

Work Colonies as Solution of Crime Problem

Aim of Prisoners' Aid Association

DAILY AVERAGE OF 19,681 CONVICTS

Striking Address by Director of Prisons

Of the total population of the Union, 2.3 per cent. are in prison, and to house and guard these prisoners 213 institutions have to be maintained with a staff of 1,647 European and 706 Native and Coloured officers. Though the actual maintenance of each prisoner is only 5½d. per day, the expenditure of the Department of Prisons amounted to £705,090 last year.

These and other interesting facts were revealed in the presidential address delivered by Mr F. Fleck, the Director of Prisons in the Union, to the congress of the South African Prisoners' Aid Association, which was officially opened by the Administrator (the Hon. C. T. M. Wilcocks) in the committee room of the Town Hall yesterday morning.

The delegates were Messrs G. F. Robbins and F. P. W. Barden, Pietermaritzburg; Mr T. C. C. Sloane and Miss Frida Hartley, Durban; Mr Burberry, Johannesburg; the Rev. T. W. Oakes and Mr C. Rose-Innes, Cape Town; Messrs J. B. Watson and Solomon, Pretoria; Mr Pescodd, Kimberley; and Mr John Crawford, Bloemfontein.

In his opening address, Mr Wilcocks paid a tribute to the members of the association for their unselfish and self-sacrificing work on behalf of the erring section of the community. His only regret was that more liberal and spontaneous assistance was not forthcoming from the general public. It was not sufficiently realised, he felt, that the prison population was part and parcel of the nation, and as such should be assisted to become honest and useful citizens. The work done by the association ranked among the noblest social tasks undertaken in this country. He was glad that there were men and women willing to undertake the work, and he wished the association and the congress every success.

PRISON POPULATION

Dealing with the prison population of the Union during the year 1930, Mr Fleck stated that there were 184,455 admissions, of whom 152,616 were sentenced to one month or under. These admissions represented 2.3 per cent. of the total population. The daily average number in custody was roughly 19,681, composed of 1,277 European males and 46 females; 16,817 Native and Coloured males and 1,356 females; and 181 Asiatic males and 45 females. About 81.6 per cent. of

ment. The expenditure on prisoners amounted to £5,796. The amount of £4,490 was paid out in aid of prisoners' families and £2,000 was handed to the Salvation Army for work on behalf of prisoners. Administration costs in this connection were £8,407, but they were justified by the conditions and the objects of the work.

There were 20,782 investigations which resulted in work being found for 657 ex-prisoners. Monetary aid was given to 2,618 persons and other aid to 1,347 persons. At Johannesburg homes and elsewhere 2,598 men were given shelter, 5,042 were provided with beds and 27,927 with meals.

SERIOUS BLOT ON ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Mr Robbins, in a comprehensive paper on "Work Colonies," referred to the endeavours of the association since 1917 to have such colonies introduced. "After some 15 years' experience of prison visiting," he said, "I am convinced that this continued lack of work colonies is at present the most serious blot upon the administration of justice in the Union so far as European prisons are concerned. It is worse than useless to sentence liquor cases to short periods of detention in jail. In effect, we purge the man's system from liquor and then turn him adrift to repeat the process of imbibing ad libitum.

"One wonders whether the public of South Africa are generally aware what a large class the so-called 'stiffs' really are, and what a burden they form upon the community. Under present conditions fresh recruits are never wanting. They produce little or nothing, and are a dead weight upon society.

"At present we are doing absolutely nothing to solve this very serious problem. We are attempting nothing to help these people to help themselves. It is a serious disgrace to us as a civilised community that this class should exist, and a still worse disgrace that we are doing nothing to ameliorate their conditions of life.

Work colonies, proceeded Mr Robbins, offered a reasonable solution, but they must be carefully graded, and there should be several of them. In the first place, consideration must be given to what might be deemed the lowest class—those who from sheer laziness refuse to work and prefer to sponge and to act as parasites