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PROPOSED STATE OF ILLINOIS CO-OPERATIVE PLAN FOR PRISON MANAGEMENT

JOHN L. WHITMAN

Under a co-operative plan for prison management, the Division of Prisons in The Department of Public Welfare of the State of Illinois, proposes to adopt methods embracing all the practical ideas advanced in the operation of the so-called honor and self-government systems and adding to them important features that have to do with the actual building of character, the promoting of a feeling of respect for the law and the preparation of convicts while in confinement so that with a correct viewpoint of life, and in the proper attitude of mind, they can enter society and assume the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.

The management of a penal system is just as much a business proposition as is the business that supplies the needs or necessities of life to its patrons, whether they be stockholders or not. In fact, the management of the prisons has an effect upon the whole people. The prisons are either manufacturing good citizens out of raw or waste material, or they are without a proper knowledge of how to use the material at hand, turning out a product that has not only been made less valuable by the handling, but has been converted into a real menace. Consequently, it is of the greatest importance that a plan of organization be adopted that will bring about the best results obtainable to all concerned. This can only be done after a thorough study has been made and an intelligent analysis of the material necessary to be used has been completed. Then, inasmuch as, in this business the material to be handled is humanity and the patrons to whom the products of the business must be furnished is also humanity, the co-operative plan of conducting the business seems to be the most comprehensive,—and when the condition of the material to work with is considered, seems to be more practical than the system that puts the unfinished products or the unprepared man without proper training or development upon his honor, or to be a part of a so-called self-government system.

How the individuals who are brought under the ban of the law can be appealed to by the administration of the law, is a question that nowadays seems to attract the attention of all good citizens and demands the closest attention and study of the administrators of the

law. The strictly punitive method that provides but one treatment for all alike and does not recognize or arrange for the classification of individuals, has proven to be a failure. Other methods have been carelessly thought out, hastily approved by some, then put into operation, with only partial success. Perhaps because of a lack of understanding on the part of prison officials of the conditions apt to be created by some classes convicted of crime. In fact, absolute failures have been made, which have increased the difficulties to be overcome in formulating or adopting plans or policies that would carry out the expressed intention of the law, which says in part that such methods shall be adopted "as will prevent them from returning to criminal courses, best secure their self-support and accomplish their reformation."

To do this, there must be an exhaustive, careful and intelligent study made of each individual, so that all will be understood, their weaknesses recognized and the treatment prescribed that will meet their individual needs, whether it be a treatment for their physical or mental health, or to overcome a lack of proper training, the effect of bad environment, insufficient education, habits of idleness, or any of the many other things that tend to contribute toward delinquency and crime.

After the individual needs have been recognized and treatment prescribed, the prison management should be organized under a plan that would insure the careful attention of all officials in the administration of the prescribed treatment. It is of the greatest importance to the state that the intention of the law, as quoted above, be carried out, which really means that the penal system is expected to enter into the business of making men out of broken, twisted lives. It is a business, which, if successfully carried on in a practical way under a proper plan will bring the best sort of returns to the state by way of a better citizenship.

Those that succeed in other lines of endeavor, in business or a profession, do so only after they have made a thorough study of their business or profession and have become proficient in it. Those in business deal with commodities;—those in charge of the management of our penal institutions, deal with humanity. If it is necessary to study commodities in order to be successful in handling them in a business way, how much more necessary is it in handling humanity to study and understand all of the various characters and moods they are apt to be in at different times, in order to be successful in bringing about the best results. It has only been during recent years that any

such study has been made in the matter of handling the so-called criminal classes in our penal institutions. Practically no well defined method or plan has been adopted that would give proper consideration to the proper classification and treatment of prisoners in our penal institutions. Whatever method or plan may be adopted, if good results are obtained, must insure the co-operation of all concerned.

Our prisons are public institutions; the whole people are or should be interested, for the reason that results whether good or bad have a direct effect upon them. A co-operative plan that enlists the hearty co-operation of all interested, over the prisoners themselves, comes nearer being an ideal plan than any that has yet been put into operation or suggested.

The commercial business conducted on the co-operative plan has what every one declares to be a very commendable object, and, as the business grows and is successful, all the investors, large or small, as well as the patrons realize upon the profits accrued. Not only in a financial way, but inasmuch as the commodity manufactured or handled is apt to be one that is a necessity to the patron, in order to become a full beneficiary, he makes himself at least a small stockholder and has a voice in establishing the policies of the business and gives information to it that will enable the officers of it to prepare for and supply that which most effectually and economically meets his needs, which, in a measure at least, are indential with the needs of other patrons.

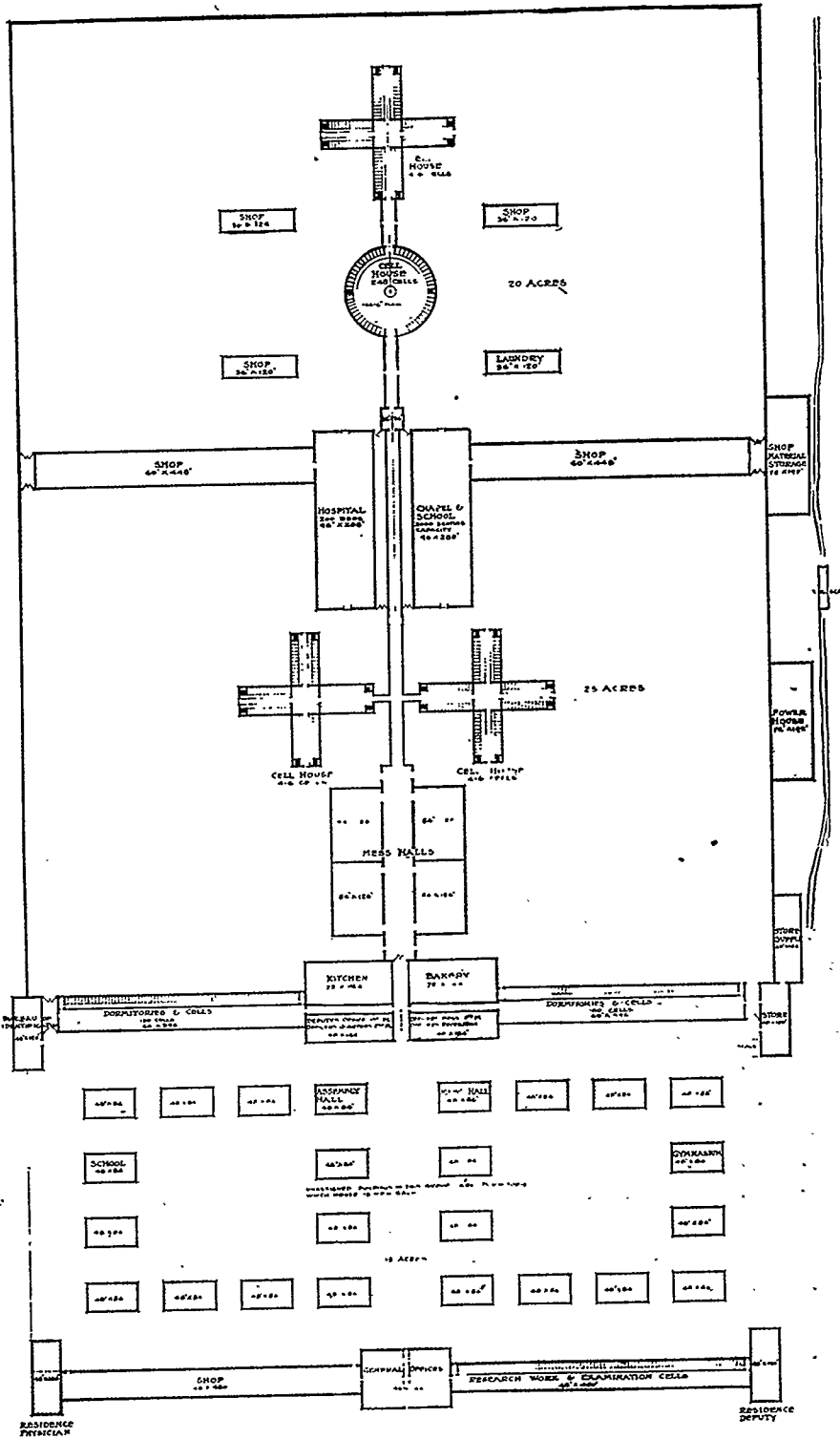
While this plan gives opportunity for working up a highly satisfactory and profitable business to all large or small investors and provides even for the small investors the chance to be heard and his especial needs to be considered, yet, the manner in which his needs and the needs of all of the others may be supplied is determined by those chosen to adopt the policies and direct how they shall be carried out. This is done by a board of directors and officers of the business who may and should be large stockholders; but they are chosen because of their experience and special fitness for their duties. They are held strictly to account and are responsible to the stockholders for the good conduct of the affairs of the business. Consequently, while the co-operative plan provides for the patrons or small stockholders to have a voice in the business, the organization of the business is such that control is held by those who must consider the interests of all concerned and protect the fundamental policies of the business.

The organization of a co-operative plan for prison management as compared with the plan for the commercial business would be that

the state (which means all of the people), is the initial investor, organizer, principal stockholder, and president of the board of directors, which in this case would be The Department of Public Welfare. This department, made up as it is of men, who, because of their years of experience have become convinced of the possibility of manufacturing out of otherwise waste material a really good citizenship for the state, are in reality heavy stockholders in this business of prison management for the public welfare. The prison officials or employes directed and trained in such a line of thought are attracted and convinced that a business organized on a co-operative plan for such a purpose is not only feasible, but offers to the investor a career for future usefulness and they soon become stockholders and are an essential part of the organization. One class of patrons of this business are the prisoners. They represent the element most in need of the benefits of the organization and through whom benefits come to the stockholders, large and small (the whole people).

It is for the purpose of supplying needs to this element that the business of prison management was organized. Consequently, every endeavor should be made by the officers and employes to enlist the prisoners as subscribers for stock in the business, thereby gaining their co-operation. Once they become actually convinced that the business furnishes products that they are in need of and can benefit by, they see the advantage of being stockholders and become such. Then, they are interested in the business as a patron stockholder is in a commercial business, but, in reality have more to gain in a substantial way. They are under this plan co-operative partners in the business and in as practical a way as the patron stockholder who has a voice in a commercial business, they reveal their weakness and the supplies needed to gain strength and stability, which are all considered; but while those supplies are being furnished, or, in other words, while they are undergoing treatment for the weakness displayed, they are under the control of the governing body of the business whose wisdom dictates just what supplies and what treatment will most effectually produce the desired results.

The patron stockholder in a commercial business buys the goods he needs a little cheaper and gets a chance to clip a coupon now and then; but the prisoner stockholder gets his needs supplied for his co-operation in the business of prison management and the chances for a future useful career made possible. He has within his grasp because of his connection with the business a citizenship, which having earned has also learned how to appreciate and protect by proper living. In



the meantime (this being a typical case), the state has realized upon its investment in the business of prison management. Not only that there have been returns, so far as a better citizenship is concerned, but the chances are, in a financial way.

One of the big problems presented to prison management to be solved is the industrial feature. Under such a co-operative plan as described here, the industrial feature of a prison presents less of a problem. How this works out is a subject for separate discussion. Under a co-operative plan, the following outline of a scheme for classification of prisoners fits in:

First. Proper treatment of the mentally and physically sick.

Second. Classification according to needs and abilities of the individual inmates.

Third. A progressive merit system working toward freedom.

This progressive merit system being a thing that is entirely visible to prisoners, serves to maintain discipline and promote industry, as well as fit them for useful careers in after life, and is practically carrying out the expressed intention of the new law, as quoted above, as well as the old law, which recognized the fact that a great majority of prisoners ultimately return to society, which makes it necessary to regard their confinement as a period of training for the duties and obligations of citizenship, rather than as a period of punishment for past failures.

Modern thought concludes that the causes of crime are exceedingly complex and include physical and mental health, training, environment, habits and education. All prisoners should be thoroughly examined upon being committed and a determination reached in the individual cases, as near as may be, of the underlying causes, and when that is done a treatment determined upon—the treatment that would most effectually meet the needs.

In addition to treatment for physical and mental ills, it is important that proper training be given and habits of industry taught. In fact, from the date of commitment, until they have demonstrated their fitness to be paroled, they should be under instruction and training with the hope of fitting them for the proper sort of citizenship when they will realize their responsibility to society. In this progressive merit system, harsh punishment is no part of the treatment.

After the mentally deficient ones have been segregated and the physically ill considered, then all others are assigned to a group or

class, being closely observed as to their inclinations and are under rather rigid discipline or restraint; at any rate, are given no responsibility. It is possible for them to work out of this class into a second class in a short time where they are given some responsibility and where they begin to show their weakness; perhaps because of bad conduct or lack of application to industry, they slip back into the first class. Then comes the opportunity for real educational work. We know them then and know what to do to help them get permanently fixed in class two, where real progress begins. It is at this time they also begin to earn consideration for parole and realize fully that whatever consideration they get is due to merit only. They begin also to understand something about the length of time it will take them to undergo the treatment necessary to fit themselves for parole and decent citizenship. Then gradually the prison restraint is removed and they are placed more and more upon their own responsibility. They have, up until this time, been under the restraint of prison walls and more or less reliant upon prison rules. However, they have graduated out of cells into small dormitories and have thus far shown their ability to adapt themselves to a progressive merit system. Now the authorities can well afford to test them as to their ability to govern themselves and their reliability when placed upon their own responsibility, living as villagers with prison walls removed, the test being that they, in small groups living in cottages, can demonstrate their ability to adapt themselves to community life.

After this test, parole is in sight and they are sent to distant parts of the penal farm to work and live, with reasonable assurance that they will keep inviolate the trust imposed in them; they having been taught how to accommodate themselves to social rules and been placed in the right attitude of mind.