

Uncle Sam's Parole System Proves 98% Efficient



Convict Getting "Another Chance" Faces Maximum Re-Sentence for Violation

By THADDEUS A. DAVIS
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Coast District

(as told to Gerald B. Burnett)

WITH the blind goddess Justice sharpening her teeth for another bite into the golden apple of crime and racketeering; with the United States Department of Justice not content to rest upon its laurels but going out to earn new ones; with states and counties and cities looking upon their law enforcement agencies in a new light; it looks like a hard spring and summer and fall for crime.

But after they have caught the criminals, what then? Will they, in the words of the old song, "walk right in and turn around and walk right out again?"

In some states the parole and probation laws have become creatures of political jobbery that have made honest lawyers, prosecutors and judges shudder with dismay.

The cop on the beat has made his arrest, the district attorney has gained his conviction and the judge pronounced his sentence only to see a hardened criminal slide out from under payment of the penalty by the machinations of underworld politicians in cahoots with special pleaders before conniving parole boards.

It is a fact that in the Pacific Coast states some heinous crimes, including wanton murder of peace officers, have been committed recently by paroled criminals. No person of humanitarian instincts has a quarrel with the principles of probation or parole. Many do question the practices as they read in daily papers of paroled criminals of the most vicious type turning back to their old ways a few days after leaving prison with terms but partly served.

BUT there is a new side to the parole story today. The Federal government, which has shown the way to strict enforcement of kidnaping and anti-racketeering laws, has also shown that it is possible to make probation and parole a new deal and a fair deal to both the defendant before its courts and the public.

Only two per cent of the men and women who were granted probation in the Federal courts last year violated their trust, just 31 persons went back on their agreement out of 1413 on the probationers' list. Parolees, of whom there were about 200 under supervision of our office in the Southern district of California, also kept to the two per cent record.

Compared with figures for cities, counties and the state this record is phenomenal. It did not just happen, either. It came about through the most systematic method of investigation and constant checking in use anywhere today.

The secret of Federal probation and parole success in our district lies in a newly-devised "rehabilitation committee" which began to function this year. The only one of its kind in the country, this committee plan was worked out by myself and assistants, Mrs. Alice Allen, second woman to be appointed probation officer in the Federal system; Calvin H. Meador, and Fred T. Purdy, well known in Los Angeles for his 20 years of relief work direction for Masonic lodges.

Practically every city, town and

village in the counties from the Mexican line to Mono, Mariposa, Merced and San Luis Obispo on the North has one or two members of the rehabilitation committee living in it. They have been selected, after rigid investigation, to look after the welfare of probationers and parolees in their communities. They are not paid, in money, but they are repaid in human values for devoting their time unstintingly to the restoration of men and women to a self-respecting place in society.

THE professional criminal dreads facing a Federal "rap." He knows from long observation that violators of Federal laws pay the full penalty for their crimes. True there is time off for good behavior, as much as three months a year if he lives up to the letter of the law in the penitentiary and he may get a "210" or good time parole.

But there is a joker in the Federal probation laws that appears when the probationer signs his papers. A very succinct sentence reads, "At any time within the period of your probation, OR WITHIN THE MAXIMUM PERIOD FOR WHICH YOU MIGHT ORIGINALLY HAVE BEEN SENTENCED FOR THE OFFENSE FOR WHICH YOU WERE CONVICTED, the Court may, for cause, impose the sentence which it might have imposed in the first instance."

In other words, if a man might have been sentenced for 50 years but was sentenced only for 10 and actually served only 5, in prison with 5 years probation to follow, at any time in the next 35 years, even though he fulfills his probationary period satisfactorily, he is subject to the sharp teeth of the law should he re-enter criminal pursuits.

To have a Damoclean sword like that hanging suspended over you by the slender thread of keeping on the straight-and-narrow path is a crime deterrent that has proven eminently satisfactory.

THE Federal probation officer handles two distinct types of offenders, the one who has paid and the one who has earned another chance from the judge. In 1934 the judges for the southern district listened to the plea, "Give me another chance," and granted it 410 times.

These probationers go back to their home towns where they are visited frequently by members of the rehabilitation committee and probation officers from Los Angeles. No cursory visit, these frequent inspections make sure that the offender is employed, living in good surroundings and associating with the right persons. The story of the probationer is checked and re-checked through disinterested sources.

It is seldom that one hears of a Federal parolee being picked up for committing another crime. In the first place, applications for parole from a Federal penitentiary are probably more closely scrutinized than those of any other penal institution. Not only a man's prison record but every known fact of his previous life is studied. Special investigations are made to bring the data up to

Under a new system of constant checking of paroled Federal prisoners, a new high mark of 98 per cent has been set. These photos show two of the Federal prisons—but from Alcatraz Island, in San Francisco Bay, upper left, there is neither escape nor parole. McNeil's Island, Puget Sound, shown in the upper right, is not so severe, however, and men frequently are granted probation. But it's probation with a grim joker attached, according to Thaddeus A. Davis, chief parole officer of the southern Federal Pacific Coast district, shown in the upper center photo.

WHEN the iron doors clang shut behind a prisoner on bleak Alcatraz Island, the federal penitentiary in San Francisco Bay, they close for the duration of his sentence. For only the most vicious of Uncle Sam's convicts are condemned to Alcatraz—the Al Capones and the "Machine Gun" Kelleys and others of their ilk—and the chances of parole are slim indeed. However, with his less desperate criminals, those who are quartered at McNeil's Island, the other federal island prison in Puget Sound, and in Leavenworth and Atlanta, Uncle Sam gives them opportunity to gain their freedom ahead of the expiration of their sentence if they are model prisoners. The remarkable record of this federal parole system—a system that is 98 per cent efficient—and the method by which it operates, is told in this story by Thaddeus E. Davis, the man who heads the work in one of the federal districts of the Pacific Coast.

date. Then, provided everything is in order, the parole is granted when it has been earned by serving the required period of time. The type of criminal sent to Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay has little or no chance of parole. Only the most desperate and vicious types filter through

Federal Committee Keeps Constant Check On Those Released; Job Is Necessary

the Federal penal system to Alcatraz and there they will serve their full sentences. But from McNeil's Island, Leavenworth and Atlanta come many parolees.

One of the conditions of parole is that a man have a job.

There are several business institutions that prefer paroled men and men on probation to the ordinary man they might pick up anywhere. They reason, these employers, that a man who has made a first mistake is not so liable to make a second one. Henry Ford is one of the largest employers of parolees and has had uniformly good results with them.

THE depression period was very hard on paroled men who were trying to make good. Many lost their jobs.

Fewer parolees are granted from Federal institutions than others. Only genuine merit rates a Federal parole. Politics, or having friends in the right places, gains no paroles from Uncle Sam. Under the southern district system, with its far-flung network of supervisors in every municipality, Federal offenders are the most closely supervised of all, and due to the stringent terms of parole, violations are made certain of bringing prompt punishment.

The parole and probation office here is one of the biggest jobs of its kind in the United States. Our district embraces 90,000 square miles with 3,500,000 inhabitants. In these 17 counties there are parolees in almost every community.

A veritable melting pot of the world, this district includes almost every nationality. The Mexican border offers rich rewards for the smuggler of aliens, liquor and narcotics. The many Indian reservations encourage illicit gains from the sale of liquor to the red man. The mountains and deserts offer splendid hideaways for criminal activities. But the probation officers carry on, beating the handicap of the great area to be covered by the new committee system.

FOR the man who reasons with figures here is some convincing proof of the way probation and parole save money for the taxpayer. It costs \$25,000 to transport 100 Federal prisoners from Los Angeles to McNeil's Island and maintain them for one year.

If they possess salvage value, that same 100 can be supervised and made into self-supporting and law-abiding citizens under probation or parole at a cost of \$4000.

Nationally, Federal probation has salvaged more than 90 per cent of those entrusted to its care. In this district the record was 97 per cent in 1933 and 98 per cent in 1934.

My philosophy in the handling of the first offender who is placed in my care after serving a prison sentence, or before incarceration if the judge so decides, is summed up in this way:

There are no first offenders in real truth. Few of us have not at some time violated some section or statute of law. The only reason we are not now in the felon class is that we were not caught.

It is well in dealing with the

other fellow not to lose sight of some of our own misdeeds.

Federal probation is still in its infancy. It has been an activity of the Department of Justice only since 1929. Yet so rapid has been its growth and so startling its success that those who were its chief opponents are now loudest in its praises.

Just Some Old Spanish Customs

BACK from a three-year trip that took him into all quarters of the globe, Fred Weybret, former Salinas, Calif., publisher, says he found in Spain the ideal place to live. He spent two winters there.

"Of course," he adds, "there are some things about Spanish customs that are a little difficult for an American to get used to. The elevators, for example, only run up. If you want to get down, you walk. As near as I could find out, there is no good reason for it—merely habit.

"By no stretch of the imagination could a Spanish elevator operator be inveigled into carrying baggage or deliveries of any kind on his elevator. No, sir! If you came home with a package from the grocery, or a ton of coal from the coal-yard, you had to pack it up the steps.

"And the markets! Spain certainly has gone the limit in the trend toward specialization. One market may carry beef, but if you happen to want pork for dinner, you will have to go to a pork market. Chickens are handled in still another market—and, by the way, every part of a chicken is used for the trade. Chicken blood is a high delicacy, and the fowl are very carefully held over a bowl to catch the blood when they are killed."

Weybret found that nobody in Spain breaks his neck in his hurry to accomplish things. "If not today, tomorrow or the next day" seems to be the national motto.

"Movies and the operas do not begin until 10 or 11 o'clock at night," he said. "Practically the whole country sleeps late in the morning. At noon they close their shops for lunch, after which they take a siesta, or nap. Probably three hours later they will reopen their places for the afternoon's business—if any.

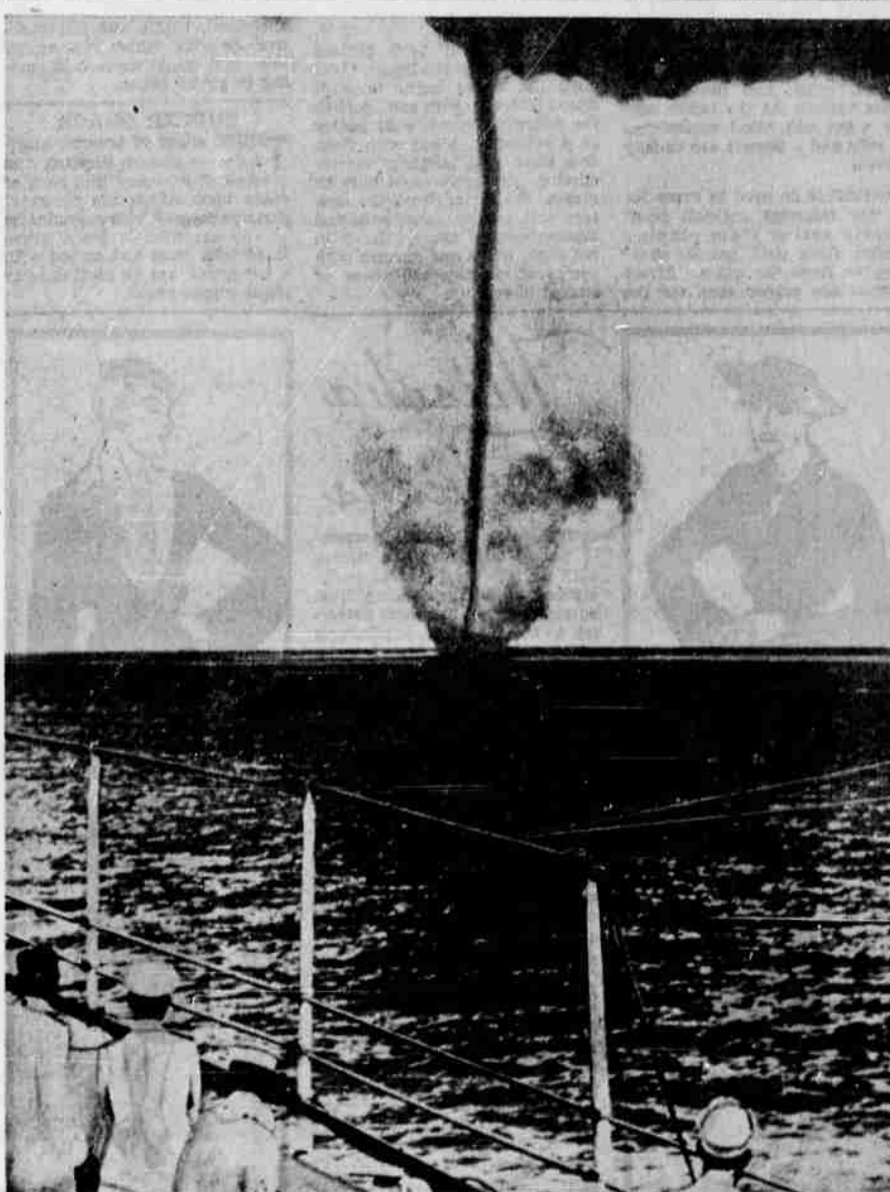
"In the apartment we had rented, a water faucet sprung a leak. I notified the porter that we would like to have it fixed immediately.

"I will notify the manager as quickly as possible," she replied. "But tomorrow is a holiday, the next day is Sunday, Monday is another holiday, and so he will get my letter on Tuesday. He will notify the plumber on Wednesday and the plumber will be here promptly on Thursday to fix it for you! As a matter of fact, the plumber did not arrive for eight days. In the meantime I had gone out and purchased a pair of cheap pliers and fixed it myself in about ten minutes."

Yes, Weybret says he likes Spain. But he came back to the United States to live.

***** And the Camera Caught It! *****

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Luckily the cameraman was "on deck" to catch a water-spout as it swooped dramatically out of the sea less than 500 yards from the U. S. S. Pittsburgh, cruiser of the United States fleet.