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OPEN INSTITUTIONS

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPEN INSTITUTIONS
IN THE FEDERAL PRISON SYSTEM OF
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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In accordance with the tradition of past Congresses, it has been possible to secure the co-operation of certain national prison administrations for the printing of documentation for the First United Nations Congress on the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders, which is from an historical point of view the Thirteenth International Penal and Penitentiary Congress. Thus the present report has been generously printed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons of the United States of America, in the prison printing plant at Leavenworth, Kansas.

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The "open institution" of the Central Government of the United States began in 1930 on a rugged mountain rising 11,000 feet above the city of Tucson, Arizona, with forty prisoners, a few tents, and a hastily constructed wooden building. This cautious experiment culminated in 1946 in a permanent, campus-like, fully equipped institution, housing 500 prisoners, about 20 miles from the busy, metropolitan city of Dallas, Texas. At present, twenty per cent of the 20,000 Federal prisoners are in open institutions of various kinds, including camps, farms, forests, and road projects. In addition to the large open institution in Texas, the Federal Prison System now operates six other open institutions. The smallest of these is a boys' camp for 75 juvenile delinquents 15 to 17 years of age. These boys are engaged in forestry projects, and are required to attend school, given vocational training, and provided with a variety of opportunities for self-improvement. One of the camps for older men is located on a large Air Force base where they maintain runways, repair buildings, salvage discarded equipment, do landscaping and perform other similar tasks. Another is a lumbering camp in the mountains of West Virginia and a third is engaged in land reclamation. The use of open-type institutions is now firmly established policy in the administration of the Federal Prison System and constitutes an integral part of the total classification and treatment program.

The first camp at Tucson, however, grew out of sheer necessity rather than penological theory. In 1930, the Federal Prison System comprised three penitentiaries and two reformatories. At the same time, the number of violators of Federal

laws was increasing so rapidly that these institutions were crowded to twice their capacity and hundreds more had to be boarded out in state institutions. The only solution to this problem of a rapidly increasing prison population was to take a number of calculated risks and to consider the use of several camps which had been abandoned by the Army after World War I.

The advantages of these camps seemed to be that the prisoners could be employed in useful work such as salvaging materials and equipment still in the camps, clearing land and woods adjacent to highways, and repairing buildings and roads. It was while these plans were under discussion that the proposal to build a scenic highway up to Mount Lemon near Tucson was brought forth by several of Tucson's leading citizens. The cost of constructing a road out of the rocky canyons and steep cliffs for purely recreational purposes was so prohibitive that no legislature would appropriate the necessary funds. It was with misgiving and apprehension that the Federal Government agreed to cooperate with the state authorities in starting such an extensive project. The classification system was not then in operation and there were no established criteria for the selection of prisoners who could be taken out of a maximum security penitentiary and placed in an open situation. Furthermore, many of the local citizens looked with some disfavor at having convicted prisoners so close to their homes and places of business. They predicted escapes and feared the commitment of other criminal depredations. Nevertheless, the project was started and over the intervening years, has now been completed. The Camp is presently located far up the mountain in semi-permanent buildings and the prisoners are being used to maintain the road, build parks and recreation areas, construct fire lanes, trails and ski-glides and selected groups of prisoners are sent out to remote areas under the leadership of forest rangers to fight the devastating fires that not infrequently occur. The attitude of the community toward the Federal Prison Camp is now one of complete acceptance and the people have in fact resisted any suggestion that the Camp be moved to some other locality where the construction of a similar mountain highway was being considered. None of the early fears and apprehensions have been justified.

From the start the prisoners were allowed a sliding scale of credits on their sentences for compliance with the regulations and good work. No one was required to remain in the Camp if he strenuously objected and those who failed to measure up to work standards were transferred to a regular prison or jail. At the outset great stress was placed upon the necessity for quickly apprehending and prosecuting any prisoner who escaped or attempted to escape. The officers of the institution were quite successful in tracking down even in this rough country those who left the camp. Since its establishment upwards of 5,000 prisoners have been committed to the project and only six are unaccounted for at this time. Since all of these were Mexican citizens, it is believed they returned to their homes across the Arizona-Mexican border.

It should be noted here that it is becoming increasingly difficult for an escapee to remain long at large in the United States. That is because the police and the agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have developed fingerprint identification and other techniques for apprehending fugitives that have proved to be extremely efficient, notwithstanding the size of the United States and the many large cities where it might be thought one could easily be lost. Requirements of employers that job applicants identify themselves, the necessity of reporting persons arrested or picked up on suspicion to the central fingerprint identification unit of the Bureau of Investigation, and the disappearance of frontier areas all make it extremely difficult to avoid recapture and a consequent additional penalty up to five years. Once the prisoners realized this situation and that pursuit would be relentless the escape problem has not been serious.

The right traditions, incentives and personnel attitudes having been established, attention was turned to road construction. While certain target dates were set for the completion of a bridge here, a rock fill there, or a tunnel at some other point, no specific tasks were established for particular inmates or groups of prisoners. The men were shown how to accomplish a particular job; they were led and not driven. The occasional loafer or unwilling worker was simply removed from the project and sent back to a walled institution with loss of credits and possibility of parole or remission almost insuperably prejudiced. Moreover, no prisoner was ask-

ed to do useless work or by hand what properly should be done by mechanical means. Up-to-date equipment—compressors, power shovels, trucks—were provided and the men taught how to use them. The unskilled worker could if he wished learn to be a heavy-equipment operator, mechanic and driver.

Working hours were the same as those applying to free men in the same line of work. Recreational facilities—motion pictures, books, radio, tobacco, and the like were provided by the government. A high standard of food service, clean bedding and sanitation were insisted upon. In short, the project depended upon winning the cooperation of the prisoners, weeding out the troublemakers, and treating the prisoners as if they were free men except that they could not leave.

Paralleling the establishment of this Tucson camp, the Federal Government proceeded with its plans for relieving the overcrowded institutions by opening up several camps on the military reservations. By the end of 1930, four such camps were in operation and within a few months, more than 800 prisoners had been transferred to these camps from the overcrowded prisons. At the end of 1931, three additional such camps were opened and by 1932 more than 2,000 prisoners were being held in the seven camps. Such were the beginnings of an experiment in prison administration arising from a very practical problem of overpopulation. Yet the results have been of sufficient significance to warrant the incorporation of the open institution into an integrated prison system such as is operated by the Federal Government as well as by several of the states.

While this development might well be characterized as theory catching up with experience, there had been in American penology for many years a strong current of opinion that a large proportion of prisoners do not need the kind of security and custody imposed by the traditional prison with its bars, walls, towers, and regimentation and that these together with the enforced idleness which usually accompanies such institutions are influences more conducive to deterioration rather than to correction.

It must be remembered that open institutions cannot be successful if traditional custodial methods are transplanted also to this type of institution. Brains must be substituted

for the bars, guardtowers and guns of the penitentiary. There must be a program of activities aimed at bringing to the fore desirable traits. Recreational opportunities, hobby shops, liberal visiting privileges, reading materials and other leisure-time activities are an integral part of the program. To be sure also selection of the men for these institutions must be carefully done on the basis of accurate information. The prisoners placed in these institutions must be without serious mental defect, be relatively free of anxiety about their families, have no cause to fear further prosecution, have no deep-seated hostilities, and know how to get along with others.

Since the vast majority of women prisoners possess these characteristics and public opinion was not averse to granting them privileges and providing an enriched activities program, the open-type institution for women offenders in the United States started before the turn of this century. Today, the confinement of women prisoners in close custody institutions is considered completely obsolete. It was also the same motivation that prompted the construction of the somewhat modified open-type institution for the young adult offender in several states and more recently the developments in California under the direction of the Adult Authority, including the open institution at Chino, California, and the increasing use of state camps for adult offenders.

Just as the reformatory philosophy of Brockway slowly penetrated the grim walls of the old prison and modified somewhat the austerity and rigidity of its program so it is very possible that the continued successful use of the camp and the open institution will in time change the complexion of prison organization in the United States. With the rapid growth of population, the American prison will undoubtedly continue to be faced with the problem of overcrowding and enforced idleness. To attempt to solve this problem by adding to the capacity of present prisons would only accentuate the problem and make the prison even more unwieldy, ineffective, and dangerous. Not only is such a solution costly, it is directly contrary to the theory and philosophy of the individualization of treatment basic to modern correctional work.

The experience with open institutions and camps have at least demonstrated that the traditional prison is not the sole

answer and while continued trial and experimentation are necessary, there is every reason to believe that the open institution will come to be accepted more and more readily as an integral part of American prisons. Perhaps this is a natural evolutionary development growing out of man's gradually awakening social conscience. It may be that we are witnessing the demise of the prison as we have known it for generations past. At any rate, it seems significant that our numerous experiments in housing prisoners in open type institutions have shown the bugaboo of escape is greatly overemphasized.

Moreover, and most importantly we are learning the value of these institutions in the rehabilitation process. It is the appeal the open institutional program makes to the man's self-respect, to the inner drives most of them have to want to profit by their stay in prison, to efforts of the staff to help them with their problems and to the relaxed and considerate atmosphere of the institution that means so much. These institutions show what a little experimentation, a little boldness and willingness to assume a few calculated risks can accomplish. As a matter of fact, we just do not know what we can do with the men and women who go to prison because we have not until recently dared go outside traditional methods.

After all, the prison, like other institutions, is the creation of human intelligence and ideals, and it reflects man's accumulation of knowledge about himself and his environment. There comes a time when our knowledge outstrips these physical monuments to an older generation and must be replaced with something more relevant to our times if advances are to be achieved. Happily, even if tardily, that time seems to be here.

Résumé

Le premier établissement ouvert fédéral aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique a été créé en 1930, sous la forme d'un camp mobile pour 40 détenus, situé sur une montagne abrupte près de Tucson, en Arizona. Cet essai, dû à la pure nécessité ensuite de l'encombrement croissant des établissements fédéraux, a marqué le début d'un constant développement qui a trouvé son point culminant dans la création en 1946 d'un établissement ouvert permanent, pleinement équipé pour recevoir 500 détenus, situé à 20 milles de Dallas, au Texas. Aujourd'hui, le vingt pour cent des vingt mille détenus fédéraux se trouvent dans des établissements ouverts divers: camps, colonies agricoles, chantiers de travaux forestiers et de construction de routes. Le plus petit d'entre eux est un camp pour 75 jeunes délinquants de 15 à 17 ans. Ainsi, les établissements ouverts forment à l'heure actuelle une partie intégrante du programme de classification et de traitement appliqué dans le système fédéral des prisons, programme qui n'existait cependant pas au moment où l'on commença, sans critères de sélection bien établis, à transférer dans des camps certains prisonniers détenus dans les établissements à sécurité maximum.

Les craintes que l'on pouvait avoir au sujet du nombre des évasions ne se sont pas révélées justifiées, grâce notamment aux méthodes efficaces d'arrestation des fugitifs développées par la police, ainsi qu'en raison de la peine additionnelle sévère qui est infligée en cas d'évasion. A Tucson, par exemple, la collectivité en est venue à accepter complètement l'existence du camp fédéral semi-permanent, qui est affecté à des travaux divers d'utilité publique.

Dès le début, des diminutions de peine selon un barème progressif furent portées au crédit des détenus renvoyés à Tucson qui observaient fidèlement le règlement et dont le travail était satisfaisant. Personne n'était affecté au camp ou ne devait y rester contre sa volonté; mais en cas de défaillance, le détenu était transféré dans une prison ordinaire.

Aucun travail inutile n'est imposé aux détenus, et ils ne sont jamais tenus de faire à la main ce qui peut être accompli par des machines. Le camp dispose d'un équipement mécanique moderne, et les hommes sont entraînés au maniement des

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