressions (5) Sources.

The Medical Director

In every penal organization the role of the physician, or medical director as he is known at this school, is an important one. Each new commitment is generally given a primary physical examination immediately upon admission to determine the presence of any unfavorable physical condition which might necessitate immediate medical treatment. If a communicable disease is found to exist at this time, the patient can be immediately segregated to obviate the danger of transference to the remainder of the institution population. In most institutions following this policy there is usually a more complete and thorough examination given at a later date.

At this school this staff officer submits an abstract on each case

based upon his conclusions from these examinations and containing the following items of interest: General descriptive physical data, specific data relating to the tested capacities and bodily mechanisms of the individual, results of tests given to determine the presence of any venereal condition, condition of the teeth, a statement as to the possibility of drug addiction based on physical evidence and known or admitted history, and a diagnosis of the general physical condition and of any specific ailment or disease ascertained. It is also his responsibility to make appropriate written recommendations upon this abstract in the light of his findings as to the medical and dental treatment needed thereafter or already initiated to restore, if possible, the health of the individual to a normal level and to maintain it at that level. The medical director also routinely states upon this abstract any physical limitations of which the Classification Committee must take cognizance in assign-recommendations upon this abstract in the light of his findings ment to quarters, work activity, and in discipline and recreational activities. If it is found that a specific ailment has been treated in an outside hospital or by a private physician, an attempt is made to secure the diagnosis for comparative purposes and the conclusion submitted for incorporation into the admission summary or a later progress report.

Psychologist and Psychiatrist

The function of the psychologist in institutional classification is generally construed to include the following major activities: To assist the administration by diagnostic interviewing and testing procedures in an understanding of each incoming inmate, to make recommendations for the placement of the new commitment in appropriate educational, vocational, and housing assignments, and to assist in the treatment of behavior problems.

At this school this staff officer submits an abstract on each case which includes and interprets the results from interviews and a battery of psychometric tests and questionnaires designed to evaluate the intellectual level, as well as special intellectual and mechanical abilities. Also included on this abstract submitted for incorporation into an admission summary is a behavior analysis report in which the psychologist interprets from his point of view the personality and temperament of the inmate and upon the basis of these conclusions, makes recommendations for the custody designation, possibility of transfer to another institution better equipped to handle the special problem he presents, appropriate remedial treatment, and a disciplinary prognosis as to his probable institutional adjustment.

It is highly desirable to have a psychiatrist affiliated with the professional staff of an adult penal institution. Although increas-

ing cognizance is being given to the many administrative advantages that may be effected through the addition of a psychiatrist to the professional staff, the use of this professional service has not as yet become widespread in the penal systems throughout the country.

At this school the professional services of the staff psychiatrist are utilized in all cases wherein any abnormal behavior during the period of confinement has been demonstrated or wherein a poor adjustment has been made to the routine and to the rules and regulations of the school. He is also called upon to make examinations of all inmates who have been incarcerated for serious crimes of personal violence or of a sexual nature. In this connection his observations and concluding prognosis as to the possible future behavior of an inmate upon his release to the community have been of inestimable assistance to the members of the Classification Committee in their formulation and application of a basic treatment program and particularly in their later consideration of the case for an appropriate time recommendation. This latter procedure will be amplified in a later paragraph.

In each abstract submitted by this staff officer for incorporation into an admission summary or a later progress report the following items are included: An evaluation of the personality of the individual and a description and diagnosis of any mental disease or disorder, neurosis, or disturbed emotional state that may exist. On the basis of this data, it is his responsibility to make recommendations relative to custody, institutional transfer, and any administrative action needed to offset any special threat the offender may offer to the well ordered scheme of school discipline or dangers that the school routine may offer to his mental health. He also includes recommendations for treatment that might be undertaken to restore to normal the mental health or emotional stability of the individual.

The Industrial Counsellor

In every penal institution there is an officer to whom has been delegated the responsibility of administering general work assignments and maintaining through his selection of inmate personnel the working activities of the institution on an efficient and productive level. This officer is variously named and at this school is known as the Industrial Counselor.

Prior to his interview with each commitment this staff officer has available for study all verified data relating to the past employment history obtained by the social worker, a brief of the pertinent facts received from the medical director as to the presence and nature of any medical limitations affecting the work activities for which he might be eligible, and a digest of results from the educa-

tional and various psychometric tests to which the inmate has been subjected.

The abstract submitted by the Industrial Counselor contains the following elements: Comprehensive data concerning the prior vocational history of the inmate, future placement, i.e. his trade interests and what general opportunities are available for work along these lines in the community to which he will be released, general and specific work skills as may be evaluated by educational and psychometric test results, and on the basis of prior reported work experience.

On the basis of the foregoing information it is the responsibility of this officer to recommend as a possible work assignment the most appropriate industrial training available within the institution. In this connection it may be stated that wherever possible each inmate is urged to avail himself of related educational and vocational training courses to further his comprehension and mastery of a particular work activity.

Educational Director

Educational training in one form or another at a penal institution is now recognized as constituting an integral part of any progressive treatment program. This type of training, although varying with each institution in the philosophy upon which it is predicated and in the procedures evolved for its application and practice, has for its goal the raising of the broad educational level of each inmate, as related to his daily adjustment to modern activities in society, to correspond more closely with the generally accepted standards by which we live.

At this school each new commitment during his period of Quarantine is routinely interviewed by the Educational Director to obtain and evaluate his educational history. Prior to this initial interview, this staff officer has available for his consideration the results purporting to the educational grade status of the individual as determined by a series of educational tests, results of the psychometric tests, and data obtained by the Social Worker relative to verified educational history.

On the basis of his observations and conclusions, an educational abstract is submitted by the Educational Director containing the following items: Educational history as reported by the individual and verified by community agencies, listing in toto of the initial test results with a statement as to the educational grade status revealed, specific academic and vocational interests, a prognosis as to the efficacy of further academic study, a clearly presented statement of the educational problem involved, and finally, recommendations for further academic study.

The Chaplain

The role of the chaplain in a penal institution is that of a spiritual advisor and counselor. The activities of the chaplain expended in the undertaking of these functions are of great significance to the inmate population and to the administration of the institution as well. His first contact with the offender is usually effected shortly after admission, closely maintained throughout the entire period of confinement, and very often extended through the post-release period of adjustment.

As each offender is received here he is routinely interviewed by the proper chaplain and an abstract prepared containing a statement as to the religious affiliation, a diagnosis as to his outlook in this area, and an opinion as to the significance of his religious attitude in determining his conduct. A recommendation is included relative to the further religious training and instruction that appears indicated.

The Classification Committee

It is quite natural in following these synchronized procedures in each field that the recommendations of one department may necessitate some modification when viewed in relation to the data obtained and conclusions formulated by other departments. It can be readily understood that a specific problem existing in any one field can be intelligently approached from a practical administrative viewpoint only when considered in relation to the limitations imposed upon the possible activities of the offender by the other problems involved. The opportunity for pooling the information gained from the various examinations and investigations and the resolving of conflicting recommendations into the best possible program is provided in a group known at this school as the Classification Committee. The membership of the Classification Committee, or of a similar group otherwise named, differs slightly at each institution but in general follows the same lines. At this school this administrative body consists of the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Director of Classification who acts as chairman on behalf of the Superintendent, Captain of the Guard, Medical Director, Parole Officer, Educational Director, Psychologist, Industrial Counselor, Social Worker, Protestant and Catholic Chaplains. At the meetings of this committee, which are held at least once a week, each case is systematically, thoroughly, and rapidly considered under the schematic framework of the admission summary. The program formulated at this time is then made known in all its ramifications to the inmate during his appearance before the Committee. If any valid objections are raised relative to this proposed program, the inmate is excused while these objec-

tions are discussed and then called back and instructed after a decision is reached.

It must be understood that at each penal institution throughout the country the nature and ramifications of the program adopted for the offender at the time of his admission is dependent upon and governed by the general administrative policy pursued with relation to the treatment of offenders. However, in all institutions dedicated to the goal of individualized treatment and employing a system of classification, the elements of an institutional program are essentially the same although varying with each institution in their actual application.

At the new Pennsylvania Industrial School each program embraces the following elements:

1. Custody and housing
2. Transfer consideration
3. Military drill training
4. Social service
5. Medical and dental treatment
6. Psychological and, when indicated, psychiatric treatment
7. Employment and vocational training
8. Education
9. Religious training and instruction
10. Date for periodic reclassification consideration

Following each meeting the final decisions of the committee in each case and the factors contributing to such reasoning are recorded under these headings in detail upon a committee recommendation sheet which is attached to the admission summary. The admission summary is then distributed to the proper departments. Thereafter, until some fundamental change is made through the collective judgment of this administrative group, these written recommendations, which comprise the program, will govern directly or indirectly all the activities of the inmate within the institution. These recommendations so presented also serve to clarify the objectives of each department in the individual case. In this connection it may be stated that at this school a definite period of time, varying with each department, is allowed by the Director of Classification for each service to initiate action necessary for the fulfillment of their respective recommendations; if such action has not been initiated, appropriate steps are taken. By following this procedure, it is felt that classification can be made a program of action and operation and not merely permitted to exist on paper or in name only.

Progress Reports and Reclassification

The preliminary analysis and the formulation of a program, which together constitute admission classification, are only first steps. It is necessary that subsequent periodic consideration be

given to the program originally formulated in the interest of the inmate's welfare and the security and proper maintenance of the institution. Such consideration is called reclassification and at this school is always accompanied by a progress report appropriate to the change of status to be considered. Each progress report contains a complete digest of the inmate's institutional progress as observed by the various departments and by interested officers in their respective fields and any new information pertaining to his pre-institutional history elicited in any fields since the last report. Thus, at every reclassification before any change in the program is considered, a continuous up-to-date appraisal of the institutional adjustment of each inmate is provided the Classification Committee. The progress report, like the admission summary, also follows a definite schematic outline for the most favorable, comprehensive, and consistent presentation of the material obtained concerning the individual.

In order that no case may be overlooked, reclassification is held periodically on all cases on dates stipulated at the time of admission classification. The bulk of reclassification, however, consists of cases in which certain changes in personal status are requested by individual inmates and also cases recommended by department or officer for promotion to assignments allowing for the addition of greater responsibility and imposition of trust. Whenever possible an attempt is made at this school to permit a gradual relaxation of supervision during the period of incarceration. At this school only the contemplated changes in the status of any individual which transgress the limitations of the custody or employment in his present program as previously formulated by the Classification Committee, or which affect the security or proper maintenance of the institution, necessitate the consideration and approval of this body.

Unlike most other penal institutions, there is one major responsibility added to the Classification Committee of this school—that of making a proper recommendation to the State Parole Board as to the length of time each inmate should remain within the institution before release to his community. All offenders of the laws of the Commonwealth committed to this school are sentenced by the courts under an indeterminate sentence plan. In each case there is a given maximum date stipulated by the criminal code relative to the offense for which the offender was convicted and beyond which he may not be retained by the authorities of this school. There is, however, no minimum release date directed by the court, and this consideration is delegated to the administration of this school.

After a given period of time has elapsed since admission and as each case becomes eligible for this time consideration, a progress report is prepared reflecting the nature of the entire institutional

adjustment to date and containing all elucidating data and expressed opinions received since the preparation of the admission summary or a later progress report from community agencies relative to the individual or the offense for which he has been incarcerated. Like any other consideration of the Classification Committee, the case is judged individually upon its merits and a decision reached through the collective judgment and recorded vote of its members. It is felt by the administration of this school that this time consideration practice, predicated upon the extensive data relating to the individual and his offense which was accumulated at the time of admission through classification procedures, incorporated into an admission summary and supplemented by the subsequent data revealed by progress reports, permits a better prognosis to be made as to the probable success of his future adjustment in the community and eligibility for release than might otherwise be made. This procedure is a major aspect of an individualized treatment program which is directly dependent upon the system of classification.

Conclusion

It should not be concluded from the foregoing description of procedures and practices that classification is merely a systematic information gathering, diagnostic program, and periodic treatment planning process. Rightly administered, classification also provides a broad, inclusive, flexible, and active process of treatment which individually affects the offender in his relationship and adjustments to every part of institutional activity throughout his entire period of confinement. In practice it involves every phase of administrative activity within the institution and depends for its effectiveness upon the efficient operation of all aspects of institutional management.

In its application classification is more than a method of administration. It is a philosophy which inculcates itself in the attitudes and minds of all who are charged with the administration and operation of a penal institution giving unity, direction, and consistency of purpose and action in the treatment of offenders. It is an idea embodying a spirit of hope and one which looks to the future and to reformation. It has now become one of the most significant steps yet taken in all penal history.
