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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**

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Before Thirty-fifth Annual Convention of the New York State  
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*Prison Problems*

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For several months I have been holding conferences on the prison situation with officials of the State Department of Correction and of the various state prisons and also with public spirited men and women who are interested and experienced in prison problems of various kinds.

It is well for us to remember as citizens of the State that while prisoners are confined in part as punishment for crimes against society, they are also kept in confinement with the hope that when released they will become law-abiding, useful members of the community. Most of us are too much inclined when we read of a prison sentence to think that the man or woman sentenced is removed automatically and for all time from community life. We give too little thought to the fact that about ninety-four per cent of those who enter state prison return at some future date to the community as free persons.

It becomes, therefore, our duty to use every possible means to give the men and women in state prisons the best possible opportunity of making themselves fit for a future return to society.

This approach to the subject brings up first of all the analysis of physical conditions in the prisons. We find that the State now has 6368 prisoners in accommodations intended for only 5482. These figures relate only to the four regular prisons and do not include the Bedford and Elmira Reformatories, or the institutions for the care of the mental defectives.

At the conference yesterday it was the general consensus that the state policy should be to reduce the regular capacity of prisons with the ultimate goal of having a total prison population of 1500 at Sing Sing; of 1100 at Dannemora; and of 1000 at Auburn, and of further removing from Auburn the 118 women prisoners who are now there.

This means that we must provide new accommodations for 1,773 prisoners and, in addition, provide during the next five years accommodations for an estimated increase in the prison population amounting to about 3,000 prisoners.

It will, therefore, be desirable and necessary to establish a new prison building program, and it is the judgment of practically all experts with whom I have talked, that we should consider the advisability of starting a new prison in this State along lines different from any existing prison. It is believed that a fairly high percentage, running from 25 per cent to 40 per cent of the prison population could be confined in rooms in fire-proof buildings and not as at present in steel cell blocks. This would be something new in the history of the State, but it is an experiment which I believe will be worth while trying and there seems to be a general agreement that the security of the prisoners confined in this new type of prison could be adequately maintained.

Next, it is absolutely essential that the old cell blocks in Auburn and Dannemora Prisons be replaced immediately. When we realize that these old cell blocks date back from 50 to 80 years and that they are a disgrace to the State from the point-of-view of good health and proper sanitation, I am certain that there will be general accord.

I shall, as a result of these conferences, recommend to the Legislature the establishment of a policy to be followed for a period of five years, this

policy involving the ultimate reduction of Dannemora and Auburn to 1,000 inmates each; the reduction of Sing Sing to 1,500 inmates; the building of the new Attica Prison for only 1,000 inmates until and unless it shall appear advisable to increase the number there, and finally the immediate authorization of a new prison to be built without steel cell blocks and to house 1,000 prisoners.

The second point of discussion involved the question of prison fare and as a result I shall ask the Legislature for an increase of appropriations to warrant an increase in the cost of the daily prison ration from 21c per diem to 26c per diem, and further permit the employment of a trained dietitian to supervise all prison fare.

In regard to the present system which in some prisons allows those inmates who happen to have money of their own or of their family to buy additional food and clothing and to have other privileges, I have all along maintained that there should be no discrimination between the rich and the poor prisoners. We, therefore, agreed that it is proper at this time to establish a principle that the State will seek to provide work for every prisoner and to pay the prisoners for this work, and that when this work is provided, thereupon and thereafter no prisoner will be permitted to receive from the outside any money but will be required to pay for his extras from what he has earned in the prison.

It is obvious that this principle cannot be put into effect until the State is in a position to provide work and pay for every prisoner.

Finally, there is the highly important question of parole. Consideration is now being given to the possibility of the establishment of a parole court to take the place of the present State Parole Board. A court of this kind would take over all matters which are now handled by the parole board, and, in addition, would be asked to make recommendations to the Governor for commutations of sentence and to make investigations for the Governor in the very large volume of cases which now go directly to the Governor.

This is a subject involving such grave questions that the final set-up cannot be decided at this time, but it is, I think, felt by all, who are in close touch with the present situation in relation to paroles and commutations of sentence, that great improvements can be made.

I am very happy that Senator Baumes and the other members of the Crime Commission are cooperating so heartily in trying to find with me solutions for these problems.