

## PRISON SYSTEM IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

(Delivered by Mr. Ramon Veltierra, Director of the Bureau of Prisons of the Government of the Philippine Islands in the American Prison Congress held at Salt Lake City on August 15-22, 1931)

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GENTLEMEN OF THE CONGRESS:

Before beginning to undertake the pleasant task entrusted to me, allow me to greet you in the name of the Filipino people whom I have the honor to represent in this Congress. As you well know, the Philippine Islands are located on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, separated from the United States by miles and miles of distance and yet united with the American people by political bonds forged by faith. That country has advanced fast and far in the ways of democracy, and inspired by the spirit of progress that is the outstanding characteristic of this great republic, is anxious to reach the goal which it has set for itself when it fell under your benevolent tutelage to be in a day not far distant a member of the sisterhood of nations.

In passing, I might mention the fact that when I decided to attend this Congress it was my wish to be a mere bystander, so to speak, only to hear and learn and profit by the experience of persons like you who are conversant with the details of penitentiary administration, and get all that is best and useful that can be applied to the prisons of the Philippines. But conscious as I am that I have a duty to fulfill like the other members of this Congress, I will try to outline in the most concise way possible all such fundamental aspects of the penal institutions existing in my country in the hope that I can contribute in some way

to the successful work that we of this Congress expect to carry out.

What is known in the Philippines as the Bilibid Prison is a building of a permanent character constructed under the Spanish sovereignty in the year 1865. According to a newspaper of that time called *El Obrero*, edited in Manila, half a century ago, the Spanish engineers who examined the work of construction ruled that the building was useless without specifying the reasons therefor. And in spite of this technical ruling, which gave rise to a famous legal case, the Bilibid Prison is at the present time one of the best public edifices in the capital of the Archipelago. It successfully resisted all the seismological shocks and floods of past years, thus showing the solidity of its structure. The excellent improvements introduced since the implantation of American sovereignty in the Bilibid Prison have placed this institution on the level, if not among the first, in the Far East. And for this reason, it is the center of attraction for all the tourists who come to visit us in the Philippines. I sincerely believe that the standard of civilization and culture of a people is measured not only by the sum total of its material wealth but also by the character of its penitentiary institutions and the like, such as hospitals, charitable centers and all that tend to relieve the physical and moral sufferings of the individuals who have transgressed laws approved by society for its protection or who have violated or ignored the most rudimentary precepts of sanitation and hygiene.

In this respect I can assert with pride that the Philippines can figure with honor side by side with the most advanced countries because its prison rules, regulations, and administrations, as I will soon describe to you in a brief form, compare favorably with that of the best followed by those in the forefront of civilized nations.

What we can properly call penitentiary as insular penitentiary system includes the following institutions: the Bilibid Prison as the central headquarters with has under its control the Iwahig Penal Colony, the San Ramon Penal Farm, the Bontoc Prison, and the Military Prison at Fort Mills. All these institutions are

under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice. In the Bilibid Prison, the inmates number from 2,000 to 3,000, all of them sentenced by the tribunals of justice in Luzon and the Visayas. An outsider who for the first time pays a visit to the penitentiary is at once impressed by the possibilities of the industrial activities with which the inmates are engaged under a rigid discipline. In this walled city, as it were, which the law has established for those who have been guilty of crimes, the natural disposition of each individual is made the subject of an experiment by submitting him to well regulated labor and to strict obedience of established rules, in a way that is calculated to allow the maximum of result. I cannot admit the possibility of of an individual failing to be reformed after he had been for some time in a modern penitentiary unless he is a born criminal, in which case neither the wisdom of the laws nor penalty imposed upon him will have no effect whatsoever.

In the modern penitentiaries, a moral restraint for every person and the penalty imposed is not viewed in the light of a barbaric punishment nor enforced in the spirit of vengeance as in the old days. Let us follow the details of the life of a criminal from the day he enters the penitentiary to the day when he is free in the supposition that he had not been given the capital punishment.

Let us set aside the ordinary details such as registration of the name of the convict in the book of records and the minute examination to which he is subjected by a keeper in order to center our attention on a single detail which, in our opinion, is very important, namely, the physical examination. The individual who has been deprived of his liberty by society for violation of the Penal Code is thus treated so that in joining his unfortunate companions within the prison walls he may be without any physical defect or is cured entirely of any incipient sickness. This humanitarian policy, altruistic even, of protecting the health of the inmates, for in the penitentiaries the agglomeration of human beings is a factor favorable to the outbreak of epidemics, is a sort of life insurance, in my opinion, so that the individual prisoner may be of use

to the maximum of his energies and for his own redemption. After the medical examination and after it has been found that he is physically fit, or after he has been cured of any disease he might have been suffering from, a prisoner is required to take calisthenic and military exercises that his will, perforce, half started by his prison sentence, may be stimulated. This phenomenon has a psychological explanation. When an individual is the victim of a very serious misfortune the first effect of that misfortune is a tendency to demoralize the will and if there is no external force or an agency much more powerful that compels his will to react, his will may be regarded as dead for a long time. The same conclusion is applicable to a man who for the first time is confined in a penitentiary. If no aid is extended to him and no steps are taken to prepare him for a life entirely different from the one he has been leading, he may become a habitual criminal and would be beyond reform.

We have followed so far in broad outline the preliminary steps taken when a convict enters Bilibid, and here follows a record of his newer activities.

The next step is for the convict to memorize the prison regulations. The code as it were, shapes his conduct and his actions while he is an unwilling guest in the penitentiary. The future of the convict depends largely upon his own conduct, his disposition to adapt himself to the policies in force that he may be reformed, such as that he may be restored to his rightful place in society as a citizen engaged in productive labor. If a blacksmith, watchmaker, musician, goldsmith or carpenter, he is given the opportunity to develop his natural bent while in prison. The convict will soon realize that he is subjected to a system that grants privileges or enacts punishment that either rear him nearer to the day of his redemption or deprive him for a long time of any hope that he may be freed. Even the color of the uniform reveals to his companions and to the public the position that he occupies among his fellow convicts. He shall be promoted gradually in accordance with his conduct until he shall be given a reasonable compensation for his work in the industrial plants and granted the privilege of being the fore-

man of a group of prison laborers. The time required for a convict to reach the grade of first-class prisoner and receive the distinction of being a skilled laborer is not long, for ordinarily such promotions come within six months or before that time, the policy being to promote any convict at any time that he shows he deserves that distinction. A convict who has served one-tenth of his sentence with an average of 100 per cent is granted the privilege of being considered a "trustee" upon the recommendation of the Director of Prisons to the Governor-General through the Department of Justice. This privilege carries with it the right to sleep in a dormitory reserved for prisoners of his class who have waiters and who eat their meals at tables with table cloth. Furthermore, they have also the privilege of engaging in any of the industrial activities in the prison and of receiving compensation for their work, and there have been cases of prisoners of this class returning to their respective homes with enough money to support them during the first year after they have left the penitentiary. The members of this Congress can have a graphic idea of the different departments where a variety of industrial activities are run by the prisoners of Bilibid from the sketch attached to this document.

#### THE IWAHIG PENAL COLONY, PUERTO PRINCESA

We shall now touch on a policy which represents the latest step in the constant changes in method for the redemption of prisoners condemned to life imprisonment. I can give you a perfect picture of this penal colony by asking you to imagine it as a republic of convicts enjoying the right to choose their own public functionaries by submitting themselves to an exemplary discipline which does not destroy their trust and faith and is compatible with the humanitarian aims of the Government. The colony occupies a site 475 square miles and is divided into 40 barrios, each of which is under the supervision of an officer called "*teniente del barrio*" and elected by the residents thereof. The election of these functionaries is held under the immediate supervision and approval of the superinten-

dent of the colony, who really is the commander-in-chief vested with extraordinary powers. It has been deemed necessary to establish this absolute limitation upon the rights of the inmates of the colony who must recognize the supreme authority of the superintendent in order to maintain discipline and insure the efficiency of the system in vogue there. In all things else, each individual convict who is ambitious through his own efforts to have his sentence remitted, to have his own family and to possess his own home that may awaken his soul and heart to assume the duties of an honest citizen, is given all the opportunities to realize his plans. All the inmates come from Bilibid Prison and are considered as settlers of the fourth class. As soon as the convict reaches the grade of colonist of the first class, there is a corresponding change in his uniform and manner; he is saluted by his companions in the colony. But a colonist of whatever class is no longer confined within the walls of a prison but is an inhabitant of an island where he can go when and where he pleases, acting in such a manner that in a not distant future he may be entirely free. He is, therefore, a citizen of a special republic of convicts who is responsible for all his acts to a jury who must scrupulously use and conserve the property which the Government has given him, who must obey all orders adopted that the colony may progress and that the activities therein may develop peacefully. These facts are sufficient to demonstrate that within the restricted freedom which a colonist enjoys there is the larger desire to inculcate in his mind a high sense of responsibility and initiative so that his every effort is always subject to intelligent leadership, that his character may be reformed and that his energies may be applied to the productive activities of life. If a colonist so desires, he may become a tenant farmer and work under the same condition as a farmer has in private estates. This condition has been an equal division of profits between the colonists and the Government; he may become an electrician, a mechanical engineer, or a member of the police force to maintain order and to enforce the ordinances within the colony; or he may become a

public functionary, a chief or a petty officer in accordance with his mental faculties and duties and the degree of moral authority that he exercises over his subordinates.

There are a great many activities in the colony and a colonist is free to choose whatever strikes his fancy, whatever he believes he is fitted to do and is in keeping with his character, either in the fields, in the work shops or in the offices.

If you would permit me to digress, I would say that you never heard there is a socialistic government in miniature organized by men in a society brought to a solitary island that they may find redemption under the autocratic power of a Lenin who in these days is the superintendent. The case of one Julian Montalan may be cited as a practical example of the beneficent influence of the present system. Julian Montalan is a bandit who terrorized the inhabitants of the Provinces of Rizal, Bulacan, Batangas, Tayabas, Cavite, Laguna and Bataan. When in 1914 there was an insignificant uprising among the colonists in Iwahig with the attendant crimes and other prejudices, the Government found itself under the necessity of utilizing the services of this bandit who was serving his prison term for life, in the effort to capture the fugitive colonists. Julian Montalan was so successful in this undertaking that he was able to capture all the fugitives, bringing back to prison a number of them alive and the other killed for they have offered resistance; and the Government in recognition of his valuable and loyal services extended to him executive clemency on condition that he should not return to the provinces which have been the scenes of his crimes. Julian Montalan is now a model citizen and is the fourth assistant of the superintendent of the colony and has under him 60 tenant farmers.

There are now over 1,400 colonists in Iwahig and a great many of them are living with their families. Both the real and personal properties in the colony may be classified as follows:

Two hundred fifty thousand coconut trees, over 20,000 of which bear fruits; mangoes, oranges, jack fruit, coffee, and other fruit-bearing trees which supply the

need of the colony and the outlying districts; rice lands, agricultural implements and work animals; 2,000 heads of cattle, about 500 carabaos and a few horses; fisheries which occupy two hectares; the concrete Government buildings, such as the school, the hospital, administrative building, the warehouse, the forest, the work shops, the electrical plant, the saw mill and the bridges; poultry and others too numerous to mention.

Today the Iwahig Penal Colony is self-supporting. All that a colonist needs for his daily use and that of his family—food and building materials—are produced in the colony itself. This experiment does not cost the Government even a centavo; on the other hand it is a source of revenue for the Government.

In the old days the name Iwahig is synonymous to cemetery. The first colonists died almost to a month of malignant fever. At present it is a healthful place and conditions are improving every day. Numerous families may make their homes there without any fear of epidemics for the colonists are so organized that hygienic regulations are properly enforced and obeyed. At this juncture in my reference to this model penal colony which has been favorably commented on by authorities on prison administration, I wish to render a tribute to its founder, former Governor-General Luke E. Wright who is well-beloved by all Filipinos. His was the initiative that this colony has been established and he was generously supported by the Philippine Legislature which liberally released the necessary fund for its organization, and also former Governor-General William Cameron Forbes, at that time Secretary of Commerce and Police. To these gentlemen who in this connection had the support of the leaders of the Filipino participation in the Insular Government is due the progress of the penal institutions in the Philippine Islands.

#### THE SAN RAMON PENAL FARM AND THE BONTOC PRISON

The San Ramon Penal Farm located in Zamboanga Province to which are confined prisoners sentenced by tribunals in Mindanao and Sulu combines features of the Bilibid prison and the Iwahig Penal Colony. It



is an agricultural station and at the same time a colony, for in it prisoners kept under guard are not kept in liberty to move about freely as in Iwahig, and are trustees who have the privileges of a colonist, such as having a family and other favorable advantages as to treatment. As may be seen, it is a combination of two systems, its salient characteristic being the agricultural activities of the prisoners. Originally, the San Ramon Penal Farm was a colony of prisoners whose offense is political, that is, it is a place to which political prisoners were exclusively exiled as also all persons not in the graces of Spanish authorities. With the implantation of American sovereignty, the institution changed in character, being converted into a real penitentiary where the inmates are capable of being reformed. Part of it was at first a dense forest but now it is an estate of 1,200 hectares planted with 150,000 coconut trees allowing handsome income for more than 30,000 of these trees are fruit-bearing and serve as a nursery for the plantations newly established in Mindanao and adjacent islands. In addition to the coconut, which is the principal product of the colony, rice, corn, papaya, and lumban are cultivated. The greater part of these products are marketed in Zamboanga. As a penal farm, San Ramon is also self-supporting.

As regards the method used in order to reform the "trustees" be they Mohammedans or Christians or pagans if their conduct is excellent, and if they are respectful and loyal to their superiors and are zealous in doing their duties, promotions are granted gradually from corporal to sergeant, from sergeant to a second lieutenant, then to first lieutenant, later as captain and finally as major in accordance with their records. There are not more than 700 prisoners in San Ramon Penal Farm, Mohammedans in the majority with only a few Christians and pagans. Up to 1913, the administration of that institution was in hands of the Army but with the advent of the civil government in Mindanao and Sulu, control of the institution passed into the hands of the Department of Justice with the Bureau of Prisons in direct control. The San Ramon Penal Farm is, therefore, one of the institutions of which

any country may well be proud and can be pointed to as a model in cleanliness, order, sanitation, and discipline.

The Bontor Prison, in the capital of the Mountain Province, to which non-Christian prisoners sentenced by tribunals in the Mountain Province and Nueva Vizcaya are confined, may be dealt with in brief. The population of this special province in northern Luzon is very insignificant, totalling 182,613 according to the last Census out of the 9,463,731 Christian population. Therefore, as a penal institution it is not of much importance in spite of its good location. It occupies a site of 16 hectares and the great majority of the inmates are Igorots, a half primitive people, submissive and obedient but who still follow traditional habits and customs resulting in murder and bloody acts of vengeance among the tribes. These traditions and customs have been, however, forgotten by this people through the influence of education and contact with people in the low lands. These Igorots are taught industrial occupations and when they regain their freedom they return to their respective tribes with some useful knowledge. They manufacture rattan furniture in accordance with the last and best models which are in great demand in the local market. They acquire hygienic habits and true discipline, forget the nomadic instincts engendered by their surroundings in the mountains.

#### FEW DEFECTS

Briefly, I have tried to describe to you the character of the penal institutions in the Philippines. Pointing out their progressive aspects, I shall now mention a few defects. The Bilibid Prison, which is the headquarters, is situated in an avenue through which passes one of the heaviest traffics in the city of Manila—Calle Azcarraga. A modern penal institution should be situated outside the limits of a city so that it may be placed as far away as possible from the influence of the men in power who also live in the same city. On many occasions, the Director of Prisons devotes a great part of his time in conferring with this or that influential public functionary who is interested in the fate of a

prisoner or who recommends an inmate to a position within the prison to which he has no right, not only because of the seriousness of the crime for which he was convicted but also because of the lack of ability or preparation that he may properly occupy the position he aspires to. This fact, you will understand, will in a way demoralize the efficiency of the prison system and is destructive of discipline. But it should be said as a circumstance, in defense of the penal institutions in my country that this defect is also common in other countries, especially those whose governments are democratic. It is not in human nature for a high ranking public official who had been helped by a prisoner to refuse to do something in behalf of his unfortunate friend. But we should do all we can to do away with this defect. Once out of the city limit the Bilibid Prison would have, moreover, an adequate site in which to enlarge its activities and it would have such other advantages as better ventilation, purer air, that contribute to the betterment of the health conditions in the penitentiary.

Another defect is that embracing the cases of women prisoners who bear child while in prison. In my opinion, the law regarding this question should be so amended in the sense that a woman prisoner should not be permitted to deliver within the prison in order to free the potential citizen from the stigma of social prejudice, for child born under such circumstance is usually frowned upon by society. The prospective mother, just before the day of delivery, should be taken to a hospital so that she may be away at the time the child is born from an atmosphere where only prisoners live. This change should be made in the name of the innocence of a child who for the first time sees the light of day with a heart pure and angelic.

#### OTHER INTERESTING ASPECTS

Probably the members of this Congress will be interested to know that there is a very close and cordial cooperation between the religious and mutual aid associations which are interested in the prison inmates and officials of all the penal institutions in the Phi-

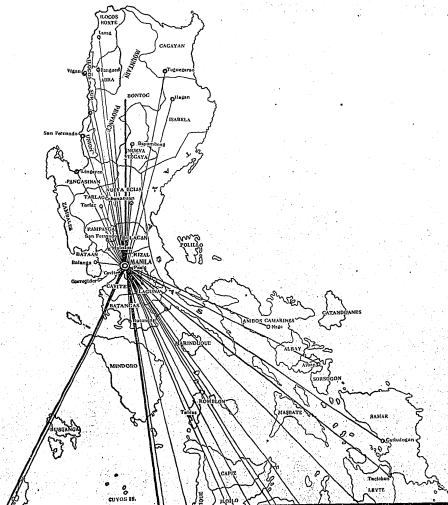
Philippines. The priests, the protestant minister, in reality all religious creeds or dogmas have free access in all the prisons to deliver lectures on moral or civil topics on a holiday or at any hour after the regular period of work among the prisoners. This cooperation is absolutely necessary if we consider that the moral regeneration of a convict does not come only as the result of compulsory labor and discipline but also as the effect of the teaching of some moral doctrines and of a direct appeal to the heart and the conscience of the convict in order to awaken his faith in God as the supreme consolation of those in misfortune.

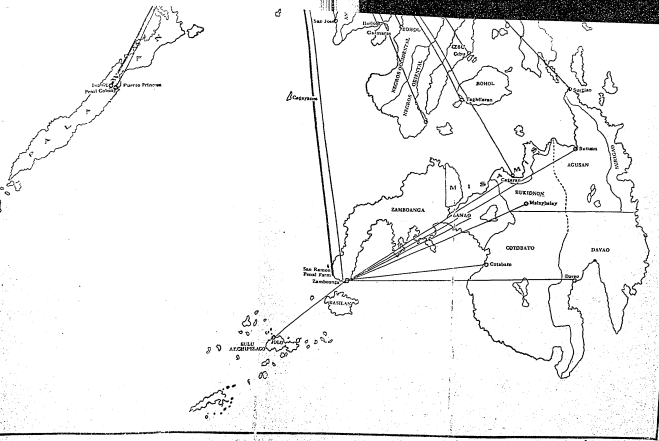
Athletics is also encouraged in all the penitentiaries as a part the physical education for the purpose of concentrating the attention of the individual on a definite end. It also teaches the convict the advantage of mutual cooperation and health for the success of any human undertaking, and gives him no time to think of obnoxious plans. We have baseball and volleyball teams and other athletic organizations and hold games which are a source of pleasure to the convicts during their leisure hours. In Bilibid, we have literary societies, civic organizations composed of educated prisoners who now and then lecture to their less cultured companions. We have theatrical companies which stage plays on such holidays as the Fourth of July, Christmas, Washington Day or Rizal Day. We have libraries and there are schools where the young prisoners attend classes two hours in the morning and one hour in the afternoon before they go to their respective occupations, and we have a night school for men over fifty years old. All these improvements have been introduced in the penal institutions of the Philippines following the inspiring examples of the liberal and humanitarian spirit followed in similar institutions in the United States. Rest assured that every useful and advantageous reform which in the future you shall introduce in the institutions under your control shall be recommended by the Philippine Government, subject to such natural changes as are demanded by the particular characteristic of every people.

The latest innovation which we have introduced in Bilibid Prison is the electric chair for the execution

of convicts condemned to death penalty. The installation of this gruesome apparatus was made by a Filipino and is working, according to technical men, without any flaw.

I have come to the end of this lecture which faithfully portrays my own observations. I wish sincerely to confess to you that I am a man who never had the privilege of attending a university. From my early youth, deprived of paternal protection, I was compelled to struggle for life, and through my own efforts, I was able to become a humble peace officer in the Police Department of the City of Manila. Experience showed me every avenue that there is in life with all its realities and from a mere patrolman I have been gradually promoted until today I am the Director of the Bureau of Prisons in the Philippine Islands. If through this lecture I have contributed something to the success of this Congress, that modest accomplishment will be the greatest satisfaction which I would feel all my life after I have crossed the seas to be with you, to hear from you and to learn from you whatever may prove to be of advantage to us.

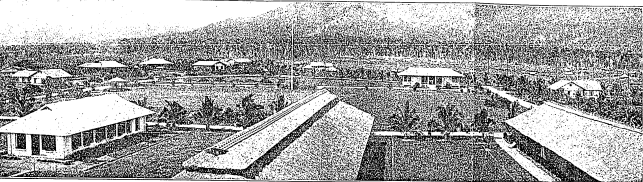




Location of prisons in the entire Philippine Archipelago. Bilibid Prison (Central Office of the Bureau of Prisons), located in Manila, is shown as the radiating center. There are four insular penitentiaries and forty-eight provincial prisons in the Philippines. There is also a municipal jail in each municipality. Provincial prisons and municipal jails come under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Prisons.



Bird's Eye-View of Bilibid Prison, the Head-Quarters of the Bureau of Prisons

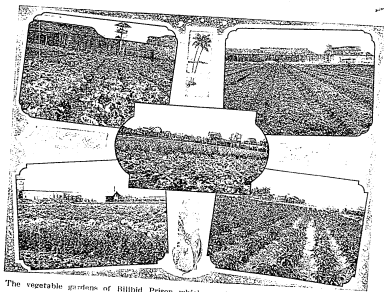


View of the Iwahig Penal Colony, Showing the Central Where the Office Buildings and Officers' Quarters are Located



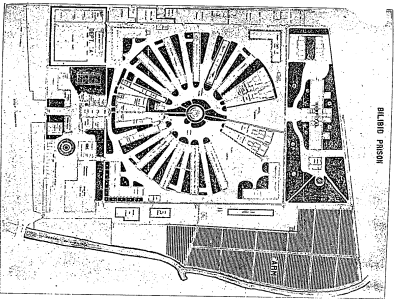
View of the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm, Showing the Prison at the center, the Superintendent's Quarters at the left and the Assistant Superintendent's Quarters at the right



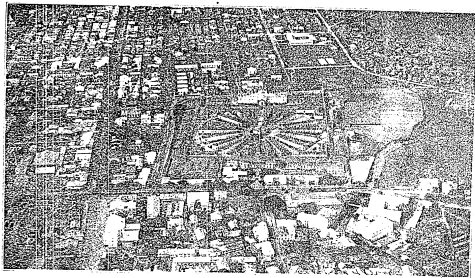


The vegetable gardens of Bilbid Prison which supply fresh vegetables for prisoners' consumption

# BILIBID PRISON



Plan of the Bilibid Prison which covers a ground space of 13 hectares or 130,000 square meters



View of Bilibid Prison from an aeroplane  
(Note that it is located in a populated district of the city of Manila and near Rizal Avenue which may become the business street of Manila in the near future.)