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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

REMARKS

OF

HONORABLE HOMER CUMMINGS  
C. C.  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

at

THE MASONIC FORUM ON CRIME

Brooklyn, N. Y.

April 3, 1936,

10:15 P. M.

The Attorney General said in part:

One of the most encouraging signs of progress in the movement to control crime is the fact that the American people, as I believe, are beginning to see the problem in a new light, to visualize the present condition in its wider aspects and to recognize it as a challenge to our social and economic life, to our national pride and to the prestige of government itself.

Certain situations have existed requiring the use of emergency techniques: the meeting, as it were, of force with force. You are all familiar, I am sure, with the conditions that brought the Federal Government on the scene. And let no one imagine that militant methods are not required to curb the criminal depredations that have been threatening our common life. But the mere meeting of emergencies, the apprehension of notorious bandits and the breaking up of criminal gangs, is not enough. This process, vital as it is, and far-reaching as its deterrent effects can prove, is not conclusive. There is a different but equally important line of procedure to which I direct your attention. I refer to the calm, dispassionate, thoughtful efforts that must be put forth if crime is to be brought under permanent control. Such efforts are not apt to be dramatic or spectacular, results will not soon be evident, but the job is worth doing and it can be done.

In planning the functions of the Department of Justice in the control of crime I have tried to avoid an approach in the nature of a "drive", or a "crusade", or a "war". All too often such expressions signalize passing enthusiasms that exhaust themselves in the satisfaction of the pre-

cise emotions that stimulate them. The control of crime cannot be achieved according to some magic formula or to some series of arrangements that can be made effective within a measurable degree of time. No permanent result can be achieved through some kind of tour de force. Our surest guarantee of success is to know, first, what the problem is, and second, how it must be met. The help needed to sustain this movement is not the sporadic efforts of zealous enthusiasts but rather the assistance of earnest workers of practical experience familiar with the obstacles that are certain to arise and determined to overcome them.

Therefore, the summons to enlist in this movement is more than a call to arms. It is a call to patience, intelligence and ceaseless labor, continued over a long period of time, indeed, as long as the need exists.

In the winter of 1934 I had the honor of summoning a national Conference on Crime. Since that time I have received continuing evidences of a firm public determination that the administration of criminal justice, in its broadest sense shall be modernized, coordinated and brought to a maximum degree of effectiveness. Our experience has shown that what might have appeared to be public indifference was largely the apathy of disillusionment, resulting from the frequent failure of public authorities to supply the service and the type of leadership to which the American people are entitled. From all the reports that come to me I believe that once a reasonable course of action has been projected, no matter whether the field of jurisdiction be great or small, public opinion is inspiringly spontaneous in support of efforts to deal with this vital problem.

Over a period of several months a large number of conferences on crime have been called under the auspices of Governors of States, of groups of

States, of local authorities, of peace officers' associations, and of private groups. These conferences have not dealt with mere generalities. The aim has been rather to find out what can be done to correct and improve specific defects in governmental structures; in court, police and prison administration; and in the inter-relations of local, state and Federal units. You are familiar with the careful attention that the authorities of New York State have been devoting to this question.

It was not a desire to usurp the functions of State and local authorities that brought the Federal Government upon the scene. Imperative circumstances required it and led to the introduction in the 73rd Congress of what has been termed the "Twelve Point Program" of the Department of Justice, which resulted in the passage of seventeen important enactments. These Acts, in general, dealt with the menace of an armed underworld crossing and re-crossing State lines in open defiance of the law-enforcement authorities. These laws have greatly strengthened the arm of the Government and have led to beneficial results, with which, I am sure, you are all familiar.

It is obvious, however, that the problem of crime is not limited to detection, apprehension and punishment. It is a social question with manifold ramifications, touching almost all the activities and conditions of life. For that reason I have recommended to the Congress a modest appropriation for the establishment in the Department of Justice of a bureau to deal with criminal procedure, instruction and Crime Prevention. I hope that if this appropriation is granted it will be possible to make a useful contribution, of the most practical character, toward an improved technique and a remedial consideration of conditions that precede the perpetration of a crime.

With respect to the functions and activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation I do not believe that discussion is needed from me tonight. Its recent achievements are too well known to require elaboration. There is one aspect of its activities that will, I am sure, be of particular interest to your membership. Under the able guidance of its Director, Mr. John Edgar Hoover, the continued and intensive research of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in all fields of criminological activities relating to detection and apprehension has been placed, in ever-increasing measure, at the disposition of cooperating agencies. Moreover, the training facilities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have been made available to outstanding law enforcement officials throughout the United States. This is a service that I have long felt the Department of Justice should offer.

The first session of our Police Training School, which offers a three months' course at no expense to those who are in attendance, was held last summer and the second group of officers completed their training last week. This is not a school for instructing police officials in their duties. Rather it is designed to offer scientific training to selected officials who, upon returning to their own jurisdictions, can pass this instruction on to their colleagues and subordinates. About fifty men have been graduated from this school. It is our earnest hope that there will thus be provided in the various police jurisdictions of the United States centers from which will go forth helpful impulses that will infiltrate our whole law enforcement structure with the most modern scientific knowledge available in this field.

And I might mention as the third unit in our project the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Under this Bureau is now placed those activities which deal with problems pertaining to the development of advanced methods in the punishment, treatment and rehabilitation of criminals. Under the experienced direction of Mr. Sanford Bates this Bureau now maintains a training course for Federal prison officials, the facilities of which will be made available under proper conditions to selected State and other officers in this field. Here are studied the development of scientific information on which to base comprehensive modern methods of parole, probation, and pardon, modern methods of jail and prison construction; modern methods for the classification, segregation and treatment of criminals; the effects of various forms of punishment, advanced penological technique in prisons, jails, and work camps, and a host of similar matters.

I mentioned earlier that one of the principal requirements in a program for the control of crime is knowledge of the problem itself. With that in mind and with funds made available from the Works Progress Administration, I have initiated another project that I am sure will be of interest to your members. The importance of parole and its administration suggest that the time is opportune for a nation-wide survey of this problem, vitally related as it is to the proper administration of criminal law throughout the country. Because of the variations existing among the statutes and practices in the various States of the several jurisdictions, I was convinced that such a survey should include pardon, probation, commutation, suspended sentences and similar subjects. In other words, all forms of release procedures. This survey is now in progress throughout the country. The facts thus

secured, the comparisons of experience thus made possible, the interchange of information thus facilitated and the varied results shown to have been obtained through contrasting methods and techniques will, it is hoped, be of great practical benefit in dealing with the crime problem.