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THE CHICAGO CRIME COMMISSION—HOW THE BUSINESS MEN OF CHICAGO ARE FIGHTING CRIME¹

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While I greatly appreciate the opportunity to tell you something of what the Chicago Crime Commission has done, is doing and will ultimately accomplish, I very much regret my inability to bring to this subject the facility of speech to illuminate a topic worthy the efforts of an orator.

However, I shall endeavor to make this conversation clear and as it is not in any sense a speech, but rather a recitation of facts and as facts are more eloquent than words, I hope to be able to convey an intelligent idea of the work the Chicago Crime Commission is attempting and how the business men of Chicago are fighting crime.

At the close of the administration of President Roosevelt, the country was wondering whether President Taft was to begin his term with a war with Mexico. Relations were strained and some Americans, resident of the Republic to the South, had been killed. President Taft avoided an outbreak during the next four years despite the fact that more Americans were killed. During the first term of President Wilson the killings increased and there came the occupation of Vera Cruz by the army, navy and marines. More taking of life, with Americans as victims, promoted the movement of troops to the border and the Pershing Punitive Expedition.

In these twelve years relations with Mexico have been severed and mended, notes diplomatic have been written and there is still talk in some quarters of the possibility of armed intervention or war. This Mexican turmoil has cost approximately 200 American lives in 12 years and has been a disturbing incident in our national life.

In Chicago, last year, more than 300 of its citizens were murdered by resident criminals. I shall not insult the intelligence of this audience by comment on these facts.

In 1919 the murders of record in Chicago numbered 330; there were 6,108 burglaries and 2,912 robberies. During the same period

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4,447 automobiles were stolen, and the property loss from thefts of all sorts was in excess of twelve millions of dollars.

For the first six months of this year the burglaries have numbered 3,227, robberies 1,269, while the total number of homicides is 498. This latter figure includes all sorts of deaths by violence, including killings by automobiles, some 300. When these figures are analyzed it will probably show that the murder rate has decreased, owing largely, in my opinion, to the great activity in the prosecution of murder cases during the spring, with the result that 15 men are now under sentence of death, while a very considerable number have been sent to the penitentiary for terms ranging from 20 years to life, some of them having pleaded guilty to manslaughter in order to avoid going to trial for murder.

Analysis of the burglary figures for the first 6 months of this year indicates a slight increase in this crime. Analysis of the robbery figures shows a reduction of almost 25 per cent. This is largely because prosecutions have been prompt and vigorous, and because there is now a law in Illinois which provides that robbery, or attempted robbery with a gun, shall, on conviction, be punished by a sentence of from 10 years to life in the penitentiary.

For the 8 months of this year the number of automobiles stolen is 3,215. Of these it is but fair to the police department to state that all but 896 have been recovered.

A long series of bank and payroll robberies had aroused the attention of the Chicago Association of Commerce, when the daylight payroll robbery and murder in the Winslow Brothers' plant, which in 1917 was engaged in government work, brought about the appointment of a committee to investigate the cause for lawlessness. Under date of June 13, 1918, the Association's Committee on Prevalence and Prevention of Crime made public its findings in a report, which recommended the formation of a commission, under the authority of the Association, to be charged with the duty of considering the subject of crime suppression and prevention; to obtain the necessary corrective legislation; to conduct such investigations as might appear necessary in order that the best results be obtained; to attend upon sessions of the General Assembly; to forward the enactment of such legislation as the commission might propose; and to remain thereafter as a body charged with the duty of securing the proper administration of such laws as may be enacted by the officials charged with such administration.

From this it will be observed that the Chicago Crime Commission, which, as a result, then came into being, is not such a vigilance committee as was organized by the Forty-niners, contemplating the apprehension of law-breakers, but rather a business organization helpful in securing the necessary tools with which to work and then, in the words of the Committee on Prevalence and Prevention of Crime, "remain thereafter as a body charged with the duty of securing the proper administration of such laws as may be enacted, by the officials charged with such administration"—an auditing body, if you please—a watch tower.

The commission believes that the lessening of crime is an object worthy of the best thought and best efforts of its best men. Working to this end, with a personnel of over one hundred men, representative of the banking, business and professional interests giving of their time liberally and gratuitously and backing it with their money, operating through an efficient and trained staff of investigators, statisticians and clerks, it has made considerable progress. It has found that the means hitherto employed in combating criminality have proved to be ineffective, and it is endeavoring to correct antiquated and admittedly inadequate methods which have proved unsuccessful. It has produced facts through the collection of impartial statistics which cannot be denied. It has realized that it is dealing with human nature and human capacity.

Almost immediately upon the organization of the commission it was discovered that there were no adequate criminal records in Illinois. The need for a State Bureau of Criminal Records was apparent. A bill to create such a bureau was carefully prepared and when presented to the Fifty-first General Assembly of Illinois carried with it the approval of Governor Lowden and the Director of the Department of Public Welfare, Charles H. Thorne, under whose supervision it would have come. The bill passed the Senate and went to third reading in the House, where it met with bitter opposition by some members and died on the calendar. The fact that some of these members had been in the criminal courts of the state as defendants may or may not have actuated their opposition.

Had the measure been enacted into law it would have been obligatory upon all clerks of courts, sheriffs, coroners, justices of the peace, police magistrates, police officers and constables to furnish to a central bureau, on forms provided by the Department of Public Welfare, all information, reports and data of and concerning complaints of felonies committed or suspected to have been committed in

the State of Illinois; such data and information relating to such felonies to comprise the history of the case and all legal steps taken in connection therewith and all proceedings ancillary thereto from the inception of the complaint to the discharge of the defendant either upon hearing or upon expiration of term of sentence. The penalty for knowingly or willfully failing to perform such duty, or for falsifying or altering such reports, or obstructing or preventing the department from obtaining such information, to be a fine of not exceeding \$1,000, or confinement in the county jail not exceeding one year, or both such fine and imprisonment.

The commission will endeavor to obtain the enactment of a similar bill at the next session of the General Assembly, possibly adding the identification and finger print feature so successfully applied in California where a state bureau is maintained.

Failing to establish this State Bureau of Records, the commission undertook the task as applied to Chicago. Starting its records as of January 1, 1919, it has indexed every burglary and robbery reported in the city and all homicides in the county. Each complaint is carded and the arrests, if any, are indicated. The action of the grand jury is recorded and if indicted the case goes into a replica of the Criminal Court docket, where every action taken by the court is recorded each day. The final disposition is applied to the original card. Another card is made at the time of the indictment and search is made for the previous record, which, if found, is applied to this card and all subsequent indictments are recorded on the same card under all of the known aliases. The homicides are classified according to the findings of the coroner's juries. Every name is indexed and symbols indicate whether it is a victim or a felon.

For the year 1919 and the first four months of 1920, approximately 45,000 cards were required to properly record and index the individual acts of robbery, burglary and homicide and the individuals indicted by the grand jury of Cook County.

To visualize the situation, two maps are used, one seven by eleven feet on a scale of four inches to the mile with the city divided into police precincts and districts. The crimes are indicated on the map by a numbered and distinctly colored tack, the number corresponding with the card in the file bearing the history of the case. On the other map—four by seven feet on a scale of two and one-half inches to the mile—the homes and hangouts of suspects and convicts, questionable athletic clubs and poolrooms are shown by tacks colored and numbered, with the history of each in the files.

At a glance it is apparent that no district is immune from its share of crime—burglary predominating in the outlying districts and among the homes of the well-to-do, while robbery is found to flourish in the bad lands of the Black Belt, the Stock Yards, and the near West Side, but peppering the city generally just off the business thoroughfares, the boulevards, parks and the dark and gloomy spots.

The large map carried 8,350 tacks for the twelve months of 1919 and for the first six months of 1920 there are now on the map 4,351 tacks. By subdividing it into police precincts it is possible to estimate the effectiveness of the department. For instance: A residence territory of about the same class of people divided into two precincts and commanded by two police captains should show about the same number of criminal complaints, everything being equal. If one district shows little and the other much crime, one of two things is true—laxness or corruption on the part of the commanding officer in the district, or failure to report, thereby minimizing crime so far as reports are concerned or an honest, efficient police official. To illustrate with two instances which have had the attention of the commission: An investigation brought out the fact that the captains were not reporting the complaints made to them to the Bureau of Records of the Police Department. In one instance, for a period of a month a certain captain reported but thirty-seven criminal complaints for his district. Investigation by the commission developed that there had been 141 complaints made to him and he had failed to report 104 of them. In the other instance forty burglaries and robberies were known to have been committed, which were not reported.

A detailed report of these was sent to the general superintendent of police and after verification by the department inspector, who found that they had been reported to the local precinct station by victims but had not been reported to the Bureau of Records, the captain in question was requested to explain his action. He replied in detail. Each excuse for failure to report is practically the same and one will suffice as an example.

“Charles Hague, 6501 Yale Avenue, reported that he was held up and robbed of \$9.45 in front of 340 West 66th street by three boys who strong-armed him. Mr. Hague could not give any description of his assailants and on that account no criminal complaint was forwarded.”

The captain was transferred from the district but strong political influence has been invoked to keep him in the department.

In the police department the commission has found a desire on

the part of many of its officers to do better work, but politics frustrate their honest efforts. In some instances arrests are made at the risk of pay or position. Too great activity on the part of the commanding officers might mean transfers to undesirable territory. At this time it is not proper to enter into a discussion of the Chicago police department—it is the only police department we have in Chicago, but it will never be a Scotland Yard until it is entirely divorced from politics. It should be housed in a building used for no other purpose. Its personnel should be schooled in the art of criminal catching and the salaries such as to attract men of brains as well as men of brawn. Its transportation should be made the equal of its adversary—the fleeing culprit. Grave responsibility rests on any police department. Upon its efficiency is balanced the value of life and the worth of property. We would not build upon the sand or lean upon the reed. Too much cannot be expected of untrained, underpaid, inadequately equipped men and this combination plus politics is the reed that Chicago's three millions of population leans upon. What is the result? Chicago had 330 murders in 1919—110 to the million population. Great Britain had 9 to each million of its population. Canada 13 for each million population. Chicago pays more for burglary insurance than any other city in the United States and unless a store is protected with certain burglary alarms and under the protection of a privately employed watchman, a policy cannot be obtained and in certain districts even these safeguards will not induce the underwriters to take the risk. Chicago pays a high price for its indifference to the administration of its public affairs. In addition to its appalling number of murders, its estimated loss by burglary, robbery and larceny was in excess of \$12,000,000.00. The premium paid for insurance against theft runs into the millions and it pays for private protection as well as supporting by taxation its police department which, perhaps through no fault of its own, is powerless to protest. What we need is a radical change in public opinion, a courage born of intelligent conviction. The man or woman who believes that the existing criminal class can be tolerated and that eighty per cent can be converted into useful citizens is a dreamer with faith in and hope for the utterly impossible.

The commission found a scandalous condition in the handling of bail bonds. Prior to November 1, 1919, when the commission began its investigations and for a short time thereafter, professional bondsmen were accepted as surety on bonds, the amount of which many times exceeded the net equity in the real estate they scheduled. Not only were they accepted on bonds greatly exceeding their worth, but

they were also accepted after bonds had been forfeited and judgments rendered and of record against the property and their names published as blacklisted bondsmen.

To illustrate: "Louis Bernstein, residing at 5206 Prairie avenue, scheduled a six-flat building at 523 and 525 East 67th street, which he valued at \$25,000.00, with a mortgage of \$11,500.00, leaving an equity of \$13,500.00. Of this he owned but a half interest or a net equity of \$6,750.00. His credit with the state should have been one-half or \$3,375.00. On November 1, 1919, he was on live bonds totaling over \$100,000.00. On June 19, 1919, there was a forfeiture unpaid for \$3,500.00 standing of record in the Criminal Court against this man. After the forfeiture he was accepted on bonds amounting to \$25,000.00, although the forfeited bond exceeded and wiped out his credit. Between August 27, 1919, and February 5, 1920, Bernstein was accepted on bonds amounting to \$269,500.00, scheduling this one piece of property.

Another instance is the case of Louis H. Levy, 5050 Calumet avenue, against whom an unpaid judgment of \$3,000.00 had been standing since July 25, 1918. He was accepted subsequent to this judgment on eighty bonds amounting to \$304,600.00, forty-two of which amounting to \$196,500.00 were still in force on February 5, 1920. In December, 1919, three more bonds were forfeited aggregating \$17,000.00, or a total forfeiture of \$20,000.00.

Facts and figures in both cases are from the Criminal Court, but both Bernstein and Levy were disqualified in the Municipal Court during this period. There are a number of cases where the facts are just as impressive, although the amounts involved are much smaller. In 1919 there were 426 bonds forfeited, approximating \$1,448,900.00 and less than \$20,000.00 of that amount was collected.

Since the commission made this expose the matter has had the attention of the grand jury, the Chief Justice of the Criminal Court, the State's Attorney and the County Board. Eleven professional bondsmen have been indicted. The man then in charge of the bond department in the office of the State's Attorney has been relieved and efforts are being made to speedily correct what has been a farce.

When a bond is less easy to obtain and culprits spend the time before arrest and trial in jail much of the time now occurring in the prosecution of criminals will be obviated. Cases have been continued as many as 20 or 30 times. The defendant is out on bail free to pursue activities which brought him to grief. The complaining witnesses are compelled to appear in court every time the case is called—some

times losing the entire day. Eventually they lose interest or become intimidated and the case is dropped for want of prosecution. The commission has brought this situation to the attention of the Chief Justice of the Criminal Court and the State's Attorney, and of the many instances known, 21 cases were selected at random and the docket record was published in a bulletin issued December 20 last.

The case of Frank Rio and his associates is typical. On May 28, 1918, two indictments for larceny were returned against him, his bail fixed at \$3,000.00, but on July 2 was reduced to \$2,000.00 which he obtained. After being in court 8 times the case was stricken off call on November 5, 1918. Apparently satisfied with this treatment he tried his hand at burglary and on May 7, 1919, was indicted on 3 counts for that. The grand jury having in mind that his former case was not disposed of when he was alleged to have committed the burglaries, went to some length and instructed the State's Attorney to fight any reduction in his bail which was fixed at \$25,000.00 on each charge or a total of \$75,000.00. Notwithstanding this expressed desire to keep him in custody, the bail was reduced to \$10,000.00 in each case and Rio was again free to pursue his profession. On May 28, 1919, he added another indictment to his list—this time for robbery with bail fixed at \$5,000.00. This bail he furnished. On July 9, 1919, he was again indicted on one count for burglary and one for larceny with bail fixed at \$6,500.00. These cases were running concurrently until he dropped the robbery charge on a verdict of not guilty on October 22, 1919. Thus encouraged he took another chance and on November 14, 1919, was again indicted for burglary and bail fixed at \$3,500.00. On March 9, 1920, he was found not guilty of the burglary charge of July 9. The other 7 cases are still awaiting disposition. Had bail been made difficult in the first instance he would not have been free to commit the crimes following and the many continuances granted on motion of his attorney would not have been so desirable had he been living in jail.

Another circumstance to be noted is the long delayed murder case. The commission brought attention to the case of Thomas Chap, indicted May 4, 1911. Chap was a bartender and shot in the back and killed a 17-year-old boy for striking matches on the bar top and kicking a dog belonging to the saloonkeeper. Chap was released on \$10,000.00 bonds on April 7, 1911. There was no further record until March 20, 1916, when the case was continued and subsequently continued 9 times until October 14, 1918, when the case was stricken off with leave to reinstate. At the suggestion of the commission it was

reinstated September 23, 1919, and after 7 continuances was disposed of as not guilty on December 2, 1919.

The commission took occasion to interview the jury and it found a few of the jurors were opposed to a verdict of guilty for the sole reason that the case was so old that it appeared to them that all of the facts were not presented. It is axiomatic that a murder case more than a year old is handicapped 50 per cent at the start. Witnesses disappear and memory fails, all working to the advantage of the accused.

A realization of this and with a further knowledge that the docket was already clogged with cases several years old and more indictments being voted by the grand jury than could be given proper disposition the commission presented this fact to the Chief Justice of the Criminal Court and the State's Attorney. With their approval, Judges Scanlan, Kavanaugh, Brentano and Barrett were interviewed by a representative of the commission. These jurists setting aside all consideration of personal convenience promptly acquiesced to the request of the commission and agreed to undertake the work of clearing the murder docket. The joint executive committee of the Judges of the Circuit and Superior Courts, whose judges are ex-officio judges of the Criminal Court immediately, and of its own volition, issued an order suspending the civil calendars of the four judges mentioned and assigned them as additional judges of the Criminal Court. The State's Attorney made immediate preparation for the assignments of prosecutors, sufficient bailiffs and clerks were provided by the sheriff and the clerk of the Criminal Court. On May 5 last, 86 murder cases were assigned and the trials begun.

On April 1 of this year 135 persons previously indicted for murder were awaiting trial. Some of the cases had been pending five years. One hundred four of the accused were at liberty on bond. In the month of May last, 12 of these defendants were found guilty and sentenced to hang. Three others were found guilty and sentenced to prison for terms ranging from 14 years to life. Eight more were found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to the penitentiary. A total number of convictions for that month alone of 24 on charge of murder and manslaughter. The work was kept up until the hot weather and the commission is hopeful of renewing this drive this year.

It is obvious that the Criminal Court machinery needs rejuvenating. Its limited facilities are due to the courts standing still while the city has trebled in population with a proportionate growth in crime and criminals. It is a physical impossibility for 6 judges to dispose of the

300 odd indictments voted each month by the grand jury with any degree of justice. To the contrary, notwithstanding, we hear that one judge disposed of 62 cases in one day, sending 21 defendants to prison, to make no mention of the 500 witnesses subpoenaed on the 42 cases continued. Had the defendants sentenced been properly tried it would not have been necessary to compromise by accepting lesser sentences on reduced charges, nor necessitated waivers of felonies. This wholesale bargaining with criminals is pernicious and will have the careful attention of the commission.

The commission has given considerable attention to the administration of the parole law. Much, in fact most of the criticism of this law is due to one of two things: i. e., the convicts released under the administration of the State Board of Pardons which went out of existence in 1917 with the passage of the administrative code, or, confusion of the terms "parole" and "probation." The press constantly uses the word "parole" when "probation" is meant. The police, the jurists and lawyers invariably confuse the terms, to the detriment of parole. An analysis of the various Cook County jury reports decrying the great number of paroled men brought before them usually develops that they are paroled from other states or are on probation. "Parole" is the term applied to the convict who has served at least the minimum of his indeterminate prison or reformatory sentence. The date of hearing is set considerably in advance by the Division of Pardons and Paroles. Anyone interested in the case, either for or against, is notified and may appear at each hearing. The commission has filed its objection to the release of numerous prisoners. Representatives of the commission have attended sessions of the Division of Pardons and Paroles. In every case contested by the commission parole or commutation of sentence has been denied. The work of the board has been observed in cases where the commission has no especial interest and wherever cause was shown why the applicant should not be released from custody the petition was denied. Those who advocate the repeal of the parole law should remember that all of the inmates of Joliet, Chester and Pontiac are not Chicago gunmen. There are men there for stealing a few chickens; for making an inadvertent remark, as one iceman did in East St. Louis during the race riot when in response to a query to the effect of "did you kill any negroes?"—he replied, "Yes! I got 'em here on ice"—or words to that effect; for many things from down state which would be a misdemeanor in Chicago and suffer no more than a fine or a few days in the county jail or house of correction. These people should not be denied the opportunity to

return to society and make good under the guidance of the parole officer. If all of our public servants functioned as conscientiously as the present Division of Pardons and Paroles there would be no need for the continued existence of the Chicago Crime Commission.

The commission has accomplished a great deal that it cannot publish. It has made its place as a constructively co-operative organization. It has pointed out the way and been helpful to officials whose confidence must not be violated. It has instigated prosecution where no prosecution would have been had and allowed others to have the credit. It is ceaselessly employed assisting individuals, corporations and their lawyers to obtain proper indictments, and stimulating the prosecution to insure conviction. This is, of course, all incidental to its study of the system which has grown up in the prosecution of criminals. It would be unfair and accomplish nothing to attack individual judges or the State's Attorney or his assistants for abuses which are the result of years of manipulation by unseen forces. There are those who insist on making an example of each official who errs. If the commission adheres to its present policy it will endeavor to effect a cure by helpful persuasion rather than by coercion and its success to date warrants the prediction that the present tactics will prevail.

The Chicago Crime Commission is not a reform organization. It is an organization of bankers, business and professional men who are applying modern business methods to correct a system which has, through inertia, been allowed to grow up in the departments of state and municipal government having to do with the prevention, apprehension, prosecution and punishment of crime and criminals. It does not contemplate the apprehension nor the prosecution of criminals. It has no political axe to grind. It is interested solely in making Chicago a place in which to live and work with a reasonable assurance that its citizens will not be the prey of gunmen and thieves. It proposes to do this not as the Kuklux Klan, not as the vigilance committee, but by insisting that the laws on the statute books be impartially and rigidly enforced, and all of this with no thought of self aggrandizement. It is avoiding muck-raking and hurtful publicity. It will defend rather than slander the majesty of the law. It will observe closely and constantly every department involved, eliminating step by step the weaknesses, until there will be no place left in which an inefficient official may pass the greatly overworked buck.

It has established a bureau of criminal records which are accurate and comprehensive. It has caused reforms to be enacted as to the manner of handling bail bonds in the Criminal Court, and when this work

is completed a bond will be a bond that will almost guarantee the return of the defendant for trial. It has given assistance in innumerable individual cases involving both public and private interest, the records of which are on file with testimonials of gratitude and appreciation from officials and complainants assisted. It has brought about a condition which has no parallel in the history of crime in Chicago—fifteen men awaiting the death penalty at one time in Cook County.

Crime today is a gigantic system organized and protected, reaching into business and politics, and while still subject to indictment and prosecution, is largely immune from punishment. It is the task of the Chicago Crime Commission to deal with this system, dispose of it, and with the assistance of every right minded man and woman bring about its defeat. It is chasing no rainbows, nor has it a vision in which crime is eliminated. It does know that crime may be minimized and controlled and to this end it is fighting, not for itself, not for the Chicago Association of Commerce, but for every law-abiding citizen, to clear and keep clean the good name of the city of Chicago. It has no personal vanity nor pride of opinion.

The Chicago Crime Commission is purely and simply an organization of business men determined to do its duty, without fear or favor, to the end that organized crime in Chicago may be destroyed.