

SHOULD PRISONERS RECEIVE WAGES?

(Winthrop D. Lane in N. Y. Evening Post.)

When the warden of the Ohio state penitentiary said the other day that prisoners ought to receive wages, he put his finger on one of the weak points in our treatment of the offender. Only a few days earlier the New Jersey State Board of Control of Institutions and Agencies had adopted a scheme of wage payments to prisoners, applicable in both the state prison at Trenton and the reformatory at Rahway. Small sums are to be paid at the outset, ranging from 15 to 35 cents a day; these will go much farther in prison, of course, than they would go outside. The rate may be increased, it is announced later.

Wages for prisoners are advocated on several grounds. In the first place, the man who works for nothing in prison is wounded in his own response to the influences surrounding him there—in his reformability. Prison life notoriously breeds suspicion and distrust; men behind the bars are under a constant temptation to believe that everyone's hand is against them. When to this is added the fact that the product of their labor is entirely taken away from them it is not surprising that many of them become resentful and defiant. They are likely to think that the State is "kicking them a thief's example by stealing their wages." An attitude of this sort is not hospitable to reform.

Moreover, the prisoner does not know what fate is in store for him when he is released. The most terrible moment in the life of an offender is not when the prison door opens to let him in, but when it opens to let him out. He has lost his reputation. His assets may comprise only the \$5 or \$10 that the State gives him, a railroad ticket to his home, or some other point within the state, and a suit of clothes that every detective in the land can recognize as prison-made a block away. He knows not where to turn. Deprived of all normal associations and activities for months, or even years, he is suddenly cast upon his own devices. Employment is difficult to obtain without lying and lying is dangerous. Policemen watch him closely, sure that he is merely awaiting an opportunity to commit a new crime. His former associates are every ready to ply him with arguments for returning to the old life. When his slender resources are exhausted he is likely to stand, unattended and alone, in the midst of dangers. It is hardly surprising that he often relapses into crime.

Claim of the Family. If the prisoner is a married man or has dependents a third injury is inflicted. The chief breadwinner has been taken away from those who need his support. The State's responsibility ends when it puts him in prison; no obligation is recognized toward those who are left behind. The predicament of the family may be acute. To have its chief source of income suddenly taken away is a blow that not many families from which prisoners come can stand. The wife may become sick and unable to work, the children may be forced into premature labor, there may be no money for doctor's bills, discouragement and want may produce delinquency by other members of the family—there is no end to the troubles that may afflict a family in such circumstances. The records of charitable societies are filled with appeals from families whose husband and father, or eldest son, has been placed in prison. Not the least effect of this is that it inflicts punishment upon the innocent as well as upon the guilty. The effect of this situation on the father may be disastrous. Here are two letters written by the wife of a man now in the United States penitentiary at Leavenworth:

MINERS' LEADER TO VISIT CANADA



Robert Smilie, leader of the English mine workers, who has announced his intention of touring Canada and the United States. He says he intends to lay the British labor situation fully before the people of this continent.

Dear Husband: I hope you are well. I am sick and am going home tonight. Well, Willie, tell the judge to please have mercy, for Fay and Ada is crying and we ain't got nothing to eat. I don't know what I am going to do, the rent is due and nothing to pay with, and I am out of coal. I hope He is a good judge. I am going to C— tonight and I am almost krazy. Rita as soon as you can. I am afraid they put the things out of the house, the girls are crying for dad. If I was well I could work, but I ain't. Ada and Fay say dad will be home tonight. I sure wish it was true.

From your wife Laura. My dear Sweetheart: Well, pa, I hope you are well. Ada and Fay have got bad colds. I am sick all the time. I don't feel that I ever will be any better and I have no money for a doctor. Listen pa, the man was here after both stoves last night. He said he would take them in a week's time if I didn't get him \$15.00, and there ain't a cent in the house. Well, dear, I mustn't tell you so much of trouble. But I have to tell some of it.

Everything has come to trouble me. Well, dear Daddy, when you get to come home take good care of my dear little darlings. It hurts to have to tell you but I can't stand it much longer and I have prayed that there would be a way out but I can't see any yet when I look at them. And pa and ma is old, have trouble enough, but I don't feel they need my care. Well, don't feel that I am krazy. I ain't. You know dear, you look around and find the children another ma. Well, dear, I am like the song I am leaving the world behind. Fay and Ada is just like—to me when I look at them, but dear we ain't got any bread and you no I can't stand it for them. I can't eat any more, it is only for babies dear. So be good to my dears when you come. I love you, dear, as I ever did. From your true wife, Laura. I am sending all of my love. This would never happen if I was well but I can't work no more. Imagine the effect of such letters as these upon a man in prison!

Wages Can Be Paid. Against paying wages to prisoners it is argued that the cost is prohibitive. This depends upon the amount of wages paid—the New Jersey schedule calls for present for adding \$450 to the monthly payroll. Moreover, prisons have never been as economically or efficiently run as most other enterprises; where politics has not led to extravagance, sheer inefficiency has often kept earnings down. Again, the cost of the present practice is to be considered. When we total the expense involved in caring for the dependents of prisoners, whether borne by private or public agencies, and the cost of the state of re-arresting and re-confining men whose relapse into crime is due in part to their release without money, we find that a large part of the present cost can probably be saved. But the most effective answer to this argument is that a prison ought not to be regarded as a money-making institution; its purposes are to protect society and to rehabilitate offenders. We do not ask hospitals, insane asylums, homes for the feeble-minded or schools to be self-supporting; we regard them as investments for the common good. Prisons ought to be similarly regarded.

Another objection is that prisoners are not entitled to wages. They are criminals, it is said, and ought to be made to pay the state for their arrest, trial, and maintenance. This is in line with the view that the purpose of confinement is punishment, pure and simple. It is not the view of modern penology, which regards the prisoner as a ward of the state, not its victim. Moreover, it is the view under which our prisons have been the failures that they have been, under which so many offenders have become "repeaters." Some change is desirable. To stop looking upon the prisoner as an economic asset may be the place to begin. A third objection is that putting money into the hands of prisoners is bad for them. Undoubtedly many offenders are incapable of using money wisely, although this is an objection that can be raised against their earning wages on the outside as well. The difficulty can be met, however, in two ways; first, by paying that portion of the prisoner's wage intended for his family direct to it or by turning it over to a trustee; second, by holding that portion meant for the prisoner, until his discharge. There is also the general consideration that it is not fair to penalize those who need the money for the sake of those who will spend it foolishly.

Experience in regard to paying wages to prisoners has been too limited to permit any positive conclusions. Twenty-six states have laws allowing compensation of some sort, but most of these are dead letters. California allows \$1.50 a day, but the law has been inoperative in Nebraska, New Hampshire, and other states have refused to appropriate money for this purpose, although statutes allow it. In New York the amount paid in prisoners' wages is limited by law to 10 per cent. of the earnings of the institution. In practice it is a cent and a half a day! We may expect to see a growing opinion in favor of this relief to the offender.

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Sept. 25, '20.

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MUTT AND JEFF—IN A CASE LIKE THIS JEFF WOULD PREFER SCRAMBLING UNDER A BED

By "BUD" FISHER

Comic strip panels showing a conversation about burglar alarms. Panel 1: 'I've got the greatest burglar alarm on the market! If I can make a sale to Jeff I'll be able to land spins and Sir Sidney, too.' Panel 2: 'Jeff, I'm gonna install a system that will warn you of burglars.' Panel 3: 'A burglar? A gat?' Panel 4: 'See? Just as soon as a burglar opens your window the bell will start to ring and you'll know a burglar is entering! Only seven bucks.' Panel 5: 'Nix! I wouldn't take it as a gift.' Panel 6: 'But it's cheap protection! This little bell will warn you when a burglar's in the house and you can get up and protect your property.' Panel 7: 'But I don't care to be warned—' Panel 8: 'My goodness! Doz look like a man that wants to come in contact with a burglar?'