

**Culhane sees problems**

**Prisons need coverage**

by H. McKinnon

If for not other reason than caring about their money, health and life, Canadians will want to destroy the country's prison system, according to author/activist Claire Culhane.

"The guy you put in there and treat like an animal will come out like an animal and we are the potential victims," she said in an exclusive interview with the Gazette.

The dehumanizing prison system destroys self-respect and develops only bitterness, she said. "It does not rehabilitate a prisoner" according to Culhane, "and considerable evidence supports this argument."

She noted that Canada has the highest per-capita prison population in the world.

"There is no sensible reason for this," she said. At least 50 per cent of those incarcerated have committed no violent crime. Many are imprisoned for drug offences, fail-

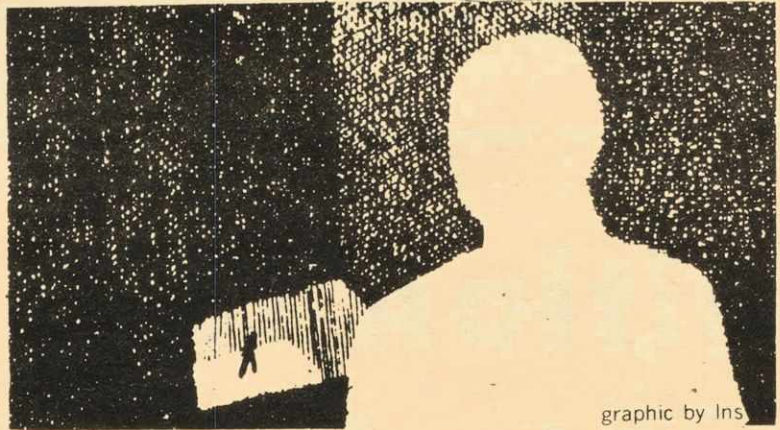
ure to pay fines or while awaiting trial.

Prisoners need but are not receiving professional help and counselling, she said. Instead, "tensions...rather than decreasing from the existing high levels, appear to be heightening" she said.

In the interview she discussed how prisoners have little or no access to the media and how this has provoked hostage-taking. These incidents have enabled prisoners to describe their "less-than-human" living conditions.

Culhane felt that denying the inmates access to media was a prison administration policy. "I personally think it's policy and I think there is proof to show that," she said.

She urged people to be concerned with the issue since this situation "can well trigger the moral conscience of the general population" and help general social change.



graphic by Ins

Culhane also discussed the sensible and effective prison systems of China and Vietnam "where prisoners engage in productive work and are educated as well." Culhane pointed out that Vietnam's hundreds of thousands of drug addicts and prostitutes, the American legacy, are rehabilitated and not punished.

She linked the oppression of inmates in the Canadian prison system to the oppression of everyone in the capitalist system.

She added that "unemployment, which is intrinsic to the capitalist system, really hurts ex-inmates since they are usually the last to be hired."

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