

Spring 1964

Inmate Self-Government

J. E. Baker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

J. E. Baker, Inmate Self-Government, 55 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 39 (1964)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

INMATE SELF-GOVERNMENT

J. E. BAKER

The author is Associate Warden in charge of treatment services in the United States Penitentiary at Terre Haute, Indiana. He also serves as Visiting Lecturer in the Advanced Training Program of the Federal Probation Training Center, Chicago, Illinois. Warden Baker has served the Bureau of Prisons of the United States Department of Justice since 1940. From 1953 until 1959, when he assumed his present position, he was Chief of Classification-Parole in the United States Penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Previously he had served as Classification Secretary, Caseworker, and Assistant Chief of Classification-Parole in the United States Penitentiary at Terre Haute. A member of the National Association of Social Workers, the American Correctional Association, and the Correctional Education Association, Warden Baker has served as panelist and speaker at American Correctional Association meetings and has published a number of articles in the field of corrections.

Is inmate self-government a concept worth retaining in American corrections? Does the history of past experiments therewith point to any promise of its present utility? What do current experiences with inmate council systems reveal about its pitfalls? In the following article, Warden Baker considers these questions and appraises inmate self-government in terms of the specific purposes which he considers it should and should not be expected to serve.—EDITOR.

In penology there yet persists the dream of finding a specific for the treatment of the myriad ills consigned to prisons by society. Historically the most intriguing attempts to create such a specific are those concerned with inmate self-government.

Of all concepts in corrections, inmate self-government is most likely to arouse partisan feelings. Other issues arising from time to time have been debated and resolved in orderly fashion by an incorporation in practice or at least an acceptance in principle. This has not been the case for self-government plans. The pros and cons of the matter as expressed today are essentially the same as those several decades ago. The static quality of the debate is interesting and significant for several reasons. First, it indicates little thoughtful examination of the inmate self-government concept and a paucity of fresh thinking. Reasons for or against self-government apparently stem from the psychological truism that we observe and remember selectively in accordance with our developed expectancies. Such selectivity tends to affirm the correctness of the expectancy.

Second, it appears that attitudes toward self-government are based primarily on accounts of such arrangements as advocated or practiced many years ago. Apparently, there has been no organized attempt to apply recent theoretical studies of institutional social processes or the results of experimentation in inmate social organization to the concept of self-government.

Third, advocates of self-government tend to regard it as a method or model of treatment which can be applied across the board to all inmates in all institutions.

Fourth, in contrast to other concepts which have intermittently appeared on the correctional scene, there apparently has been no real application of scientific principles in determining the efficacy and efficiency of self-government.

There appear to be very few neutral or uncommitted persons on this subject. Opinions are quite definite and can be summarized as follows:

Positive: Inmate self-government or inmate council systems are a part of the "new penology," hence are therapeutic in nature. Since we are nothing if we are not therapeutic, then we are "for" self-government. We know self-government will work if insidious forces do not undermine it.

Negative: The entire history of self-government proves how unsound it is. It never lasted anywhere. That is proof enough of its unworthiness. If inmates were smart enough to govern themselves they would not be in prison in the first place.

As can be readily seen, nothing in the position of either camp is in the nature of a reason. In either point of view we recognize familiar stereotypes not defensible on an intellectual basis.

In an attempt to provide a better perspective on inmate self-government, we have examined past experiments and experiences and have solicited the views of present correctional institution ad-

ministrators. Our summaries and discussions are concerned with suggestions as to the reasons for the rigidity of opinions about the concept of self-government through inmate councils. In addition, we offer some views on the prospects for these groups in correctional institution practice.

No claim of completeness is made for the historical review of self-government experiences. Undoubtedly there have been other experiences about which no accounts have been published or which have not come to our attention. However, the review is a representative sampling of self-government experiments in correctional institution history.

In addition we sent a questionnaire to 52 penitentiary and penitentiary-type institutions in all regions of the United States. Recipients were asked to give certain information as to the administration of their advisory councils if they "have or have had" such a group.

PAST EXPERIMENTS AND EXPERIENCES

The earliest reference we found to an inmate self-government system in American penal institutions is that of the *Walnut Street Jail*, Philadelphia, in 1793. Our information is meager, mentioning only that the prisoners established rules to provide harmonious living with each other. As an example, a regulation pertaining to cleanliness was cited. It provided that no man should spit elsewhere than in the chimney. Punishment for violations was exclusion from the society of fellow prisoners. It is stated this was found to be sufficient.¹

At the *New York House of Refuge* in 1824, a reformatory for delinquent children, the first Superintendent, Joseph Curtis, introduced a modified form of self-government. Rule violators or those charged by others with committing an offense were tried by a jury of boys. The Superintendent was the Judge. If the accused was found guilty the number of lashes to be given was announced by the foreman of the jury and administered by the Superintendent.² The system had no other features of consequence. Curtis was Superintendent for approximately one year. The system terminated at his departure.

Another reformatory for delinquent children, the *Boston House of Reformation*, established in 1826, was the setting for an early experiment

which was broader in scope and lasted throughout the several years tenure of its originator. A young Episcopal minister, the Reverend E. M. P. Wells, became Superintendent of the institution in 1828 and promptly attracted considerable attention by his rather intensive education programming. Inmates were given a voting participation in the administration of the school. Corporal punishments were entirely excluded. Monitors were appointed from among the youngsters at the beginning of each month, and the head monitor presided over the institution in the absence of the officers.³

While his contemporaries had some reservations about his program, there was a consensus as to the outstanding nature and ability of Wells himself. Disagreement with the Boston Common Council after an official inspection visit in 1832 led to his resignation soon thereafter.

In his autobiography published in 1912, Zebulon R. Brockway⁴ reports that while he was Superintendent of the *Detroit House of Corrections* during the 1860's, he experimented with engaging prisoners in monitorial and mechanical supervision and in educating their fellow prisoners. He claims this was ennobling to the prisoners so assigned. While we would not seriously doubt Mr. Brockway's claim of a self-government group during the 1860's, it does seem rather odd that he had never previously mentioned it.

The *Mutual Aid League* organized at the *Michigan Penitentiary* in 1888, under Warden Hiram F. Hatch, is the earliest contemporarily reported record of any inmate self-government system among adult prisoners.⁵ The set of principles involved in this arrangement anticipated by many years those widely publicized three decades later in Osborne's *Mutual Welfare League*. In an unsupervised meeting an inmate committee drew up a constitution, naming the organization *The Mutual Aid League of the M.S.P.* This constitution set forth the usual ideals of self-government and group advancement. Meetings were held monthly with the Warden as presiding officer. Reports indicate he attended meetings "without guards." Warden Hatch received considerable criticism from

³ Lewis, *Inmate Self-Government a Century Ago*, 8 THE DELINQUENT 9 (1918).

⁴ BROCKWAY, FIFTY YEARS OF PRISON SERVICE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY 96 (1912).

⁵ Helfman, *Antecedents of Thomas Mott Osborne's "Mutual Welfare League" in Michigan*, 40 J. CRIM. L. & C. 597 (1950).

¹ LEWIS, THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN PRISONS AND PRISON CUSTOMS, 1776-1845, at 169-70 (1922).

² *Ibid.*

contemporaries, which he answered by referring to a favorable record in the maintenance of prison discipline.⁶

The story of *The George Junior Republic* founded in 1896 by William Reuben George (1866-1936) is a familiar one and needs no recounting here except its mention as a rather early experience in institutional self-government. In 1908 the National Association of Junior Republics was organized and continues to the present. For this study, the George Junior Republic has special importance, since two of the later strong advocates for inmate self-government in penal institutions were associates of the founder. They were Thomas Mott Osborne, Member, Board of Directors, and Calvin Derick, General Superintendent.

Calvin Derick utilized the pioneering work of George when appointed Superintendent of the *Ione Reformatory in California* in 1912. He outlined and formulated a program using inmate self-government as the keystone of its arch. It is significant to note that the Ione experiment represents the first acknowledgement and endorsement of inmate self-government by any state. At the inauguration of the second president of the self-government group, Governor Hiram Johnson of California went to the school and placed the stamp of his official approval upon the experiment.⁷

The purported sole purpose of this system of self-government was to furnish a medium in which the boys might develop a civilization of their own with as many degrees and gradations as necessary to meet their needs and interests, the ideal being to come as close as possible to standards of civilization.

In his annual report for 1915, Frank Moore, Superintendent of the *State Reformatory, Rahway, New Jersey*, explains the failure of a self-government plan begun in 1914 and abandoned at the end of the year: "[A]fter giving the question sober consideration the inmates of the Reformatory felt that it was better for them that the institution should return to the original plan of being governed by the appointed authority of the institution and hence the council disbanded."⁸

In December, 1913, *The Mutual Welfare League* was founded at New York State's Auburn Prison

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Derick, *Self-Government*, SURVEY 473 (Sept. 1, 1917).

⁸ Reported in WINES, PUNISHMENT AND REFORMATION: A STUDY OF THE PENITENTIARY SYSTEM 408 (Lane rev'n 1923).

by Thomas Mott Osborne. The stated purpose and objective of this inmate self-government group was to alter concepts of confinement then practiced routinely in the majority of penal institutions.

It was Osborne's contention, based on his experience with the George Junior Republic, that self-government was the practical remedy for the evils of the prison system. After a voluntary one week term of confinement at Auburn Prison he developed, with inmate assistance, the methods of implementing a self-government plan in an institution for adult offenders. A cardinal principle was that prisoners must work out their own plan, rather than have an outside plan presented to them. Osborne noted: "This was real, vital democracy; this was solving the problem in the genuine American spirit."⁹

It is significant to note that Warden Rattigan, of Auburn, with the approval of the New York State Superintendent of Prisons, proposed to hand over all infractions of discipline to the League except in five instances: assault on an officer, deadly assault upon another inmate, refusal to work, strike, and attempt to escape.

Prisoner cooperation was the foundation of the League. Its operations were based on the premise that the prison could be treated as a community. Tannenbaum espouses this by his comment: "Prisoners possessed among themselves a public opinion that if properly harnessed could be made effective in the enforcement of public policy and the development of public morale, which would make discipline both easier upon the warden and more effective with the men."¹⁰

Osborne became Warden of *Sing Sing Prison* on December 1, 1914. He immediately organized a Mutual Welfare League which has been described by Wines as follows:

"The real instruments of self-government at Sing Sing were the committees. It was these that effectively expressed the wishes of the prisoners and took the initiative in getting things done. The Warden's day was filled with appointments with committee chairmen who wanted assistance or advice. The chairmen quickly came to realize that a great deal of power lay in their hands if they knew how to wield it. Not only were they trustees of the wishes of their fellow-inmates, but the prison

⁹ OSBORNE, SOCIETY AND PRISONS 164 (1916).

¹⁰ TANNENBAUM, CRIME AND THE COMMUNITY 416 (1938).

officials came to regard them as responsible makers of institution policy. Some of them became adept in the art of getting what they wanted without appearing to ask for much. Aside from the specific things they accomplished, their activity was beneficial in two ways: (1) It taught them some of the difficulties of administration, thus enabling them to pass that knowledge back to their constituents; and (2) It enabled the prison authorities, by means of the understanding thus promoted, to rely upon cooperation where before they would have received only suspicion and distrust."¹¹

Later, Osborne organized a League while serving as Commandant of the Naval Prison, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

At the *State Reformatory, Cheshire, Connecticut*, a self-government experiment was begun in 1915 and abandoned in the following spring. While we have no adequate description of its operation, Mr. Charles H. Johnson, Superintendent during the last eight months of the self-government regime, made the following report:

"The reason for the dissatisfaction in the organization was that it lent itself readily to so much misrule and dishonesty that the inmates were tired of it. . . . It was finally decided at a gathering of the inmates that the management of the institution should be placed with the Superintendent and the officers appointed by law."¹²

In 1927 Howard B. Gill, Superintendent, *State Prison Colony, Norfolk, Massachusetts*, inaugurated a program of individual directional inmate treatment called the Norfolk Plan. This approach utilized balanced programs in the following broad areas: (1) inmate classification, (2) group system of housing and supervision, (3) community organization on a basis of joint-responsibility, and (4) individual programs for treatment.¹³

Based upon a classification of prisoners into groups of fewer than 50 men the development of a complete program for the period of confinement was directed by a House-Officer acting as a resident caseworker. Such an officer lived with the inmates for 24 hour periods on an alternate schedule.

The third phase of the Plan, an inmate organiza-

¹¹ WINES, *op. cit.* *supra* note 8, at 397-98.

¹² *Id.* at 407-08.

¹³ Gill, *The Norfolk State Prison Colony at Massachusetts*, 22 J. CRIM. L. & C. 107 (1931).

tion known as the Council, occurred as a direct outgrowth of the group system of housing and supervision. Together with the staff, the Council constituted the community government of the institution.

In an address before the Conference on the Treatment of Criminal Delinquency at Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 4, 1930, Gill reported as follows:

"... This is not to be confused with the strictly penal administration of the Colony which is in the hands of the Superintendent and his assistants. Also in contrast to inmate organizations in some institutions which are founded on the principle of self-government in the hands of inmates only, this community organization operates on the principle of joint responsibility in which *both* officers and inmates take part.

"... In general the plan has worked, although it is neither an 'honor system' nor 'self-government,' because it is founded frankly on a basis of results for both Staff and men. . . . Neither officers nor men give up their independence or their responsibilities, and each continually checks the other to insure square dealing; but both agree that cooperation works better than opposition where men must work and eat and live together, whatever the circumstances."¹⁴

Summary

Two features of these past experiments stand out, both containing the seeds of self-destruction— inmates functioning as disciplinarians, and the dependence of the systems on a lone individual for sponsorship.

Discipline is a part of the treatment process which must be retained in toto by prison personnel. Its proper administration requires a degree of objectivity which is not to be found in the object itself. This feature of the past experiments calls for an altruism psychologically not possible in the faulty ego structure of the socially disadvantaged and damaged person.

Involvement in the disciplinary process appears to have been a point of departure for these systems. One need not ponder long the question as to why. Examine only briefly the accounts of the early prisons, and the stark naked brutality of disciplinary practices assaults your senses. Revolting as they are to us today, these were the accepted

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

methods of dealing with deviancy. The untrained personnel of the old prisons were ill equipped to handle discipline problems. To the originators of the early experiments apparently this was the area in most urgent need of change. Also, this was an area offering the best prospects for effecting a positive change. All the administrator need do was to reassign the responsibility for discipline from staff to inmates. This he could not do in other functional areas without a complete breakdown of operation. For this reason, it is believed, the self-government idea became equated with the handling of disciplinary matters.

Only at Gill's Norfolk State Prison Colony was staff support enlisted. It is apparent that it was not wanted by the other experimenters. Those employees affected by self-government were often placed in situations subordinating them to inmates. Little comment is necessary regarding the administrative crassness of this arrangement. Modern management recognizes the need for interpretive communication in advance of the implementation of an innovation. The presence of untrained and incompetent personnel intensifies that need. We can speculate as to the many positive changes which might have resulted had administrators of yesteryear focused their efforts on staff development.

SELF-GOVERNMENT SURVEY

Forty-four responses were received to a questionnaire sent to 52 penitentiaries to gather information about self-government or inmate council groups and asking the opinion of recipients as to the value of such groups. The replies are rather illuminating, particularly those of a negative nature.

The responses to questions regarding the operation of existing councils, of which seven were reported, are as follows:

Formal Administration of Councils: Of the seven reported existing Advisory Councils, five operate under a Constitution and By-Laws.

Staff Sponsors: Three councils are under the sponsorship of the Warden or Superintendent; and two have the Associate Warden for Treatment as sponsor. There is no designated staff sponsor for the remaining two groups.

Membership Qualification: Conduct record and length of time served or remaining to be served are mentioned by five respondents. One reports the exclusion of maximum and close custody men.

TABLE I
ACTIVITIES IN WHICH GROUPS PARTICIPATE

Activities	No. of Institutions
Recreational Programs.....	4
Entertainment Programs.....	5
Holiday Programs.....	5
Blood Bank.....	3
Tours or visits by service clubs, student groups, industrial representation groups.....	1
Other: Eye Bank 1, Postage Fund 1, Charity Drives 2, Sanitation Drives 1, Safety Drives 1, Self-Improvement 1, Talent Shows 1, TV-Radio-Movies 1, and Curio Program 1.	

Another indicates the only qualification is assignment to a job in the area represented.

Method of Selection: All are elected by ballot vote, subject to approval of the administration, except one group.

Preparation of Agenda for Meetings: In five instances the Council prepares its own agenda, in two of which the further approval of the Warden is required. Agenda for the two remaining groups is made by the Council Chairman. One of these is assisted by the Council Secretary.

Council Meetings: Four councils meet monthly, one semi-monthly, one weekly, and one meets as the need arises.

Participation in Activities: The question asked was: *Does the group have any voice or function in planning and/or carrying out institutional activities or activities involving outside persons,* with a subsequent listing of the activities mentioned in Table I. This table also gives the number of institutions replying affirmatively with reference to the various activities.

In addition, one institution reports a recreation committee separate from the council; one has a sub-committee on developing plans for a general recreation program, and another has a sub-committee taking an active interest in general rules development and other specific prison activities. Still another report states that the council may submit to the Superintendent some change or addition to any inmate program not purely administrative or disciplinary in nature.

Advantages of Council Membership: To the question: *Are there any material advantages to an inmate as a member of the group,* only two responses were affirmative and were qualified by: *Only his social development, and gives him status in the eyes*

of the inmates but no material advantage from viewpoint of the administration.

Council Membership as Individual Treatment: All responses were negative to the question: *Is there a conscious or planned use of group membership as a part of the development plan for a particular individual inmate?*

Evaluation of Council: The last question, in three parts, was designed to elicit the respondent's estimates of the value of his experience with an advisory council arrangement:

a. *If you presently do not have a group but did in the past, for what reason was it discontinued?*

b. *Did you feel it was successful or unsuccessful?*

c. *Please give reasons for your answer to (b).*

Two institutions having existing councils replied to this question as follows:

"Success varies with its membership. Sometimes [the council] is constructive, sometimes just carping and fault finding. The strongarm inmate or the cutie is likely to become a leader in this type of activity and enforce the wishes of a few on the many."

"... considered to be helpful... bring to attention of administration certain complaints from the inmate body... on matters that may easily be taken care of by the administration. The group has no authority and its suggestions are accepted as nothing more..."

Other respondents reporting on previous experiences with Advisory Councils:

"They are of absolutely no value in an institution. Of the many years I watched them operate, I do not know of any constructive suggestion they ever made."

"We do not have any inmate self-government group or Inmate Council. I experimented with one back about 1939 or 1940 and it was a failure and more harm than good. When a prisoner is adjusted enough to advise how to run the prison he doesn't belong here. He should be released."

In one institution which had undergone a critical period in the 1952 riots:

"Shortly after... a group of inmates supposedly representative of the inmate body, functioned for a while as an Inmate Council for the purpose of establishing a better understanding between inmates and the administration for improving conditions and operation of the institution. Inmates selected members of this group by ballot. Members selected were of the aggressive, hard core criminal type of individual and it

was not long before they were using their position to manipulate in favor of their friends and themselves. It is the consensus here that inmate self-government groups do not help for better administration, or rehabilitation in a maximum security institution."

One penitentiary reports a now defunct committee of inmates which met with the Treatment Associate Warden each month in a school classroom to plan the institutional publications.

One Warden reported previous favorable experience in another prison system. After receiving his present appointment this Warden permitted election of an Inmate Committee, subject to his confirmation. "However, this venture was unsuccessful... inmates used this position for their own personal gain. I let the committee die of its own accord. At the present time, I do not plan to have another such committee."

Another institution found that in attempting to use an inmate advisory committee on food, "the inmate's idea of proper feeding far exceeded what our budget would permit."

One Warden reported favorably on a council he had at another institution and felt was successful. It proved to be a good sounding board concerning inmate morale, and its very operation was a factor in maintaining morale at a high level. He plans a similar organization at his present institution when "I feel we are ready."

Other comments were:

"I have seen inmate councils in other institutions and they have proven disastrous."

"I personally, as a Warden at this institution, have never had contact with a group of this nature, however, I have seen several groups of this nature in operation when I have been in other positions at other institutions... It would take a great deal to change my personal opinion as to the benefit of having a group of this nature operating within a penal institution."

"I happen to be on the side who thinks there is no value in inmate councils. Through the years there have been many rehabilitative programs that have placed more control in the inmate's hands and each one of these programs have proved disastrous... One of these rehabilitative programs caused the riot (in 1952). It is going on nine years now that we have the place under control. Custody is in first place... before you can teach you have to have attention. We have had no trouble during this period,

so you can see why I am not in favor of inmate councils."

With the exception of the first, the following comments imply a definite point of view in spite of no actual experience with self-government groups.

"... no experience with the so-called inmate self-government group. This does not mean that I am necessarily opposed to such groups. . . . We accomplish, perhaps, some of the alleged benefits of self-government through our guidance program and the constant individual guidance activity between staff members and inmates which occurs here."

"We do not have any self-government groups. To date, I am not convinced that such groups are justified within a penitentiary such as ours."

"... members of our inmate body are not permitted to organize such groups."

"No inmate is granted privilege or assignment having authority over others."

"We have never had an inmate self-government unit in operation in this institution and from the information I have verbally experienced from some wardens, I am of the opinion that we do not wish to have one."

"About 40 years ago there was one and it did not work out well. . . . I understand that as time went on it became involved in the administration of the institution. We found it was most unsuccessful."

"Many years ago, probably 25 or 30, the Inmate Council used their privilege to meet in the evening within a cell block to plan and execute an escape attempt. One of the guards was severely beaten. That episode ended the Council."

Summary

It is interesting to note that of 44 responding institutions only 13 report experience with inmate self-government or advisory council groups. Six respondents who have never had direct experience with such groups expressed a negative view based usually on the negative experience of others.

Geographically, of seven existing councils six are located in Western institutions and one in a New England State facility. Five of the six previous councils were located in the Eastern and Mid-Eastern States; one in the Southeast.

The chief executive officer of the seven institutions is directly involved in discussions with the

council. While other staff members attend meetings in four institutions, in only two of these are they reported as alternates to the executive.

Councils are reported as being active principally in intra-mural interest programs such as recreation and entertainment. Participation in activities designed to encourage social identification is slight.

Reportedly there is no advantage to council membership. However, there were only two responses to a question concerning this. Probably the five instances of silence are more significant, reflecting, perhaps, a line of thought that council membership is its own reward. The visibility of this altruistic view is beclouded somewhat in view of there being no reported instances of council membership as a part of the development plan for an individual. Correctional administrators endorse various forms of compensation for participation in other programs, principally those involving work. Perhaps thought should be given to providing some compensation for members where the council is frankly used as an administrative adjunct. The writer hopes that this suggestion, so implicit in the question "Are there any material advantages to an inmate as a member of the group?" was not met with silence because it was regarded as either threatening or ridiculous.

Two factors contributing to a favorable evaluation of experience with a council were given as:

1. Success is dependent upon the identification of council members.

2. The functions of the council are well understood by all concerned so that no question exists regarding its functional scope and purpose. Constitutions and by-laws are a means of insuring this understanding.

The reasons advanced by those whose evaluation of their experience with a council was negative were inversely identical:

1. Aggressive types of inmates elected to the council attempted to use their positions for personal gain.

2. The purpose, procedure, and scope of the council were not similarly viewed by inmates and staff.

Oppositions to the concept of inmate self-government or advisory council groups form a cluster of considerations offensive to some correctional administrators. These may be summarized as:

1. Inmates should not be permitted to give advice regarding operation of the institution.

2. Inmates should not be placed in positions of ascendance over other inmates.

3. Inmates should not be placed in positions advantageous to personal gain.

DISCUSSION

The self-government concept grew out of the harshness of the old prison regime. It was an attempt to provide a framework within which the inmate could exercise some freedom of expression and choice. It was unique to the prevalent social patterns of the periods in which we find it briefly emerging. There was little knowledge of and concern for the law-abiding citizen's condition. The principles of industrial management espousing the welfare of the individual were unknown. Prison administration as a science was at best in an embryonic stage. Humane treatment of offenders was the concern of only a dedicated few, virtually none of whom was in actual correctional practice. We find references to this or that person as being a "humane warden." Apparently this was a novel situation.

Treatment as we envision and practice it today did not exist. Life in the old prison was a deadly monotony under a stern and often brutal autocracy. There are few accounts of career administrators and fewer accounts of occupational mobility. The guard remained a guard. Supervisory custodial personnel were usually hired at that level. Wardens and their deputies were appointed as a part of a political patronage system. Unfortunately, some of these features currently exist, but not to the same degree.

Those correctional workers who consider their experience with inmate councils to be successful realize that the councils are not designed to assist "in running the place." They know that while it is desirable to instill a sense of responsibility in the inmate, they must not confuse that aspect of resocialization with their duty to retain and exercise all functions of management. These functions cannot be abrogated or delegated.

For too long many fictions concerning inmate self-government have gone unchallenged in correctional literature. Probably one of the most absurd is the notion that such systems reduce operational costs. O. F. Lewis made this statement: "And just as in most modern days (1922) it has been found that participation of the prisoners in their own government has in the main resulted in decreased necessity for watchfulness by guards,

so in the Walnut Street Prison. In 1794 the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt discovered that 280 convicts were governed by only 4 officers, the women prisoners being under the control of a woman."¹⁵ This is evidently supposed to be a case for self-government, adding to the "proof" that self-government is also good from the economical standpoint. Actually, all it tells us is what every correctional administrator of any worth already knows—custodial detention is a relatively simple and economical matter. There was no program other than custodial containment at Walnut Street. In one modern Midwestern penitentiary, with a current average population of 1400, no more than 30 of the custodial complement of 150 would be needed to effect security functions alone, provided such personnel worked 12 hours daily, seven days each week, as did the keepers at Walnut Street in 1794.

We know that these systems of inmate self-government could not have succeeded under the most favorable circumstances. Such systems would be unworkable even in the most enlightened of modern correctional institutions. As administered, most of the past experiments in inmate self-government were inadequately structured and implemented arrangements superimposed on an untrained staff by individuals whose zeal far exceeded their correctional management ability. All of the self-government systems reviewed depended on a central figure and rapidly expired when that person departed. Apparently little, if any, effort was made to indoctrinate the staff and lead them to an acceptance of this concept of managing prisoners.

It is quite apparent that each of the originators of these systems was a person in advance of his time, an innovator and experimenter, dynamic and creative, impatient with current conditions. None had a trained or professional staff recruited and developed under a merit system. There were no personnel development programs. Salaries were low, hours were long, tenure was insecure, and employee benefits were unheard of. All of these circumstances add up to extreme conditions. Little wonder then that the proponents of the various systems of inmate self-government justified their stand with such extreme statements as "Which is better (for inmate development) the autocratic system or the self-government system?"

¹⁵ *Op. cit. supra* note 1, at 36.

CONCLUSION

In 1960 the Warden's Association of America went on record as being in opposition to the idea of inmate self-government. Our study of literature which penetrates United States correctional history 169 years, and the survey responses of 44 penitentiary administrators reveal similar negative attitudes which we believe grew primarily from an erroneous equation of self-government with discipline by inmates.

Self-government was used by its early advocates as a means of promoting the goals of improved prison conditions, public acceptance of the released offender, and the reduction of criminal behavior. Today we see these goals being realized through personnel development, programs to acquaint the public with modern correctional methods, and inmate classification and individual treatment.

On the current scene there are no longer inmate self-government systems as proposed and attempted in the early experiments and experiences we have described. The features of these systems most acceptable to prison administrators have been retained under an arrangement known as the inmate advisory council. Dickson, Fenton, and Holzschuh¹⁶ have pointed out that the advisory council represents one of the most satisfactory devices for encouraging the inmates of a prison to think constructively about their own institutional environment and provides a means by which inmates may share the responsibility with the staff of making the prison a better place in which to live.

Many administrators regard the advisory council as simply a device for the communication of inmate complaints to the administration. This narrow view has produced the term "gimme groups."

¹⁶ *The Inmate Advisory Council*, 1955 PROCEEDINGS: AM. CORRECTIONAL ASS'N at 142.

Successfully used, the council has a two-way function. It is an agency for communicating to inmates the responsibilities which the administration expects of them and to present a picture of the administrative problems in the areas with which inmates are concerned—notably food. By showing them the budget and soliciting their suggestions as to how a better job might be done with available resources, a structure is created which provides for and encourages thoughtful, constructive feedback. This approach involves the same psychological principles basic to management efforts to provide employee job satisfaction—call it morale if you wish.

It is significant to note that no institution responding to our survey questionnaire indicated a conscious or planned use of group membership as a part of the development plan for a particular individual inmate. It would appear that this use is one of the principal features of the rationale for inmate advisory councils, yet is the least explored area of all. For instance, a properly operated council offers an excellent vehicle for the harnessing and direction of the abundant energies and usually high abilities of many offenders not amenable to conventional treatment forms. Some men need an experience of working for the welfare of others. Others require ego-satisfying assignments in which they can escape the feeling of being engulfed in the crowd.

Perhaps correctional administrators would be well advised to look again at the modern counterpart of self-government, the inmate advisory council. They should consider it in its proper perspective as a part of social education for inmates, and as a morale-raising device for the entire institution through its facilitation of two-way communication between staff and inmates.