

PRISON AIDES GET PLEA FOR CANDOR

DEC—9—1971

Parley of Experts Calls for
Honesty About Failure
NYTimes

By LESLEY OELSNER
Special to The New York Times

WILLIAMSBURG, Va., Dec.

8—The 350 penal experts assembled here by the Justice Department ended their meeting today with a call for a "new candor" in relations between their profession and the public.

Up to now, they agreed, the country's corrections officials have not been honest with the public, and as a result the officials themselves have prevented prison reform.

Only if corrections officials are "frankly candid" about their massive failures, they said, can they expect any public sympathy or help.

"The concensus of this conference," Oliver J. Keller Jr., director of Florida's Division of Youth Services, said this morning, is that "the watchword for all of us is to open the door."

'We Must Be Honest'

"We must be completely honest," he said. "We've got to let the public know that the traditional means of handling offenders have not worked."

Mr. Keller, summarizing the reports of each of the 15 discussion groups into which the delegates had been divided, told the assembly this morning that "corrections, it was the unanimous feeling, has done a terrible job in the past of getting the support we need."

At least part of the reason for this failure, he said, is "correctional incest."

"We have been isolated from the public," speaking only to one another, avoiding the public, avoiding even other segments of the criminal justice system, he said.

More than that, he said, "we have not been honest about our problems and our needs."

Perhaps, he suggested, his is because "correction has been so plitical."

'Research Avoided'

He said that corrections officials "have avoided objective research" that might indicate success and failures. They have not given "meaningful priorities" to the Government and public, tending instead to present their needs "like a great Christmas shopping list with no indication of what is truly important," he said.

One problem with this approach, the delegates agreed, is that the public tends to expect more than it should from corrections.

Arguments about whether prisons should be expected to reform or merely to hold inmates occurred throughout the conference, in discussion groups, in the corridors, even at meals.

This morning, delegates were told that the consensus was that the public should expect only "some" rehabilitation from the prisons.

Solving the Problems

"Let's make it known that we are not expected to solve all the problems," said Mrs. Dora Somerville, an executive of the Illinois Department of Corrections, who summarized the conference's feelings on the question.

Mr. Keller said: "We've got to let the public know that something is expected of it, too."

Another theme that has run through the conference is that, despite at least a century of recommendations for prison reform, the prisons are still "colleges of crime," as President Nixon said in his recorded message to the conference Monday.

Most of the delegates appeared to feel that the Nixon Administration's interest in the corrections field indicated some hope of better things to come. But most were not quite as optimistic as the Nixon officials who spoke here.

Their recommendations, as summarized this morning, indicated their wariness.

Imprisonment Opposed

Many recommendations held that the offenders should be kept out of prison and in some cases not even prosecuted, according to Robert J. Kutak, deputy commissioner of the American Bar Association's Commission on Corrections, who made the summary.

This, said Mr. Kutak, indicated the delegates' belief that too many correctional programs lack any substantially redeeming social value.

Some of the recommendations, he said, were bold. One called for the codification of a prisoner bill of rights, for instance; another would require judges to explain each sentence they impose.

After the conference concluded, the commission that will study its recommendations—the National Commission on Criminal Justice, Standards and Goals—began an organizational meeting here. Norman A. Carlson, director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, said his department would study each of the conference's proposals.