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GLANCING AT PRISON FINANCES UNDER THE NEW REGIME

One of the sore spots in North Carolina financing for a number of years has been that of the State's Prison. The number of prisoners were multiplying at an unprecedented rate and on every hand was objection to their being employed at this or that task. Despite the wisdom of the superintendent, nothing could happen but an ever-increasing deficit. In scores of sections in the State one could see free labor being paid for highway work, every year heaping up the indebtedness of the State. Yet thousands of prisoners must largely idle about. The farms were the chief source of income and of employment.

The Prison Becoming Self-Supporting.

But the combination of the management of the highway business and the prison management under that super executive, E. B. Jeffress, and the consequent employment of the prisoners on a large scale in highway work have, seemingly, transformed the situation. Instead of paying free labor \$1.50 a day, the present wage, the highway commission is working convicts in almost every desired way in the ramifications of the immense highway business. You find them now, according to Mr. J. B. Roach, executive director of the prison, working in the Highway system's garages, building bridges, as well as performing the most of the ordinary labor in the upkeep of the highways and roads.

While no money passes, the highway commission charges itself with 80 cents a day for each prison laborer. That is a difference of 60 cents, compared with free labor. Whether it means an actual saving to the highway commission depends altogether upon the comparative efficiency of the two. And that point Mr. Roach has made it a point to determine since his succession to George Ross Pou as prison executive. In the meetings of the district engineers, Mrs. Roach has asked the pointed question as to whether the convicts compared favorably in efficiency with the ordinary free labor, and the reply has been almost unanimously in the affirmative.

The employment of the great mass of prisoners thus and on the farms has resulted apparently in the prison's becoming self-supporting.

A Remarkable Achievement.

When one considers that the average prison popu-

lation for May, 1934, was 7,723, and that seven hundred of them are infirm and an absolute liability upon the prison management rather than an asset and that many of the prisoners are turned over to the management in need of immediate medical or surgical attention, it becomes more wonderful to contemplate a report of no deficit.

Cost of Maintenance Being Reduced.

The estimated per capita cost of prisoners' maintenance during 1933 is 57.4 cents a day. Despite the increased cost of all kinds of commodities the per capita cost per day thus far this year is estimated at 56.58 cents—a reduction of nearly a cent a day. That is apparently a small saving but when applied to nearly 8,000 prisoners means \$75 a day, or more than \$25,000 a year.—And remember this saving over the first experimental period has been made in the face of greatly advanced prices.

The supervision and maintenance of nearly eight thousand prisoners seems a stupendous task, but this is only a part of the responsibilities of Chairman Jeffress, for he has the ultimate say-so in all highway and prison matters.

The mileage of roads and highways under Mr. Jeffress' supervision and upon which these thousands of prisoners are employed is 57,273, of which immense mileage 10,447 miles are listed as State highways and 46,826 miles as county roads.

An Executive Who Is On the Job.

The immensity of the task of supervision imposed upon Chairman Jeffress might lead one to infer that he has only a casual or superficial knowledge of what is going on in the different parts of his domain. But not so, according to Mr. Roach, who says that the man's mind loses nothing. "Mr. Jeffress can right now tell you the condition of practically every piece of road in North Carolina," said Mr. Roach. Continuing, he said "that man forgets nothing; he may remind you any day of the details of a conversation he had with you six months ago."

An Introduction to Mr. Roach.

The eyes of the State were more upon George Ross Pou after his retirement from the prison management and entrance upon his campaign for congress than upon his successor. I myself had forgotten who suc-

ceeded him and had to ask my friend Chester Bell, the man of figures in this the State's hugest enterprise—care of prison and building and maintaining roads.

Mr. Roach is a native of Mississippi. He has been a resident of North Carolina since 1910. He became connected in 1931 with the highway department. His executive ability must have impressed itself very strongly upon Mr. Jeffress and the governor, since he was named almost off-hand for the succession to Mr. Pou, but not at that gentleman's salary, for Mr. Roach is getting only \$3,100 a year, as against I believe nearly or quite double that sum for Mr. Pou. However, Mr. Roach does not claim to have all the duties that belonged to Mr. Pou's job. Nor does he make any undue claim, or any claim at all, to the fine showing apparently being made in the financial management of the prison—he has been on the job too short a time for that. Accordingly, Mr. Pou must share with Chairman Jeffress in the credit for whatever of progress appears as yet in making the prison self-sustaining under the new scheme. And conscience knows that he deserves a chance to get credit for it, for it was his to bear the odium of an ever-increasing deficit under a regime in which he was as helpless, or anybody else would have been, as a babe to make the prison pay its own way. Think of it—several times as many prisoners as in earlier years, price of farm products reduced to near nothing, not allowed to compete with private business in any line, hundreds of the maimed, half and infirm thrust upon him and demanding medical or surgical care.—Yet some people thought he should make ends meet.

Possibly it is better to call attention to the fact that the 56.58 cents estimate includes not only the food and clothing of the prisoners, including the infirm, but medical care, guard costs, etc., etc., ad infinitum till one reaches the prison and its equipments here and yonder. For instance, the State must contribute the cost of the contemplated new building, as it has the material costs of the scores of camps throughout the State. But it will be a big thing if the next report of the prison management shows the institution to be a self-sustaining one.

Our Modern Moses Sets Date For Signal For Canaanward March

It was a considerable period after Moses had led the distressed Israelites across the Red Sea from Egypt before any plans were outlined for a march upon Canaan. A year and a month was spent in the wilderness of Sin and Mount Sinai before a word was said about marching forth. The people in their distress had to be fed with manna; later they were gorged upon quail. Even water had to be provided for them upon occasions. The people lost faith and made a golden calf to worship—on the order of the sacred bull worship in Egypt.

The time came at last to move. The Amalekites resisted. They were overthrown. The record does not state the exact date of the cowardly refusal of the people to march to Canaan land after the report of the spies. But it was probably just about the period that has passed since the inauguration of America's modern Moses.

The parallel is most striking. Roosevelt came upon the scene at a time when the people were the slaves of the worshippers of the golden calf. Their distress was such that it required such a bounty of bread as the world never before saw showered upon a distressed people. None has vainly cried for bread these sixteen months, if our Moses or his representatives were aware of the need. When bread alone palled, meats surpassing in quantity the abundance of quail were broadcast over the land. Codes which may be likened unto the directions for living received and given by Moses have been promulgated to make life freer and easier. Scarcely a step has as yet been taken toward the goal of the people's ultimate desires—the land flowing with milk and honey.

Preparing to March.

Months were spent by Moses in seasoning the people, in undertaking to build up their faith and to root out the longing for the flesh pots of Egypt. Another period was spent in organizing the people. Then came the order to march. And that course has been

pursued almost exactly by President Roosevelt. The first year and four months have been spent in restoring the confidence of the people, in picturing to them the possibilities of their resources,—of the New Deal—and in making life as comfortable as possible in the economic wilderness in which the leader and the people had found themselves. The golden calf worshippers had to be disciplined. The Amalekites, few or many, have been chastised. Organizations have been effected. And now comes the challenging announcement that at the opening of the next session of Congress, which affords the first feasible opportunity, the message incorporating the rules for the march to the promised land will be issued.

The Evils of the Land Will Be Magnified.

Ere that day arrives we may be sure that spies will have spied out the land and will have all manner of evil reports to make. Alas, some of them have already bewailed that in that land it will be possible for a citizen to be directed as to "what kind of hat he must wear." Others, worshippers of the golden calf, will bewail the prospect of a land where the golden calf is utterly displaced. "Regimentation" will be decried by the very champions of a regimentation that profited them alone. The evils that they wot not of will overthrow the evils that all of us know brought disaster in a time of the greatest abundance. Even many who were forced to make a double tale of bricks without straw and fed upon crusts while serving under the masters' lashes will bewail the loss of the fleshpots of Egypt. Like unto the companions of Columbus they will be expecting great monsters of the sea to swallow them up—or even they may conceive that they are asked to march into the nothingness of a space where the world ceases to be.

The Calebs and Joshuas.

The crisis will be at hand with the delivery of that message. Whether the Calebs and Joshuas shall

prevail or the cowards, will determine America's fate for a generation, perhaps the forty years of the wanderings in the wilderness. A failure to back up the leader will be disastrous.

What the Promised Land Offers.

The promised land offers good homes, plenty to eat, sufficient leisure to enjoy life to every American citizen. It in assuring these things to the many must necessarily deny superfluous riches to the few. The abundant resources of the land of the new deal will be devoted to the welfare of the many and shall not be allowed to be monopolized by dogs in the manger. But it will be for the people to decide whether they will go forward. No Moses, no Roosevelt, can lead an unwilling people to the land of promise. The Israelites suffered for their pusillanimity; Americans will do likewise if they cowardly or selfishly refuse to follow the glowing pillar of cloud that beckons the way. O, the leader may make mistakes. But it is evident that he is the chosen of Providence to lead the people to a haven of plenty and comfort or at least to the border thereof, where the people themselves must decide the issue. The coming winter will see a definite march forward or a disastrous return to the wilderness. For whoever supposes the last year to have been spent in a forward march is mistaken—it has been merely an interim of preparation, in which all efforts possible were made to bring cheer, comfort, and courage to the wilderness dwellers. The real event looms.

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