

A look at correctional institutions



EDITORS NOTE: The following essay is a comment on American PRISONS* WE FEEL THE ESSAY IS ALSO APPLICABLE TO THE Canadian prison institution.

BY Pat Miller

I would like to take the opportunity to directly confront an issue which everyone should be re-examining: Prisons.

Having been involved in research in this area I am aware of the problems which are inherent in the situation. It is necessary for the readers to realize the changes which are needed in the present correctional situation. Politicians and Judges are constantly telling the populace that of the so-called "hard core juvenile" in society, of their numbers and the increased incidence of young criminals. I assert that there really are not very many hard core juveniles as these people would have society believe. Members that could be labeled thus are often merely a product of the system which sought to "correct them."

Professionals have names for these people, names such as the sociopath of the 20's and 30's, the psychopath of the 40's, a person unresponsive to verbal conditioning of the 50's, a criminal personality of the 60's and 70's - and for all these people the treatment has been the same, one of isolation and brutality.

A good example of this in the last decade is Charles Manson. Manson was described in "Helter Skelter" as a psychopath with which no one could work with. I feel Manson is a logical product of the prison system. Bugliosi related how Manson raped an individual in the Washington DC training school yet neglected to indicate that Manson himself had been raped at the age of 14 at another institution.

Frankly one wearies of explaining and re-explaining the process and the results involved in some of these basic deinstitutionalization efforts. Such, however, has not been the case. Beginning with the so-called "Manning Report" sponsored by the National Association of Training School Superintendents in 1972 - to the current issue of Corrections Magazine - the facts continue to be distorted and the sound research findings continue to be ignored.

I am taking this opportunity, therefore, to outline a few of the salient issues in one of the deinstitutionalization efforts mentioned above, i.e., The Massachusetts experience. The following is based upon the findings of the Harvard Center for Criminal Justice.

Between late 1970 and 1972, Massachusetts closed all of its institutions for adjudicated delinquent youngsters. Previous to that time Massachusetts had institutionalized 8 to 12 hundred adjudicated and committed delinquent youngsters. From 1969 to 1971, the Massachusetts State Department of Youth attempted to "reform" these state schools, turning them into so-called "therapeutic Communities". During this period the institutions improved - the Harvard study

showing that they compared favorably with the famous "Silverlake" experiments - the institutions eschewing much of the psychological and physical violence which had characterized many of them to that point.

It was also clear, however, that keeping these institutions decent was a full time job - an upriver

swim. Rogerian principles regarding individual personality (such as drives toward health) were not meant to apply to institutions with

captive populations. It was the experience that the disposition of such institutions is precisely the opposite. When left alone, they deteriorate - the needs of the institution taking precedence over the individual. At best there is a retreat to bureaucracy and apathy, and at worst to repression and violence - neither a happy result. Unfortunately sustaining care in institutions is a major problem. When this is compounded with civil service systems, state bureaucracies, the political systems and considerations that underline them, etc., the task of

sustenance becomes nearly an impossible one. Fortunately, some learned this very early on. To let up efforts for even a short time resulted in retreat to routine institutional approaches - use of lockups, isolation, etc. Some learned that a good and decent institution (and there are some) rests upon the fragile relationships of staff and clientele - with a constant ferment, questions of roles, examination of self, etc., all of which undergrid a potentially creative human community. Such an institution must work at it full time. It is not attained by rules and

regulations. One could hardly imagine a superintendents directive that "staff will care for clientele," or "Staff will question their own motivations and reactions as of 9 A.M. tomorrow." But, unfortunately, the converse is not equally true. Once can destroy a good and decent institution quickly and effectively in days, if not hours - with a few simple rules of directives: "Three days' isolation for such and such rule infractions," "Social workers will talk with such and such clients only," "Custody personnel will do such and such with runaways," etc.

This awareness brought some to the decision in Massachusetts that our reforms within the state institutions, though useful and measurable, were likely to be undone - if not through some simple bureaucratic fatigue, by and subsequent administration devoted to more "control" or "law and order" ideology. It was in this context that they made the decision to leave the institutions as completely as possible and to develop a statewide series of alternatives for institutionalized delinquent youngsters. Additionally, they felt that it must ensure that these alternatives had as much political "clout" as possible to counteract the political considerations undergirding state institutions (e.g., patronage, state employee's unions, contractors, vendors, etc.).

From late 1970 to the middle of 1972, they proceeded to close all of the institutions for juvenile offenders committed to the state juvenile correctional agency by the court. They substituted for these institutions a wide range of community-based alternatives. The institutions have remained closed for the past six years. What happened, and what has been the result. The following are conclusions and policy implications derived from the studies of the Harvard Center for Criminal Justice done on the Department of Youth Services in Massachusetts over a four year period.

THE HARVARD STUDEIS CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. The community based system is a viable alternative to the training school system. The reform in Massachusetts was a basic which expanded the corrections area to include the extensive involvement of private agencies and the setting up of a massive array of programs that were considerably more community based than the traditional training school. Massachusetts reforms were not therefore a matter of establishing "pilot programs" or a few model community-based programs to argument training schools.

2. Youngsters in the community-based programs perceived themselves as being recipients of more human care than those of institutions. Although the short-term outcome of this was an improved self-image and improved perception of others were generally not realized. It was clear that more follow up work was needed with youth in returning to their normal living situations following community based treatment.

3. Recidivism statewide was up slightly, though not significantly under the new system. However, in those regions of the state where a wide mix of community based programs were established, recidivism dropped almost dramatically and continues to stay down. It was a conclusion of the Harvard group not that the training schools provided lower recidivism rates, but precisely the opposite - that many of the community programs were not community based enough. They did not in fact establish enough linkages with the community and in fact many cases redid training school ideology and bureaucracies in the community. This was particularly true of the so-called group homes.

The Harvard group concluded that where there was more reliance on family support systems, specialized foster care (paying a person a full salary to care for one or more youngsters), community advocacy programs (paying a person to spend 30 to 50 hours a week with an individual youngster), that such programs showed a dramatically lower recidivism rate. There was no over reliance upon the group home model as the alternative to institutions, whereas there should have been greater reliance upon non-residential and smaller residential care programs.

CIA Says UFOs real

CIA documents obtained in a Freedom of Information suit by a UFO group show that the agency has been secretly studying unidentified flying objects since 1949 - despite its continued statements to the contrary. William Spaulding, an aerospace engineer and head of the group, Ground Saucer Watch, says, "After reviewing the documents, Ground Saucer Watch believes that UFO's do exist, they are real, the U.S. Government has been totally untruthful and the coverup is massive." The documents indicate that the CIA ostensibly wanted to avoid exciting the press and public's "probably alarmist tendencies."

The documents indicate, however that the Air Force tried to intercept and even destroy UFO's. One of the detailed CIA accounts tells how a U.S. Fp4 Phantom jet over Iran attempted to fire an AIM-9 missile at a small craft associated with a mother ship. The report states, "But at that instant his weapons-control panel went off and he lost all communications." Then the pilot saw the small craft rejoin the larger ship. The group is now awaiting a final court ruling which could provide access to 57 items of "hard evidence" such as film and residue from landings. (Newscript)