

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CORRECTION
MAY 13, 1971

A regular meeting of the Board of Correction was held on May 13, 1971, at the offices of Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, Room 2520, 277 Park Avenue, New York, New York.

Present at the meeting were Messrs. vanden Heuvel, Dribben and Schulte, and Mrs. Singer. Also present by invitation of the Board were John M. Brickman, Executive Director of the Board, Lesley J. Spector, Executive Secretary of the Board, William Goodstein, Counsel to the Board, Terry Strauss, Research Assistant, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, Leonard Ryan, Program Officer, The Ford Foundation, and Messrs. Jonathan Dolgin and Lewis Korman, attorneys. Mr. vanden Heuvel acted as Chairman and Miss Spector as Secretary of the meeting.

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:10 P.M. He then introduced Messrs. Ryan, Dolgin and Korman to the members of the Board.

The Chairman stated that he had been asked to testify in Washington on May 17 before a Senate Sub-committee, regarding the problems at the Rikers Island Reformatory. He further stated that he felt it would be premature at this time to testify and that the Board should now work toward preparing the groundwork before making a public statement. The Chairman further stated that he and Mr. Schulte would be visiting Rikers Island next Tuesday and that any other Board members were welcome to join them at that time. The Chairman declared that a friend of his who is in the printing business in Philadelphia would also be making the trip to Rikers Island to look at the printing operation at the Reformatory.

The Chairman declared that the Reformatory is suffering from the same administrative chaos as is the rest of the prison system. He further declared that the Reformatory is one of the most important prison facilities in New York City for two reasons. First, the inmates housed there are adolescents. Second, most of the Reformatory sentences are the longest. He added that there is virtually no rehabilitation program at the Reformatory, that there are some adults who are housed there, and that the public school at Rikers Island is underutilized.

Messrs. Dolgin and Korman then discussed their study of the problems of the Reformatory. Mr. Dolgin stated that before they visited the institution, they structured a questionnaire to be used for inmates and correction officers. They visited the Reformatory four times, interviewed 45 inmates, spoke with correction officers, the Warden, as Assistant Deputy Warden, the senior Captain and some VISTA volunteers. Mr. Dolgin then explained that the 45 interviewees were chosen at random. He stated that inmates are housed according to job assignments and that the questionnaire was submitted to inmates based on their housing location, but that, within their location, inmates were selected strictly at random. Mr. Dolgin declared that each inmate was interviewed in a closed room by either himself or Mr. Korman.

Mr. Dolgin then stated that last July, the Reformatory was certified by the State that it met the standard of the State Correction Law for operating a reformatory. The State report at that time listed the population of the Reformatory as 1726. As of that report, all of the inmates were either serving indefinite sentences, or were adolescents between the ages of 16 and 21 serving definite sentences. Mr. Dolgin declared that since the report was issued, adult prisoners have been housed there awaiting trial. Although they are housed separately from the adolescents, additional room was needed for the adults. As a result, according to Mr. Dolgin, many of the adolescents have been sent to State facilities. The Chairman stated that at Napanoch, there were over 300 adolescent prisoners who had been taken from the Reformatory and sent there.

Mr. Korman then explained that the Adolescent Remand Shelter on Rikers Island houses adolescents between 16 and 21 years of age who are awaiting trial. The ARS is physically connected to the Reformatory. It has its own staff but shares many of the same facilities, e.g., the kitchen. There are, according to Mr. Korman, inmates at the Reformatory who work at the ARS. He further stated that there were Reformatory sentenced inmates that were moved to the ARS because they worked there. Mr. Korman declared that there are so few sentenced prisoners to work that the work that they do is just menial tasks and there is no time left for rehabilitation.

Mr. Korman then stated that the physical conditions of the Reformatory need to be improved. He added that every inmate and many correction officers complained about the food. Many inmates complained about the commissary, stating that the commissary did not carry cosmetics for adolescent skin problems, magazines, filter cigarettes, etc. The inmates also stated that by the time it was their turn to go to the commissary, many of the items they wished to purchase had been sold out.

Mr. Korman declared that inmates complained of not being permitted to receive packages of food or clothing. Another often-voiced complaint concerned recreation. The Reformatory shares its recreation area with the ARS, which limits the amount of time each inmate can use the facilities. Additionally, Mr. Korman stated that white prisoners were afraid to go to the gym because they would be harrassed by black prisoners. Mr. Korman declared that he had been told that inmates were allowed to go outdoors for recreation during the summer months, but that many inmates had expressed a desire to be allowed to go outside during the winter months as well. He stated that the warden had told him inmates were not permitted outside during the winter months because it was too cold.

Mr. Korman stated that no inmates complained of lack of funds, but that many stated that the reason for this was that there was nothing they wished to purchase at the commissary.

Mr. Dolgin then stated that the Reformatory had 11 "treatment programs." One of these programs is P.S. 189. Inmates under the age of 18 are required to attend classes at this school (presumably from 8:00 A.M. to 2:30 P.M.). Mr. Dolgin stated that there are 168 inmates enrolled in the school out of a total of 499 sentenced and 186 trial prisoners. He further declared that the entire vocational program of the Reformatory was operated by P.S. 189.

Mr. Dolgin then briefly described some of the other "treatment programs." He stated that there is a Spanish Bible class with a total of six prisoners who attend; a remedial reading program conducted by St. Joseph's Seminary two nights a week with a total of three prisoners who attend; and a drug program conducted by ex-addicts with a total of seven prisoners who attend. Mr. Dolgin also stated that the most successful of the programs is run by VISTA volunteers. These volunteers attempt to contact sentenced prisoners two to three months before they are scheduled to be released from the Reformatory. The volunteers give job and educational counseling. They keep in contact with the inmates after they are released from the institution.

Mr. Korman stated that of the 45 inmates who were questioned, 20 had prior convictions.

Messrs. Dolgin and Korman stated that one of their primary recommendations would be to have inmates work on job assignments for perhaps four hours a day, and then to make sure that they all participated in one or more of the treatment programs. They stated that this recommendation was based on their observation that those inmates who were not working spent virtually their entire day watching television.

Mr. Korman stated that there is an Assistant Deputy Warden for Rehabilitation at the Reformatory, but that he spends a major portion of his time interviewing inmates to ascertain what job details they would best be suited for.

Messrs. Dolgin and Korman informed the Board that, with the exception of P.S. 189, all of the "treatment programs" are run by volunteers. There are 49 volunteers presently working at the Reformatory. Of those, 29 are VISTA workers.

The Chairman then stated that, following his visit to Rikers Island next Tuesday, he would like to prepare a series of recommendations. He also stated that he thought the Board should give the Department of Correction a two-month deadline to improve conditions at the Reformatory. He suggested that at the end of that time period, if conditions have not been improved, the Board recommend to the State that the Reformatory be de-certified.

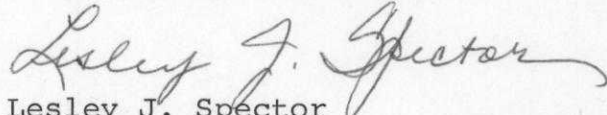
Mr. Dribben suggested that the Board recommend to the Department that a special "roster" be kept at each prison facility to record the visits of each Departmental official to each facility.

Mr. Dolgin stated that officials at the Reformatory receive no information from the Department on any prisoner who is sentenced for less

than three months. Information becomes more readily available to the Reformatory in direct proportion to the length of a prisoner's sentence.

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Lesley J. Spector". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Lesley J. Spector
Executive Secretary