

South Carolina: The Employed Inmate

Like California, South Carolina has some of the worst prisons and some of the best. Its maximum security Central Correctional Institution may be the worst dungeon in the country, a 104-year-old five-story granite mass with iron catwalks from which, in the past, inmates had thrown guards and fellow inmates to their death below.

But architecture is not the critical judgment of a prison system. The state's director of corrections, William D. Leeke is trying to get rid of his dungeon, but in the meantime he has started a program of work release centers.

Leeke has leased small buildings near each of the state's major cities, turned

them into open dormitories and moved in prisoners who have served at least a year in the regular prison without major trouble. Professional and volunteer workers find jobs for the prisoners, jobs that seem to have a future and that pay going wages. The prisoners leave each morning and return at night, unsupervised during the day.

At night, the dormitory doors are locked only because neighbors occasionally sneak in and steal things from the convicts.

Donnie Lee-Tyler of Greenville is on his second conviction, serving five years for breaking and entering. South Carolina spends less on its prisoners than almost any other state, \$1,882 a year. In addition, Tyler's wife and

three small children were on welfare, \$89 a month.

In his work release dormitory, Tyler gets up at 8:30, has breakfast in the small dining room, picks up his bag lunch and drives to work in his boss's red pickup truck. He works for a dry wall company for \$3.25 an hour.

Tyler earns \$176.75 gross pay, out of which he pays \$14.70 in federal taxes, \$9.14 in Social Security, and \$2.25 in state taxes. From his take-home wages he pays the state \$24.50 for room and board at the dormitory, \$100 to his wife (who has gone off-welfare), \$12 for his own spending (an occasional bought lunch or movie and a stereo set and records for his cubicle in the dorm) and the rest for a saving account

when he gets out. He can go home on weekends. He could escape at any time but he hasn't.

South Carolina, like everyone else, has not kept very good records. But of all men in such programs over seven years, only 14 per cent have been sent back to the state prison system after their release. The usual rate for released prisoners is 40 to 70 per cent.

The men on release are already working at good jobs in their home cities and have noncriminal associations. For some unfathomable reason, parole boards regularly turn down such men's requests for parole, though such prisoners seem to have a spectacularly low return to crime.

California: Juvenile on Team Probation

Billy Summers (not his real name) is 14. He is on his second conviction, the first for truancy and stealing bikes, the second for running away, breaking into a trailer and stealing a gun. He was headed for an institution. If he followed the national average, he would be a threat to society and himself for most of the rest of his life: the national statistics say he would be arrested seven more times in a lengthy criminal career.

But Billy did not go to an institution. Instead, the state of California paid his home county, Yuba, \$4,000 to keep Billy at home and school under special help from a team of young probation workers.

This is not ordinary probation. If it had been, Billy would have left the courtroom after his sentence, filled out a one-page form and been told by the probation officer to drop by once a month. Other than that, the only time the system would hear from Billy, or Billy from the system, would be when he was arrested again.

This time the probation team — two young men in their mid-twenties, two young women, plus their supervisor, Mrs. Maxine

Singer — collected all the available records on Billy — criminal and school. The worker assigned to his case, Pat Clark, in her early thirties, visited Billy's school and home. Another member of the team interviewed Billy for 2½ hours with a tape recorder. The next Friday the team listened to the tape, making analyses and comments along the way.

Several times Billy is heard on the tape saying:

"My mother is always hollering at me."

"Why do you suppose she does that?"

"I don't know. I'd like to tell her to shut up but she'd knock-me down. I did it once and she whipped me so I ran away."

He hated school. The teachers were "always hollering at me."

Billy described fights between his mother and his father (now in jail), how once his father beat his mother and pulled a pistol on her and Billy and his older brother threw themselves on their father.

"Why do you think he did a thing like that?"

"I don't know. Maybe he drinks too much."

His mother constantly tells him how terrible his father is.

"I don't like for her to keep saying bad things about my Dad. Maybe she does some wrong things but he's still my Dad."

A student probation officer sitting in for training suggests that Billy has a deeply ingrained resistance to any authority. The regular workers disagree and say they think the trainee is projecting his own standards of behavior into Billy's case. They think the facts of Billy's home and school life are more helpful in explaining his attitude toward parental authority than any theory of deeply ingrained antagonism.

"I guess we all agree on one thing," Mrs. Singer says with a smile. "Whoever works with Billy shouldn't holler at him."

They agree that he is immature, withdrawn and not very articulate and that he needs to experience a relationship with an adult that he can trust.

But Pat Clark discovers something that his school, his home and his present-tending report hadn't found out: Billy can't read. His school had promoted him and refused remedial reading work. She arranges it.

"That could have something to do with his truancy

and the teacher 'hollering.'"

"Miss Clark genuinely likes to fish. So does Billy. They do it regularly. But the probation effort is more than buddiship. Miss Clark talks often with Billy's mother and has come to like her and see strengths. They are a white migrant family from Arkansas never involved with much city or town life. Miss Clark sees her job not as replacing Billy's mother, but in helping mother and son to deal with each other more successfully. She arranges for him to spend time with a man in the community who has kids-in-to work on engines.

If Billy had gone to an institution it may or may not have helped him. But in any event, when he came out he would have two choices — go off on his own with friends he made in the institution or return to his home, where conditions and relationships would have been the same as before. He may learn how to read, finally. And he may learn how to trust people and trust himself. There are no certainties in his present program. The only certainty is that conventional commitment programs usually fail.