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PERSPECTIVES ON CORRECTIONS IN CALIFORNIA

Preface By WARNER SMITH

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES focus upon particular facets of the California corrections system. In a recent speech, California's Attorney General, Evelle Younger, noted that: "California's correctional system is one of the most admired in the world. Correctional officials come from around the world in a steady stream to study the California operations . . ." He concluded "Our correctional system isn't perfect, it's just the best there is."

The JOURNAL does not share the Attorney General's Panglossian view of the California corrections system. He confuses quantity with quality and becomes imprisoned by the ideology, Giantism. That California's corrections system is one of the nation's largest is indisputable: as her jail population was 27, 672; New York had the second largest jail population of 17,399. That it is "the best there is" is doubtful; given the goal of rehabilitation, the Scandinavian corrections systems probably achieve it more effectively than does California's. Even if California's corrections system were the best there is we could not submit to the slothful belief that what is is the best possible. Criticism of the best there is gives birth to new possibilities. By focusing upon some of the institutional excesses in California corrections, the JOURNAL hopes to draw public attention to those prison systems throughout the nation falling further than California's below minimal humane standards. By examining the "cream of the correctional crop," the articles should reveal comparable problems encountered in other jurisdictions.

The JOURNAL understands that some institutional practices in the California system are unique to it, particularly the indeterminate sentencing scheme, but awareness of the nature and operations of these practices will forewarn citizenry in other states of some of their harmful effects. The value of unique conditions to other systems is that those correctional officials from around the world are provided a broader range of options to select from in formulating new policies and operations. The largest corrections system is prototypical, not only in its approaches to problems shared in common with other systems, but in its experiments unique to itself.

Finally, a major impetus for prison reform emerged from the bowels of the California corrections system: from a band of articulate, politically conscious, and courageous prisoners. Much of the most persuasive cries for change has flower from the pens of men in Soledad and Folsom. Their eloquence, together with that of other prisoners throughout the land, has quickened the conscience of people throughout the world. Hence, it is fitting that the JOURNAL'S focus on a national issue will center upon a system which is the immediate scene of a vanguard's struggle.