

The shooting at Norfolk Monday is another of those recurring incidents which prove that life in Massachusetts prisons will not be humanized overnight; and that there are, without question, many inmates who may never qualify for the benefits of reform.

It is all very well for Gov. Sargent to declare, as he did only a few days ago, that he has complete trust in the ability of Comr. John Boone to put into effect the reforms outlined in the omnibus prison bill passed last month.

But it takes more than a change in the statutes — or in the prison personnel — to undo what years of violence and repressive confinement have done to brutalize the attitudes of many of the inmates, who recognize no law but that of the jungle.

This is the warning guards and corrections officers have been voicing. In the main, it has been ignored. But the governor cannot afford to dismiss what has happened at Norfolk as merely the isolated and desperate act of a desperate inmate — as one of his spokesmen has attempted to do.

There have been five homicides at Norfolk and Walpole in four days; and these are only the most recent in a series of violent events. It is an accepted fact that, more than ever in the past, the cons are running the prisons, and the guards and corrections officers have been reduced to the role of custodians.

If this is a reflection of the new policy ordered by Comr. Boone — others complain it is no policy at all, merely excessive permissiveness — then the governor should involve himself personally in the task of discovering the facts of the situation and what is to be done to correct it.

Certainly, he must even consider the question of whether Comr. Boone is the man for the job, though he publicly reasserts his confidence in him.

Recent resignations of high corrections department officials assume added significance as a result of Norfolk County Atty. George Burke's disclosure he had alerted prison officials to a planned break more than a week before.

When he resigned two weeks ago, Walpole Supt. Robert H. Donnelly also disclosed a "tremendous lack of communications" within the department, and explained he could not do the job he wanted to. Donnelly, a former deputy superintendent of California's Soledad prison, was brought here by Boone.

Spokesmen for the guards' union have complained on several occasions that they have sought

a meeting with the governor to explain their interpretation, from first-hand experience, of what is happening in the prisons. On each occasion, they say, they have been repulsed though Gov. Sargent has not hesitated to listen to the prisoners' complaints or to the advice of outsiders. It is time to air the entire story.

If negligence by corrections personnel permitted the guns used in Monday's shooting to be smuggled into the prison, as Comr. Boone has inferred, then the guilty persons should be identified and their actions punished.

But their principal complaint is that they have been hamstrung in their efforts to perform their duty and have been stripped of all authority to exercise preventive discipline because of their system's new preoccupation with the idea that reform is synonymous with elimination of punishment and emphasis on rehabilitation.

But, rehabilitation of hardened recidivists will come slowly — if at all — if it is attempted while relieving them of any sense of responsibility for their acts, as any student of human behavior will testify.

There is no doubt that Comr. Boone is acting with the best of intentions — supported by the most advanced modern theory — and that it is the hope, generally, of the public that he will succeed in bringing about a change in penology in this state.

But it will take more than good intentions to make an effective break with the past. That will come only through cooperative effort of prisoners as well as prison personnel.

Massachusetts wants no repetition of Attica, nor of the frequently brutal and violent outbursts at Walpole, Norfolk and Concord. But the shootings, stabbings and bludgeonings, the planned breakout attempts, the unsolved murders of inmates and the cold-blooded shooting of guards seriously jeopardize public confidence in what is being tried as an alternative.

In the meantime, order must be maintained at Norfolk, Walpole, Concord and other institutions under the control of the Corrections Department, and a reasonable degree of safety both for prisoners under the state's care and personnel assigned to their supervision. Morale is now at a low ebb.

It would seem a lot of basic and fundamental corrections work needs to be done to restore safety and sanity within the prisons before risking such innovations as half-way houses and released time.

Aug. 4 - Boston Globe Sargent ducks prison blame

Of three young innocents who attended high school together some years ago, one went to prison for murder, another became his guard at Walpole and the third became a political reporter who finds himself writing about them.

Given a chance sunny day here, a rainy day there, their roles could have been interchangeable; such is the manner in which kismet or fate works its way upon us, spinning and swirling our lives as though we were rudderless barks at sea.



GOV. SARGENT

was a demonstration by 50 angry welfare recipients.

Welfare and corrections are the two most critical problems facing Massachusetts society today and, at the rate things are going, the problems will proceed to get much worse before any cure is found.

For at stake is a new political philosophy whereby the traditional concepts of punishment for wrongdoing and working for a living have become questionable. The "new politics" believes in complete freedom, the sexual revolution, abortion, the guaranteed annual income, college campuses run by students, the prisons run by the inmates, the opening up of things.

Gov. Sargent, through his appointment and backing of Boone and Steven Minter, the commissioner of the Department of Public Welfare, and others, is apparently willing to take the path of the new politics, at least in these two areas.

"He doesn't belong in Walpole," the guard said recently. "He belongs in Bridgewater. He needs help. But we can't get him in."

The system is failing, that convict, as it is failing hundreds of others, despite the trumpeted talk about "prison reform."

On Wednesday there were two developments at the State House. One was the meeting of prison guards with Gov. Sargent and Corrections Comr. John O. Boone. The other

The welfare situation gets worse and worse and the governor, who once contended that the "flat grant" system would help solve the problem, has washed his hands of it and has called on Washington to take over. So currently more welfare recipients get more money, guaranteed. The flat grant in Massachusetts is, in effect, a guaranteed annual income, beating George McGovern to the White House by some time.



COMR. BOONE

killed in Norfolk Prison Monday — watch out.

In typical fashion, the governor, who is chiefly responsible for the looseness in control of inmates, again washed his hands of the matter. He first absolved Boone of any responsibility, thereby absolving himself. Boone blamed Norfolk Supt. George Bohlinger, who was hired by Boone, for lack of security. The prison guards blamed Boone.

But Sargent appointed Boone, who appointed Bohlinger. So it is Sargent, as the chief executive, who has set the tone in the area of corrections.

And the only convicts who seem to have benefited from these "reforms" are the tough cons who run the prisons. Now, with permission to roam about at will, they have even more control. And the guards less.

Should not the governor, who has initiated these sweeping changes in corrections and welfare, be held accountable when something blows up? Apparently not.

The commissioner's job, Sargent said, is like being "the admiral of the fleet. The policy maker cannot be responsible for the weapons getting behind the walls."

If Boone is the admiral of the fleet, what is Secretary of Human Services Peter Goldmark? The Secretary of the Navy? And, indeed, what is Sargent then?

It is pretty good public relations to sign the prison reform bill within the walls of Norfolk, as the governor did last month. But be sure to take a long walk when the system breaks down.

Peter Lucas is a Globe State House reporter.



Board of Selectmen

Norfolk, Massachusetts

August 15, 1972

To: All Mayors, Selectmen, Aldermen and City Councillors of the Commonwealth

May we ask for your support in a most crucial situation involving policy changes and security at all our penal institutions.

The Board of Selectmen of Norfolk has met with MCI Norfolk Superintendent Bohlinger, Security Officer of Norfolk Mr. Bettincourt and our Chief of Police. As a result of these meetings, it is very clear that the policy changes made by the Department of Correction affect the safety of guards, local and State Police, and area citizens as well as every citizen of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The lives of the rehabilitative inmates are being threatened and jeopardized as attested by the most recent incidents, a murder of a prisoner on July 27th who wrote to express his concern to Senator McCann, and the recent catastrophe at Norfolk on July 31st, claiming the lives of two guards and permanently injuring another. The opinion of the guards is that "the system as a result of policy changes has created a jungle rather than a workable penal system. The hard-core prisoner is running our prison system". The MCI Norfolk prison was originally designed to be an open type minimum security institution with dormitory style living quarters. It is now becoming a maximum security prison without the proper facilities, means, and capabilities for providing adequate protection to the surrounding communities.

We ask you to join with us to request the Governor to instruct the Commissioner of the Department of Correction to return to a more conservative approach rather than the permissiveness and policies of treating all inmates equal. There are many men within the prison system that are non-rehabilitative who under the present conditions have risen to the top to gain control of the inner prisons. THIS MUST STOP. Under this system, the prisoner most likely to be rehabilitated is swallowed up by this radical hard-core prisoner.

Please join with us now before it is too late. Write the Governor to express your concern on a problem we all share. Would you be so kind as to send us a copy of your letter.

Very truly yours,

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Charles J. Bettincourt
Richard B. Potter
Robert K. Stenberg

/jr

Encl., Letter from Norfolk Police Chief
Copies of Articles from Newspapers



Norfolk Police Department

Norfolk, Massachusetts

SAMUEL J. JOHNSTON
Chief

August 8, 1972

Dispatcher -- Tel. 528-3232
Station -- Tel. 528-3206

Board of Selectmen
Norfolk
Massachusetts

Gentlemen:

As you know, I expressed concern about policies of M C I, Norfolk inmates being allowed outside the walls on work details with only minimum security.

As you are well aware, a tragic occurrence has taken place resulting in the deaths of two officers and an inmate and his wife.

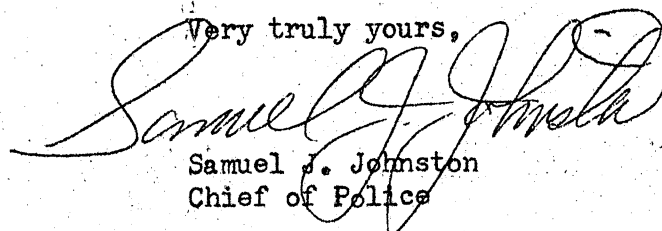
Gentlemen, if you could have been there when I arrived and seen the stark terror and fear on the faces of the female civilian employees and the disgust of the correction officers, I am sure that you would know something is wrong with the system. I have also noticed that the inmates are more cocky and belligerent towards the officers than in the past. I wish to express my deep feeling that more trouble and deaths are eminent unless policies of leniency are changed by the administration. I do believe that Superintendent Bolinger is a very capable person but apparently the Commissioner will not allow him to run the institution.

In my years of service as a police officer and Chief, I have never seen morale as low as it is now with the correction officers. I have had officers report assaults to me on them by inmates several times. This type of lenient policy can only result in one thing -- complete chaos of our system. After all, the inmates are there because they can not or will not conform to our society's laws.

My deepest concern at the moment is the safety of the citizens of Norfolk and I have no doubt that if things continue to progress as they have that the next step is a mass escape of inmates into the Town of Norfolk.

I sincerely request that you take what ever steps are necessary to return security to M C I, Norfolk including conference with the Governor and the Commissioner of Correction.

Very truly yours,



Samuel J. Johnston
Chief of Police

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Communication from the Board of Selectmen,
Norfolk, Mass. requesting the City Council to confer with the Governor and the Commissioner of the Department of Correction involving policy changes and security at all penal institutions

September 11, 1972

*Tabled - Copies to
ALL COUNCILLORS*

Sept 18/ 1972

Placed on File

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