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"The Penitentiaries Move Forward"



An address given by

Maj.-Gen. R. B. GIBSON, C.B., C.B.E., K.C.
Commissioner of Penitentiaries



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"The Penitentiaries Move Forward"

An Address Given by

Major-General R. B. Gibson, C.B., C.B.E., K.C.

COMMISSIONER of PENITENTIARIES

at the

CANADIAN PENAL CONGRESS

Kingston, Ontario

June 21st., 1949

IT is a great pleasure to have the opportunity of attending this Fifth Canadian Penal Congress and of telling you something of recent developments in our Canadian Penitentiaries. I think it was a happy thought that prompted your Committee to decide to hold this Congress in the City of Kingston, for Kingston as you know, has been the site of a Canadian Penitentiary for more than a hundred years. Sometimes we are inclined to lament the antiquity of some of the facilities that we have inherited, but I think we can safely say that there is an historic tradition penologically speaking, about this City of Kingston that makes it a most appropriate place for this Congress to meet.

At your last Congress in Windsor nearly three years ago you will recall that we heard a most entertaining address from Dr. B. K. Sandwell in which he stressed the importance of convincing both ourselves and the public that penology is a profession, a worthy profession capable of making a most important contribution to the welfare of society and as much deserving of public recognition as many of the older and more established professional activities. I think that in the intervening years real progress has been made in Canada in developing that professional outlook toward prison work. Certainly in our own training courses in the Penitentiary Service we have placed great importance on that professional outlook and I think that all of you who have been actively connected with the developments in the correctional field in Canada have appreciated the changing point of view that is emerging both from the public and from participants as to the importance of a trained professional approach to the serious problems of dealing with crime and delinquency that confront society in these present days. And so I feel that this Congress of Canadians, sincerely interested in the ap-

plication of sound penological principles, graced too by the presence of some of our American colleagues who have had long experience in this field, offers a real opportunity of reviewing the progress that has been made in Canada and of inspiring us to further effort, and to further development of that professional approach to the treatment of crime and criminals.

Now if we are to convince the public that the practice of penology is a real professional job we must have clearly in our minds the principles upon which our profession is based, and we must be able to convince them that those principles represent a practical and worthwhile approach to the matter of dealing with crime, and have a reasonable chance of success, since it is the public who in the final analysis provide the funds to carry on our work and who must be convinced that the moneys expended for the maintenance and development of a sound correctional programme are producing results.

We in Canada are fortunate that some years ago a very comprehensive study was made of the Canadian Penal System by a Royal Commission whose Report may well be considered as the "text book" for penal and correctional development in this country. While there may be differences of opinion as to some matters of detail referred to in that Report, and as to the practicability of carrying out some of the recommendations in the form which the Commission proposed, there can be no quarrel with the enunciation of the broad principles of penology which the Report set forth.

It stressed that the basis of every good correctional system must be the protection of society and by that was meant continuing and not merely temporary protection. Simply stated, this involves three main principles, first, that those committed to penal institutions be kept in safe custody until they have served their sentences or are otherwise properly released according to law; secondly, that to the utmost extent possible, the period of imprisonment shall be utilized to change and correct the anti-social habits that resulted in the sentence of imprisonment and to provide the prisoner with knowledge, habits and skills that will enable him to make his way in society upon release without reverting to crime, and thirdly, that as an aid to the second objective the prisoner will be treated humanely, fairly and permitted such privileges as may reasonably be allowed with due regard to disciplinary

and administrative requirements. Those principles have been accepted as the philosophy behind our present programme in the Canadian Penitentiaries.

Now I should like to describe to you some of the steps that have been taken in the last two years to further that programme in our Federal Institutions. One of the first recommendations of the Archambault Report was the reorganization and expansion of the Headquarters Staff responsible for the direction and administration of the Canadian Penitentiary System. Following an amendment made at the 1947 Session of Parliament, the new Act was proclaimed on September 1st, 1947. The Government saw fit to appoint me as Commissioner of Penitentiaries with Mr. Joseph McCulley and Dr. L. P. Gendreau as Deputy Commissioners, and Mr. G. L. Sauvant, Mr. James A. McLaughlin and Mr. Neil R. MacLean as Assistant Commissioners. Colonel R. W. Catto was appointed Chief Penitentiaries Engineer and there were also appointed a Supervisor of Stewards, a Supervisor of Farms, a Supervisor of Industries, a Supervisor of Training, and a Supervisor of Stores and Accounting. There are, of course, also the necessary administrative and clerical staffs to enable the organization to function smoothly. All these appointments were filled with great care and I can say frankly as Commissioner that we have at Headquarters a competent harmonious team, all deeply imbued with the enthusiasm and interest necessary to make a success of the new programme that has been undertaken. As a result of the provision of an adequate staff at Headquarters it has been possible to increase greatly the number of visits made by Head Office officials to the penitentiaries thereby developing much closer liaison and understanding with the Wardens and their staffs, and a mutual appreciation of the problems to be solved.

Another important factor in improving the calibre and morale of the Penitentiary Service has been the revision of salaries for all officers in the Service. Prior to 1945 the salary range for guards was \$1200 to \$1500 per annum. As a result of a series of salary revisions, the initial salary for a custodial officer joining the Service is now \$1980, rising to \$2280, with a higher scale for 20% of the custodial staff reaching a maximum of \$2460. Instructors' salaries have a range of \$2580 to \$2880. Chief Keepers and Chief Instructors from \$2880 to \$3480. Other positions have been raised correspondingly and the salary for Senior Wardens now reaches \$6300 per annum. These increases

have been instrumental in improving the morale of our staffs and have permitted us to attract to the Service many new personnel with good qualifications for their duties.

The third step taken with regard to staffs has been the institution of Training Courses for penitentiary officers. The first course began in February 1948 and to date 183 officers have attended the seven courses already completed. The courses are held at the R.C.M.P. Barracks, Rockcliffe and are of six weeks' duration. In planning this first series of courses we decided to concentrate upon the training of officers with a reasonable background of service and experience in penitentiary work because we considered it essential that the "backbone" of our staffs should be trained in the new programme before dealing with the newly joined recruits. The response and interest of our officers in these training courses, many of them with ten, twenty and even thirty years' service, has been most heartening. The present courses are for the purpose of orienting our officers to the principles of sound modern penology, to increase their knowledge and to raise their standards in terms of their awareness of the factors that influence human behaviour, their knowledge of social problems and the causes of crime, their efficiency in their own specific responsibilities, their own physical fitness, and their general interest in prison work as a career. It is gratifying to report that out of 160 officers who attended the first six courses 107 passed the final tests with honour standing. It is of interest to note that two of the courses already held have been bilingual, with instruction in French for the French speaking officers attending. We feel that the training being given is fundamental to the development of our present programme, and already its effect is evident to a noticeable degree in the daily administration of our institutions.

Proper classification of prisoners is an essential part of a good correctional system, if a programme of individualized treatment is to be carried out. In 1947, Classification Officers were appointed in all our penitentiaries. These officers were specially chosen for their duties, and are university graduates with training in social work and experience in occupational counselling. They interview all newcomers to obtain full information as to their educational, social and economic backgrounds, their mental capacity, and their general interests and abilities. Much useful information is obtained from social agencies, and other sources with whom the prisoner has previously been in con-

tact. On the basis of this case history the Classification Board of the institution is enabled to reach a decision as to the treatment and employment of the prisoner during his incarceration. The value of this procedure has become increasingly evident during recent months and we find that more and more convicts are seeking the advice and counselling of the Classification Officer in connection with their individual problems and plans.

The success of a good treatment programme depends largely on the willingness and the interest of the prisoner to participate in it, and the Classification Officers play a most important role in interpreting to the inmates of our institutions the opportunities that are becoming increasingly available for their benefit and advancement while serving their sentences. Prior to the completion of sentence the Classification Officer is the link with the John Howard Societies, the National Employment Service and the other agencies designed to assist the rehabilitation of the prisoner upon discharge. In that pre-discharge period the knowledge that has been gained of the individual's assets and liabilities by a proper system of classification is of the greatest importance in assisting him in his post-discharge plans. We all know, of course, that classification is not a magic formula which will provide the solution for all cases—but it does assist greatly in developing a plan of treatment that will be best suited for the individual's needs.

Now a word about the developments that have taken place in improving the facilities available for the treatment process—the tools, as it were, with which our staffs have to work. The Archambault Commission pointed out that education should be regarded as an essential part of any programme of rehabilitation and that it was fundamentally a problem of adult education. The prisoner should be regarded as an adult in need of education, as well as a criminal in need of reform, and the educational programme should be sufficiently broad in scope to influence the basic attitudes of those who participate and to open to them new means of occupying constructively the long hours of leisure time at their disposal. These recommendations have guided our developments in the educational field. Our teaching staffs have been more than doubled in the past two years and substantial progress has been made in the enlargement and renovation of our classrooms and in the provision of fluorescent lighting, new school room furniture and up-to-date text books and educational aids. In Septem-

ber a new well equipped school building at St. Vincent de Paul Penitentiary will be ready for occupation which will greatly improve the facilities at that institution. The use of the correspondence courses provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and by the Provincial Departments of Education has continued to expand during the past year—at the end of March last the total number of correspondence courses currently being undertaken was 1205, from a population of approximately 4000.

The programmes of special lectures and courses provided by outside lecturers at some of our institutions were continued again during the past winter and we are particularly indebted to the staffs of Queen's University and the University of British Columbia for their interest and assistance in this phase of our activities. The interest of the prisoners in these visits from the outside has been very apparent and their effect upon morale has been excellent.

And here, I should like to say a word of appreciation to the ladies of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Kingston who have recently undertaken to assist in providing some extra-curricular activities for the inmates of our Prison for Women. This work is deeply appreciated and will, I am confident, have very beneficial effects upon the morale and attitude of our women prisoners.

We have been able in the past year to increase substantially the size and scope of our penitentiary libraries and to improve the methods of selection and delivery of library books. We are now within sight of our objective of the standard of ten volumes per inmate.

In my last Annual Report I referred at some length to the development of full time vocational training courses for the young convicts under 21 years of age and others of the reformable type in their early twenties. There have been, of course, for many years in Canadian Penitentiaries opportunities for prisoners to learn useful trades in the various industrial shops and construction activities that have been carried on, but this type of "on the job" training, while it benefited those who had the will and the ambition to apply themselves, failed to produce the skilled workman who could compete in quality and quantity with the employee on the outside. It was evident therefore, that if we were to equip these young men to obtain and hold employ-

ment in the competitive world outside, we must first develop an interest and pride in work itself and then train them so well that the quantity and quality of their productive output would rival that of their equivalents in outside shops and give them a social consciousness and sense of achievement that will make them capable of attaining a position of economic independence upon release. With this aim in view we embarked in 1947 on a programme of full time vocational training designed to give the trainees a thorough grounding in trade theory and practice on actual projects during a basic training period of approximately 1000 hours, or practically nine months of elapsed time by penitentiary work standards. In addition the trainee receives instruction in related subjects of blueprint reading, shop mathematics and others necessary to achieve successful journeyman status. The initial courses were undertaken at Collin's Bay and St. Vincent de Paul Penitentiaries. The trades included Brickmasonry, Construction Carpentry, Plumbing and Steamfitting, Tinsmithing and Sheet Metal Working, Draughting and Cabinet Making.

In January of this year this type of vocational training was extended to Saskatchewan Penitentiary and we are now in process of organizing similar courses at Dorchester. At each institution a Chief Vocational Officer has been appointed to organize and supervise the carrying out of the courses, and competent vocational instructors, separate from those employed in the regular institutional maintenance shops, each well qualified in his trade and with previous teaching experience, were employed to conduct the training. The classes are restricted in size to enable each instructor to give individual instruction and to follow the progress of the individual trainees. During the training period the trainee's progress is closely checked and reported on daily by the instructor in charge. The course itself is designed so that the trainee must keep striving to attain passing marks on his tests, or run the risk of being dropped from the class. As the trainees graduate from the formal syllabus, they perform maintenance and construction work in the institutions to gain further experience, and their subsequent progress is reported upon and they are credited with the hours spent at their trades towards the credits for final journeymen's rating. We have had encouraging indications from the Directors of Apprenticeship in most of the Provinces that as this training proves its worth our graduates will be eligible for trade testing and certification under the Apprenticeship Regulations.

I should perhaps mention that the institution of this training has had a marked effect upon the prisoners themselves. When the initial courses were being organized, it was necessary to urge the convicts to take the courses to obtain a full complement per instructor. For the past few months we have had a waiting list greater than we can accommodate. There is a noticeable earnestness on the part of those assigned to vocational work and they carry out their tasks with definite interest and attention. Already we have had several cases where "tickets of leave" have been declined because the prisoner wished to complete his training. While we are not optimistic enough to expect 100% recovery, I think we can say that this type of training is producing positive results and is providing many young men with the incentive and ability to attain economic security which were not previously available to them. It is too early yet to produce definite statistics but such information as is available indicates that a high percentage of the trainees so far released who have obtained employment are still gainfully employed.

During the past two years a planned programme of improvement of our industrial shops, of replacing obsolete machinery and equipment and of providing the necessary modern facilities to make our shops comparable to those in outside industry has been pushed forward vigorously. Our expenditure for machinery, tools and equipment of all kinds in the fiscal year which ended March 31st last was \$435,000 as compared with an amount of \$191,000 for the same period two years previously. These changes have had a noticeable effect upon the morale and attitude of many of the convicts employed in the shops and have contributed to a more purposeful approach to the work to be done.

Under the guidance of Deputy Commissioner Gendreau improvements have been made in the hospital facilities at our institutions and a considerably increased amount of corrective surgery has been undertaken. The Psychiatric Ward at Kingston Penitentiary has been in operation for some months under Dr. Crawford's supervision and at other institutions the services of outside psychiatrists have been utilized in a considerable number of problem cases, in addition to the many interviews which Dr. Gendreau has carried out in the course of his visits to the penitentiaries.

And now I should like to refer to the outstanding developments

that have taken place in the field of placement and after care of prisoners upon discharge. The expansion and development of the activities of the various John Howard Societies and other prisoners' aid organizations across the country have been most heartening to all of us who appreciate the importance of this work in making effective whatever efforts may have been undertaken to rehabilitate the prisoner during his period of imprisonment. Great credit is due to your President, Mr. Edmison and to the Executive Committees of the various Societies for the splendid advances that have been made in the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizations available to undertake this most important task. The assistance of the Special Placement Division of the National Employment Service in the work of finding suitable employment for discharged prisoners has also contributed greatly to the present arrangements. The liaison that now exists between the penitentiaries through the Classification Officers, the local societies, and the National Employment Service is proving most effective in providing full information as to the individual's capabilities for employment and in preparing him for placement. There is a receptiveness and an appreciation on the part of the majority of our prisoners of the sincerity of these efforts that is a decided contrast to the attitude that prevailed in the past, and that is a great encouragement for the future. The results to be obtained from these efforts are dependent on two factors:— and I mention first the one that appears to be the most important—the willingness on the part of the public and employers to offer employment to a man or woman who has served a prison term, and secondly, the will and ability of the prisoner to hold the job once he has obtained it. The second factor can only be tested if the job is made available for him, and all too often that opportunity is delayed until the will is weakened and the ability dulled by disappointment. It should therefore be the objective of all of us who have this reformatory programme at heart, to do all in our power to convince employers that it is a vital factor for its success that employment should be made available for those who have, by their conduct and attitude in prison, demonstrated that they are reasonable prospects for future good citizenship in spite of past failures.

I have endeavoured to review very briefly some of the constructive developments that have taken place in our penitentiary programme during the past two years. During the past week we have had a conference of our Wardens in Ottawa which has given us a very useful

opportunity to discuss together many administrative problems and to lay plans for the future. Further changes will be developed when those discussions have been fully considered and the proposals resulting from them have received approval. We have still many difficult problems to solve, not the least of which is our constantly increasing population, particularly in the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec where for several years the admissions have considerably exceeded the releases. However, we feel that real progress has been made and that there is now a better understanding and greater co-operation between the various agencies, Federal, Provincial and private, that are concerned with the problem of dealing with offenders than has ever existed before in Canada. At this Congress we have the opportunity of considering together all the methods that penology provides for reducing the incidence of crime,—initial prevention, probation and parole as well as institutional treatment.

I think that the theme chosen as the keynote of this Congress, "Team Work" is a most appropriate one at this stage of the development of penal reform in Canada. Improvements in institutional treatment are not alone the answer to the problem of reducing crime and preventing its recurrence. Only by the teamwork of all the agencies concerned with this problem will real progress be made.

If I may use a medical analogy, prevention is better than cure, medication in the form of a judicious use of probation is better than the surgery of a prison sentence, minor surgery in the form of a corrective reformatory sentence is a more desirable means of treatment than the prolonged hospitalization that a penitentiary sentence necessarily involves, and if that major surgery is necessary then a wise use of parole should be invoked to shorten the period of convalescence where the patient shows hopeful symptoms of recovery.

There are encouraging signs in Canada that this therapeutic aspect of penological treatment is being developed on an understanding basis by the responsible authorities. In my view the greatest hope of success in dealing effectively with this problem of reducing the incidence of crime lies in greater co-operation and understanding between all the agencies charged with the responsibility, the community agencies, the courts, the Provincial and the Federal institutions, the rehabilitative societies and finally the employing public. No one of these agencies alone can solve the problem and I am a firm believer

that in a country the size of Canada local agencies familiar with local conditions and in close touch with home surroundings and the possibility of employment for the released offender have a very important role to play in solving the problem of rehabilitating those who have offended against the law. It is only when we can bring home to all our citizens their responsibility to share in this task of eliminating delinquent behaviour that we shall be on the road to solving this problem. I venture therefore to suggest to you as members of the Canadian Penal Association that one of the major functions of this Association, through its affiliated societies, is to keep constantly before the public the need for an understanding and sympathetic approach to the problem of rehabilitation, and to provide wider opportunities for participation in your activities by a larger body of citizens.

Nearly forty years ago the Right Honourable Winston Churchill who was then Home Secretary of Great Britain had this to say:

"The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country. A calm and dispassionate recognition of the rights of the accused against the State, and even of convicted criminals against the State, a constant heart-searching by all charged with the duty of punishment, a desire and eagerness to rehabilitate in the world of industry all those who have paid their dues in the hard coinage of punishment, tireless efforts towards the discovery of curative and regenerating processes, and an unfaltering faith that there is a treasure, if you can only find it, in the heart of every man--these are the symbols which in the treatment of crime and criminals mark and measure the stored-up strength of a nation, and are the sign and proof of the living virtue in it."

Those words spoken by a great man, who has since proved his pre-eminence in many other fields of human endeavour, shine with as much brilliance and are just as applicable today as when they were uttered many years ago.

