

1953

## Current Notes

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### Recommended Citation

Current Notes, 44 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 353 (1953-1954)

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## CURRENT NOTES

V. A. Leonard, *Editor*

Prison Riots and Disturbances—Declaring that “prison riots should be looked upon as costly and dramatic symptoms of faulty prison administration,” the American Prison Association on June 4 released a detailed study of the causes and preventive measures and methods of controlling prison riots and disturbances. The association authorized the study in February, 1953, and a committee on riots under the chairmanship of Richard A. McGee, Director of the California Department of Corrections, has compiled what is termed “a professional and objective interpretation of this phenomenon.” Directed to the public as well as to responsible officials throughout the country, the study was stimulated by the “unprecedented number of outbursts of mass violence and mutinous behavior in our prisons during 1951, 1952 and the early months of 1953.”

One of the association’s basic conclusions is that “. . . the underlying causes of poor prison administration all stem from a lack of public understanding of the problem and from a consequent reluctance to provide adequate financial support and to keep politics out of management.” Prison riots, the report states, “are nearly always the direct result of the shortsighted neglect of our penal and correctional institutions, amounting to almost criminal negligence in view of the costly results, by many governors, legislators, governing boards, directors, wardens, and others basically responsible for the administration and management of these institutions. The immediate causes given out for a prison riot are usually only symptoms of more basic causes. Bad food usually means inadequate budgets reflected in insufficient supplies, poor equipment, poor personnel and often inept management. Mistreatment of prisoners, or lax discipline, usually has behind it untrained employes and unwise or inexperienced management.”

The association’s committee on riots included, in addition to the chairman, Sanford Bates, commissioner, New Jersey Department of Institutions and Agencies; James V. Bennett, director, U. S. Bureau of Prisons; William S. Brent, supervisor of jails, Virginia Department of Corrections; Father Gervase Brinkman, O. F. M., Illinois State Penitentiary, Joliet; James W. Curran, industrial superintendent, Maryland Penal Institutions, Baltimore; Major John W. Foote, minister, Department of Reform Institutions of Ontario; Warden G. Norton Jameson, South Dakota Penitentiary, Sioux Falls; Warden Garrett Heyns, Michigan Reformatory, Ionia; Prof. Austin H. MacCormick, School of Criminology, University of California at Berkeley; Warden Joseph E. Ragen, Illinois State Penitentiary, Joliet; Will C. Turnbladh, executive director, National Probation and Parole Association, New York; Dr. Walter M. Wallack, warden, Wallkil Prison, N. Y.; and Warden Elwood H. Wilson, New Castle County Workhouse, Wilmington, Delaware.

The committee listed seven fundamental factors contributing to prison maladministration and paving the way for riots and other disturbances:

1. *Inadequate financial support, and official and public indifference.* “. . . Hand-to-mouth budget practices and deficit financing, usually stemming from political considerations, will be found at the root of nine-tenths of the inadequacies of personnel, plant and program, which result in prison riots and scandals. The taxpayer will pay the price of good prisons even if he doesn’t have them.”

2. *Substandard personnel.* “. . . The inadequacy of prison personnel

rests, basically, upon insecurity of tenure and poor salaries. Lack of a sufficient number of employes to provide adequate supervision for safety, to say nothing of rehabilitation, is the rule rather than the exception, even in our better prisons."

3. *Enforced idleness.* ". . . The enforced idleness of a substantial percentage of able-bodied adult men and women in our prisons . . . militates against every constructive objective of a prison program. It is one of the direct causes of the tensions which burst forth in riot and disorder."

4. *Lack of professional leadership and professional programs.* ". . . We have been drawing people especially for the important posts of warden, department head, and parole board member, from other fields only superficially related to corrections."

5. *Excessive size and overcrowding of institutions.* ". . . Any institution, operating as a single unit, becomes increasingly inefficient and unsafe as its population exceeds 1,200."

6. *Political domination and motivation of management.* ". . . Improper political activity in connection with prison management is far more dangerous and injurious to the public welfare than in most other phases of government. . . . Any state which seriously wishes to reorganize its prison system and place it on a sound foundation, must begin by developing an organizational structure as free from improper political influences from top to bottom as it is possible to make it within the framework of a democratic form of government."

7. *Unwise sentencing and parole practices.* ". . . The state in which there is an indeterminate sentence law, and a central board for the fixing of definite terms and the granting of paroles, has the least difficulties from this source."

The report listed preventive measures which can be effective "in spite of glaring deficiencies in our prisons" in reducing the incidence of prison riots and similar disturbances. The report also set forth a detailed summary of measures for control of disturbances once they have occurred. While recommending against deals with rioting prisoners, the report noted that "conditions and practices that form a valid basis for inmate grievances should be corrected as soon as possible, even though one violently disagrees with the methods taken by the rioters to bring them to official attention—THE PRISON WORLD, May-June 1953.

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English Form Scientific Group for the Discussion of Delinquency—From time to time the need for an Institute for Criminology has been urged in England and other countries. In the examination of the causes of crime alone, an ever-increasing expertise is required in the various sciences which are becoming yearly more specialized and imply differing approaches to various aspects of the problem, as well as differing research techniques. The sociologist's approach is unlike that of the biologist or the psychiatrist. He asks different questions and he expects to get his answers by different methods. Equally, on the treatment of offenders, a lawyer, an educator, a statistician, a prison administrator, a sociologist, a psychiatrist or a social worker will each have his own point of view, and so complex is the whole question, so specialized the various disciplines which are employed in its investigation, so diffuse and vast the material, that, in the words of a distinguished criminologist, "no single individual . . . can continue to command all of it."

An Institute of Criminology would have the dual job of permitting multi-

lateral research where this can usefully be undertaken, and of serving as a kind of clearinghouse of scientific information. Such institutes already exist in some countries; and recently an International Institute of Criminology has been founded in Paris. In England, we now welcome the formation of the Scientific Group for the Discussion of Delinquency, which promises to meet that need for a regular exchange of views which alone makes it possible for specialists to see their part of the work in relation to the whole of the problem.—THE HOWARD JOURNAL, Vol. VIII, No. 4, 1953.

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**Alcoholics Are Successfully Treated**—New York City's Bureau of Alcoholic Therapy, better known as Bridge House, observed its 10th anniversary by offering proof of its effectiveness in treating alcoholics. During the ten years since the bureau was established by the late Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, 5,000 persons in the extreme stages of alcoholism have been referred to it by courts, hospitals, churches, social agencies, doctors, and families of victims. The bureau's first and only director, Edward J. McGoldrick, has just completed a follow-up check on what happened afterward to 100 "graduates" who were treated between 1945 and 1947. The cases were chosen at random. Fifty-six are still totally abstinent (which is the only "cure" the bureau recognizes), and have fully regained the business, social and financial stability they lost through drinking. Eleven who have since died remained totally abstinent and responsible up to their deaths. Eighteen resumed drinking again, and fifteen could not be traced sufficiently to determine what happened in their cases. This score of 67 per cent known, full recoveries in the 100 cases is high for the treatment of alcoholism. In terms of restored family happiness the success cannot be measured; but an indication of the economic gain to the city can be found in estimates that the average compulsive drinker who has lost control of his life costs the city up to \$3,000 a year in hospital, jail, welfare, or police expenses.—MICHIGAN POLICE JOURNAL, April-May 1953.

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**Scholarships Awarded**—Three one-hundred dollar scholarships to the Human Relations Workshop held at Loyola University June 22 through July 30 were awarded to Los Angeles police officers by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Captain Gilbert R. Gilmore, Lieutenant Peter F. Hagen, Jr., and Sergeant Thomas Bradley were the recipients of the awards, which were presented by George F. Wasson, Jr., representing the NCCJ. The six-week Workshop is designed as an educational approach to inter-group education, according to Albert S. Foley, director. Teachers, community leaders, policemen, public administrators, etc., participate in the Workshop, where they are trained in basic methods of reducing personal tensions and promoting personal harmony among people of various races, religions, social classes and national origins.

The National Conference of Christians and Jews, which furnished the three scholarships, is a civic educational agency for the promotion of justice, good will, understanding and cooperation among peoples of all races, religions and national origins. Last year, the NCCJ presented a scholarship to Inspector Noel A. McQuown of the Los Angeles Police Department for the Human Relations Workshop at the University of Chicago.—THE LOS ANGELES POLICE BEAT, July 1953.

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