

Another matter contributing to our staffing position is the fact that for some years prior to the war there was an insidious anti-authoritarian propaganda campaign carried on by a group of extremists in what may be termed an anarchistic effort to impede and break down law-enforcement machinery. In the United States of America and Canada it was known as "communist penitentiary propaganda." The tactics adopted were to foment discontent in prison, both in regard to staff and to the prisoners, and to disparage the status of prison-work in order to prejudice recruitment.

The outbreak of war witnessed, both in New Zealand and abroad, an impetus to this nuisance by reason of the fact that many pacifists, military defaulters, and their sympathizers aligned themselves as fellow-travellers with the extremists in their policy of disparagement and creating discord.

The staff deeply resented the unfair attacks made on their character and status. It seriously affected morale and has undoubtedly hindered recruitment.

It was refreshing to read the tribute paid to his prison staff by the Attorney-General of Canada :

To take a group of men of varying dispositions and temperament, to keep them steadily at work, guarding against escapes and infractions, to be prepared at any moment to endanger one's life or ready to grapple with a refractory prisoner, and bring the men back at closing a little better for having been under one's care, demands high qualities of manhood and resourcefulness.

In all callings where human factors are involved, the success or otherwise of the work is largely contingent on the attitude and quality of the staff concerned. This is predominantly the case with the Prison Service, where throughout the working-day, in one manner or another, there is a play of personality upon personality.

To-day prison-work has the dignity not only of labour, but of service. It is concerned with the shaping of the lives of men. Few fields of work offer as many opportunities for genuine and satisfying community service. The work is unlike almost any other branch of the Public Service and cannot be measured by ordinary departmental standards, nor, as is the case with a business concern, can the efficacy of a prison administration be gauged by ledger balances alone. Its value is judged to-day not merely as a social quarantine to protect society for the time being by removing elements dangerous to its health, but by its more enduring influence in reshaping the lives of wayward men.

A Department which deals with human beings and problems of human behaviour cannot function as an impersonal machine. The human touch is vital, for it must assume the common humanity of those committed to its care and of those who have to deal with them. The self-respect of the prisoner must not be lowered, but strengthened, also his sense of social obligation and duty as a citizen. The self-respect of the staff and the esteem in which they are held, both inside and outside the prison, is dependent on their attitude towards those placed in their care. The prison officer must be able to deal understandingly with all sorts and conditions of people in an attitude of objectivity and patience.

The Department notes with interest the institution of a Chair of Social Science at Victoria University College, and already discussions have taken place with Professor Marsh with a view to exploring the practicability of co-ordinating academic study with the practical work of the Department and providing a tutorial service for the staff. Whilst, in general, one would be inclined to agree with the views of the Scottish Prison Service that the "long-haired University type" is not always the most effectual in the Prison Service, and that practical men of common-sense are to be preferred, it must nonetheless be granted that a study of the social sciences gives a background appreciation of behaviour problems and assists in dealing more understandingly with them. Competence in prison-work has its roots in actual experience on the job, or what is termed "in-service training."