

The Future of Prison Industries

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THE PUBLIC GENERALLY, including the very large body of men and women who are directly or indirectly interested in crime and punishment have, in the main, three different ways of looking at the problem of prison labour:

- (i) The time spent in prison should be such as to deter people from committing crime again. Work should be difficult and carried out under unpleasant conditions; life generally should be made unpleasant so that the prisoner on discharge may be persuaded to keep out of prison at all costs.
- (ii) Men commit crimes because of their weakness, their easy falling into temptation, their unwillingness to settle down to a real job. The prison routine should be such as to rehabilitate them as good citizens. On this view those prisoners who suffer from abnormalities of mind and body ought to be appropriately treated.
- (iii) Society must protect itself

against criminals who seem to devote their life to crime and who, in spite of every effort, are not rehabilitated. Such men ought to be detained for long periods.

In all these three attitudes there is a mixture of good commonsense and humanitarian feeling.

The policy of the Prison Department

One of the most important elements in this policy is the rehabilitation of prisoners by building up a certain officer and prisoner relationship, and officers are trained in this subject. Discussions between officers and prisoners such as take place at group counselling sessions are valuable, but every activity of prisoners, including entertainments, sports, studies, eating and working provides opportunities for developing the desired relationship. It is not for the present writer to describe what is desired, except to say that it includes mutual respect and understanding, coupled with a definite exercise of authority and its acceptance.

It would be going too far to say that the value of any activity, including work, is to be measured by the frequency and the importance of prisoner and officer personal contact. Nevertheless there are clearly kinds of work, such as handsewing of mailbags in crowded rooms, where it is well-nigh impossible to have any relationship except that of master and servant; and, on the other hand, there are kinds of work such as woodworking where there are frequent and impersonal problems, about tools, materials, defects and methods, and these problems provide personal contacts of great value.

The Prison Department is trying to obtain more work, and more suitable work, having in mind this general policy of establishing good relationships. In addition the Department is trying to increase the hours worked per week to something approaching industrial conditions.

What is needed if the Department's policy is to be fully implemented

No ideal, no policy is realised just by wanting it and talking about it. There are the twin, inseparable twin, problems of getting more work and increasing the number of workshops, the machinery, the staff, in order that more work could be done. As the twins cannot be separated they must both be attended to at the same time. But this leads us to turn to some thoughts on work, in free society. In the last 30 years, there has been a minor revolution in public ideas

about what work is. We will digress a moment to take a close look at the work of free men.

Work in Society at Large

Perhaps the most simple definition of work is what a person consciously does for his living. He may play football, sing songs, play tennis, make pictures, explore holes in the ground, make useful things, but none of these are in themselves "work," they are only work when they are consciously done for a living. Putting this another way, work is what one does for the benefit of society in expectation of receiving the benefit of what others do in exchange.

There is a big difference between work and play. One may choose whether to play or not and if the play becomes tedious and irksome one may give it up. But in the case of work one has made a sort of contract and has to keep at it whether one likes it or not. If it gets too unattractive it can be given up and changed for something else, but only after careful consideration.

The exchange of the product of one's own work is accomplished through money exchange so that there are, on the one hand, values of one's own work and, on the other hand, values of other men's work.

After some hundreds of years the industrial nations have worked out a system so that absolutely essential goods and services can be made with a steadily decreasing expenditure of labour and

materials. The industrial system, contrary to popular belief, is not designed merely to supply what is needed but to do something much more important, that is, to supply what is needed with a minimum of effort and expense. A little thought shows that by this system the standard of life is improved; there can be produced not only the bare necessities but also the luxuries and the frills; there can be built concert halls, libraries, sports stadiums. Entertainment, art and many other activities can be indulged in with great pleasure and benefit and much of the drudgery and tedium of work can be removed. The majority of men accept that their private lives are fuller and richer than were their fathers and grandfathers, and they want their sons to be even richer if possible. This depends on more efficient production of necessities, giving more free time for better things.

One of the chief causes of many crimes is the desire to shirk the duty of making a personal contribution, and still to benefit by the work of others. Money has come to be regarded as itself a means of getting a living, and not as a means of exchange.

There is another aspect of work outside prisons which needs a little thought. There is a very long chain of events involved in bringing electricity and water, television and telephones into our homes. These things do not happen just by wishing for them. Everything has to be planned. Today craftsmen are at work with their

pencils making drawings of power stations, coal-getting machinery, geological structures below ground, hydro-electric schemes, irrigation schemes and what not, and it will be on the average some five or ten years before society receives the benefit of their work. During these five or ten years there is not only need for a great deal of work to be done by hundreds of skilled and semi-skilled craftsmen, engineers and technicians; their contributions are required at a definite time and if they are late, then there is waste and frustration. Even with quite small things that we buy in shops, especially perishable things like fish and vegetables; everything must be done expeditiously and carefully; there can be no delay.

What is called the industrial system, including agriculture and distribution, depends on efficiency, on a timetable and a cost. It is a kind of general contract between industrial personnel and society at large.

Such then is the demand of industry. It is a demand not made by industrial enterprises but by the public. Everyone engaged in industry realises this demand by ourselves as consumers, for cheapness, promptness and serviceability.

From the public point of view then, work is not a contribution to be given when one wants, how often one wants and when one feels like it. Rather it is a contribution that, for the time being, one has committed oneself to make, and to make it efficiently at the time

promised and of the quality promised.

It is perhaps necessary to point out that these demands are quite independent of the attitudes of the employers and industrial managements who may be in varying degrees rapacious or benevolent, and who may have little appreciation of social values. No matter what the personal qualities of industrial managers may be, there is no escaping the urgent demand of the public for the fulfilment of promises.

The status of prisoners vis-a-vis society

Most prisoners return to society after serving a few years at most. They are expected to find a useful place in it. A very difficult thing to do in any case, whatever the will and resolution of the prisoner.

He will be helped if, during the term of his imprisonment he has been treated as a member of society, with the rights of a citizen, as far as this is possible when he is deprived of his liberty, his family life, his social life, and his work.

If, on discharge, he is to return to a worthwhile job, he should not only be able to do the job as it needs to be done, but he should want to do it, and be confident that he can do it. There are more indefinite things than ability, and they will depend on the treatment that the prisoner has received in prison. Not that anyone really believes that all prisoners can be rehabilitated! At least one can try, and no-one can predict success or

failure in an individual case. There are probabilities and statistics, but these do not guide one in a particular case.

Prison industry and free industry compared

The prisoner, through his supervisor and trainer in his prison workshop or elsewhere, should be brought to understand that work is not just doing things for money. Work is done for a customer, a customer very much a man, like a prisoner, who knows what he wants, when he wants it and how much he will pay. A prisoner at work is undertaking to satisfy a customer on these points.

Now, those of us who have lived in industrial life, are well aware that free men do not always see their work in this light, nor do all managers. That is a pity, and it leads not only to industrial strife and bitterness, but generates a divorce between the work and the work of others for which it is exchanged. Men want money, and their work is a means to get money. What a simple step from that point to getting money without work!

If this paper seems at times to be idealist, it is not because the writer of it has illusions either about society or about prisoners.

Nevertheless, men must pursue their ideals. That is a worthwhile job.

With these unsatisfactory conditions in some sections of free industry, the Prison Department cannot and should not draw on the experience of free industry without

carefully weighing the special circumstances of prison labour.

Of particular importance is the question of wages and the effect of them on the prisoner, his work and on the prison officer.

A powerful influence on the minds of free men is the absolutely clear relationship between their work and what they exchange for it. Because of this free men will often work at what seems to them little more than drudgery with no interest, because they are paid for it at a good rate. This influence is obviously not available in prisons at present for various good reasons. It is therefore necessary to develop other influences. The interest of prisoners in their work needs more stimulation than in outside industry, the value of their work needs clearer demonstration, and for these and other reasons the ratio of supervisors to workers needs at present to be larger than it is outside. This point is, of course, well known and as far as possible it is put into practice. But when one looks at the general conditions one is bound to say that there is a tremendous distance yet to go.

If the prisons, the prison industries with their staffs and the prisoners themselves are to be integrated with society the maximum possible contribution to society should be made. To have some 20,000 or more able-bodied persons confined in prisons is a great responsibility. Clearly, when the number of prisoners engaged on domestic work is reduced to the

barest minimum by better methods and longer hours ; when as many as possible of the prisoners are put on maintenance and constructional work for the prison service and for supply of the needs of prisoners in clothing, etc., there still remains a very large number who must work for outside bodies, such as government departments, municipal authorities and private industry. Work in this category, as well as domestic work should always be regarded not as something to fill in the time, nor even to rehabilitate but to be part and parcel of the life of the nation. In order to bring about this result, prospective customers for the products which prisoners can make must place orders, and when the prison authorities are negotiating these orders, they must be in a position to give promises, to quote a price, and to give a delivery time. To be able to do this they must have the necessary facilities, workshop space and machinery and the more obvious and essential industrial organisation.

However, even yet more is necessary. There must be a recognition by all concerned that prisoners should work not only because it is a good thing for them to be occupied, but also because what they do is necessary, and because it is necessary it must be treated seriously. Orders must be secured and efficiently dealt with. The place of work in the system of priorities is being emphasised and in assessing this place it is recognised first, that the work

of prisoners will play an ever increasing part in rehabilitation; second, that rehabilitation includes the inculcation in the minds of the prisoners of the necessity and of the value of work; third, that orders cannot be obtained on the basis of being fulfilled at any convenient time; fourth, that the work should be of the highest possible value so that in the foreseeable future when the industries and the domestic work of prisoners is running efficiently there will be economies to the taxpayer, from which all the other prison activities would benefit.

Often it has been objected that this outlook would make a prison into a factory. The answer to this objection is that if prisoners are to work, the work must be done under conditions as much like a factory as the circumstances allow, or as policy decides. A properly run factory in free society may well be an ornament to society as well as useful, may bring satisfaction to the workers in it as well as to the customers for its products.

This aspect of free factory life is worth stressing. Press reports lead one to think of it as degrading, inhuman and as without real satisfaction. There is another aspect which is not news because it is not considered interesting enough. However, that there are serious difficulties in free industry in the sphere of human relations is an indication that prisons are not alone in their struggle, and can learn much from outside.

The work of prisoners

Turning now to the work of prisoners, this too differs from play. What is done is not a pastime, not simply a means of getting good relations and curing prisoners. Work is only work if its value, its use and its necessity is recognised by all concerned. It is not work if at any time, on any pretext, it can be changed. To change is to upset the main stream of production. Of course attention is always necessary to ensure that the work done by a prisoner suits his skill, his strength, his disposition, his power of concentration, and his understanding. Errors will inevitably be made and must be corrected, but the general atmosphere ought to discourage trivial complaints and encourage a determination to stick to the job.

Domestic work is work too. It is hard to think of any work, however tedious, menial and unpleasant, which prisoners are called upon to do, which is not done by free men. But in freedom, such work has to be studied, and tedium, drudgery and bad conditions have to be improved year by year. What is necessary must be done, and it is the business of industrial management to improve the conditions under which it is done. Floor scrubbing is necessary. Well then, the prisoner must realise the necessity, and have the advantage of modern methods. For work is not something that, in the course of nature, man is obliged to do because of the sins of his forbears,

or even of his own. Work is essential to life. Work is done for man; man is not made for work. He must work as hard and as long as necessary for life. No harder and no longer.

A prisoner cannot be expected to acquire a sense of the social value of work which is felt by him to be part of his punishment.

The future

I know that the Prison Department are giving a great deal of thought to the development of work in prisons on the lines I have indicated.

There are great difficulties, and progress is slow. Why is this? First, it is necessary to have more space in prisons, and more well-trained staff. Since I became Industrial Advisor in 1958 I have had many talks with members of all grades in the Prison Service, and I know there is much enthusiasm for improving the work of prisoners.

Second, the organisation and management of prison industries

are even more crucial for prison industry than for outside industry. Labour relations are more sensitive (though some private managers in industry wish they could have as much control over men as the prisons do!) there is prejudice against the products of prison labour, there are fears that prisoners may compete unfairly.

All these matters receive careful and sympathetic attention. Considerable expenditure is involved, for building, machinery and staff, but when it is demonstrated that there is a resulting benefit, directly to the taxpayer, indirectly through more success in rehabilitation, the necessary funds are made available.

When all is said and done, time is precious. No society ought to tolerate for long the overcrowding, the shortage of staff, the unsatisfactory nature of much prison so-called "work," the insufficiency of suitable and real work.

What is needed now is to think of the ways and means and pursue them with tenacity and enthusiasm.

Clerical Collaboration

Sir,

I have read again with pleasure in our Journal No. 8 of July 1963, a splendid article by the Rev. Stanley Pearce.

I criticized one of a previous issue written by Mrs. Pauline Morris, therefore, I do not hesitate to praise this one.

I recommend all Chaplains of our Service to read it, act upon it and they will then not go far wrong in the splendid work they can do in our establishment. If they can arrive at the state of collaboration with all concerned and not stray from their functions within the team, then a lot of embarrassment to Governors and staff will become a thing of the past.

An excellent article well written, well meant and may it bear fruit.

A. RICKARD.