

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Sixty - Third Legislature.

SENATE.

No. 59.

STATE OF MAINE.

Your Committee on State Prison to which was referred the remonstrances against convict labor have had the subject under consideration and would offer the following report :

It must be obvious to every philanthropic person that employment for the convict is absolutely necessary. To condemn them to confinement and then to inaction of mind and body is to inflict a punishment of extraordinary cruelty.

In the judgment of medical experts it would end in many cases in insanity, and in all cases would leave the convict a worse man when he left the Prison than when he entered.

The necessity of employment being conceded, there can be no doubt that the convicts should be put to some useful trade or calling in order, first, that the expense of their maintenance, at least in part, be repaid by their own labor ; and second, that when their sentences expire and they go forth again into the world, they may have the means of acquiring an honest livelihood. Prison discipline must look to the reform of the convict as the leading matter. Make him an honest, industrious man, and society is the gainer.

But alike employment is essential to the welfare of the convicts, it is unwise and unfair policy on the part of the State to work them in such manner as shall needlessly interfere with the business of any citizen or class of citizens.

When that is done an inequitable burden is laid upon the citizens, and they have good cause to complain of the policy of the State.

In the judgment of your Committee the remedy lies in the introduction of a variety of employments in the Prison, and by thus dividing and sub-dividing the labor of the convicts prevent any large competition with outside business.

As long as so many of the convicts are employed in carriage and harness making there will undoubtedly be an unfair interference with that branch of business in the State and with all the mechanical labor employed in it. Your Committee is of the opinion that a certain proportion of the convicts can be profitably employed in the manufacture of whips, a certain proportion on corn brooms, a certain proportion on baskets, and a certain proportion on kitchen chairs.

If the labor of the above number of convicts shall be divided among those handicrafts, and still others could be added there would be no complaint outside, for the small amount of any one thing manufactured would not create a great interference in the general business of the State.

In the handicrafts named there would be labor for the unskilled as well as the skilled. And the period of apprenticeship could be profitably employed in turning the lathe, in pounding the ash for baskets and in various other preliminary processes.

One marked advantage would result to the Prison industry from the introduction of these simple handicrafts from the fact that, being so easily learned, the convicts of short sentences could be profitably employed in them.

In this way in the judgment of your Committee all the expense of the change of industries would in a very short period be fully made up to the State. Additional overseers would be needed to instruct in the new branches and some inexpensive new buildings would be required.

The Committee therefore recommend that a contingent appropriation be made for these purposes, subject to the direction of the Governor and Council. Perhaps for a year or two

the expenses of the Prison would be slightly increased by these changes, but in the judgment of your Committee the expense is one which should be cheerfully assumed by the State in the interest of our home industries, and in justice to a most worthy class of our fellow citizens.

With the carriage and harness industry of the Prison reduced to the same proportion as the new branches we have suggested, all complaint would, in the judgment of your Committee, cease among all trades and callings in the State.

In making these important changes in the Prison industries your committee suggest that the Governor and Council should be specially authorized to confer and co-operate with the Warden at every step. If once prosperously organized, your Committee believe that the system suggested would give universal satisfaction.

S. H. ALLEN,
for Committee.

STATE OF MAINE.

IN SENATE, February 25, 1887.

Reported by Mr. ALLEN from Committee on State Prison, and laid on table to be printed under joint rules.

CHARLES W. TILDEN, *Secretary.*