

Stout walls and bars do not a prison make

by Robert J. Trotter

**Irate prisoners and the demands of society
are forcing the Federal Bureau of Prisons
to develop more modern methods of correction**

*The vilest deeds like poison weeds
Bloom well in prison air:
It is only what is good in man
That wastes and withers there:
Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate
And the Warder is Despair.*

Oscar Wilde,
The Ballad of Reading Gaol

Seventy-five years ago Oscar Wilde described his life in prison as a living hell. Since then, it seems, little has been done to change the conditions that produced such a lament. Accordingly, some of today's less poetic prisoners have adopted a more enthusiastic method of bemoaning the dread and degradation of their situation.

In addition to the rebellious prisoners, other groups have taken up the call for prison reform. In late July the board of trustees of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency issued three specific proposals for the upgrading and modernization of the criminal justice system.

The first recommendation calls for realistic compensation for inmate labor. Charging that the present prison labor system is counterproductive, the NCCD argued that inmates who earn at least the established minimum wage would be able to provide support for their families, continue Social Security payments, make restitution when applicable and save for self-support dur-



New York Times

Male and female prisoners at the Fort Worth Federal Correctional Institution stroll in a country-club-like setting.

ing the period when they first reenter society.

In a second, more drastic proposal the NCCD said the Federal Bureau of Prisons should quit wasting massive sums of money on a system that has not worked in the past and is not likely to work in the future. Nearly \$2 billion is presently earmarked for projected construction of prisons, jails and juvenile facilities throughout the country. This money, the NCCD says, should be allocated to expand community treatment programs.

Community treatment does not mean a penitentiary located in the community. It means a small group of prisoners living together in a group or foster home. When possible the prisoners hold jobs, attend school or receive vocational training in the community. In the home they receive group therapy or specific treatment suited to the problem that put them in jail. There is no blanket approach to this type of treatment, but the basic idea behind the system is that a person cannot be successfully rehabilitated if he is kept out of touch with society.

Community programs and effective probation and parole systems, the NCCD says, can significantly reduce the number of persons held in jail, thus avoiding overcrowding and the need for new prisons. To back up these claims, the NCCD reports that with such programs California has reduced its prison population from 28,000 to 21,000. Saginaw, Mich., demonstrated that 80 percent of its felony offenders could be placed on probation without danger to the community. New Mexico dropped its prison population from 1,500 to 800 as a result of an effective parole system—a \$20 million institution was found to be unwarranted there.

The President's Crime Commission recommended that only the very dangerous be held in prison. The American Correctional Association estimates that less than 15 percent of the men in prisons need maximum security. If these guidelines are followed the Federal Bureau of Prisons will be out of a job. This is the NCCD's third proposal. The council believes the Bureau of Prisons is impeding the trend toward community correction. In place of the bureau the NCCD suggests the establishment of a Federal correction agency that would provide technical assistance, program guidelines and research designs to state and local governments.

Responding to these NCCD proposals, Roy Gerard of the Federal Bureau of Prisons noted that one of the strongest pushes for the implementation of community treatment was made by the bureau with its establishment of halfway houses. "As soon as we determine



Kennedy Youth Center

Kennedy Youth Center's open setting replaces the traditional walls and bars.

that prisoners are trustworthy," he says, "we try to move them into these programs. We are working as hard as we can to get people into community programs, but the courts tell us there are still quite a few people who require institutionalization."

The bureau's 10-year building program, he says, is not aimed at building more bastille-type institutions but at replacing existing prisons with smaller ones. The Federal prison in Atlanta, Ga., for example, has 2,000 inmates. Gerard says the bureau knows a group this size is too unwieldy to treat effectively. The bureau will replace that institution with four or five smaller facilities in which meaningful programs can be instituted for the prisoners.

Gerard contends that to institute meaningful programs, the bureau must remain operational. In a purely advisory position, he says, the bureau would become just another ivory-tower institution. By staying operational the bureau, he hopes, will be able to do a better job of testing experimental and innovative prison models.

Two such experimental programs are currently in operation. The Federal Bureau of Prisons inherited 300 acres, 20 buildings and 206 staff members of what was formerly a National Institutes of Health clinical research center in Fort Worth, Tex. The staff of psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers, together with about 35 experienced bureau personnel, converted the facility into what is now the Fort Worth Federal Correctional Institution. It began operation last November as a minimum security prison designed to accommodate both male and female offenders.

Five rehabilitation programs are being operated at the prison. Heroin,

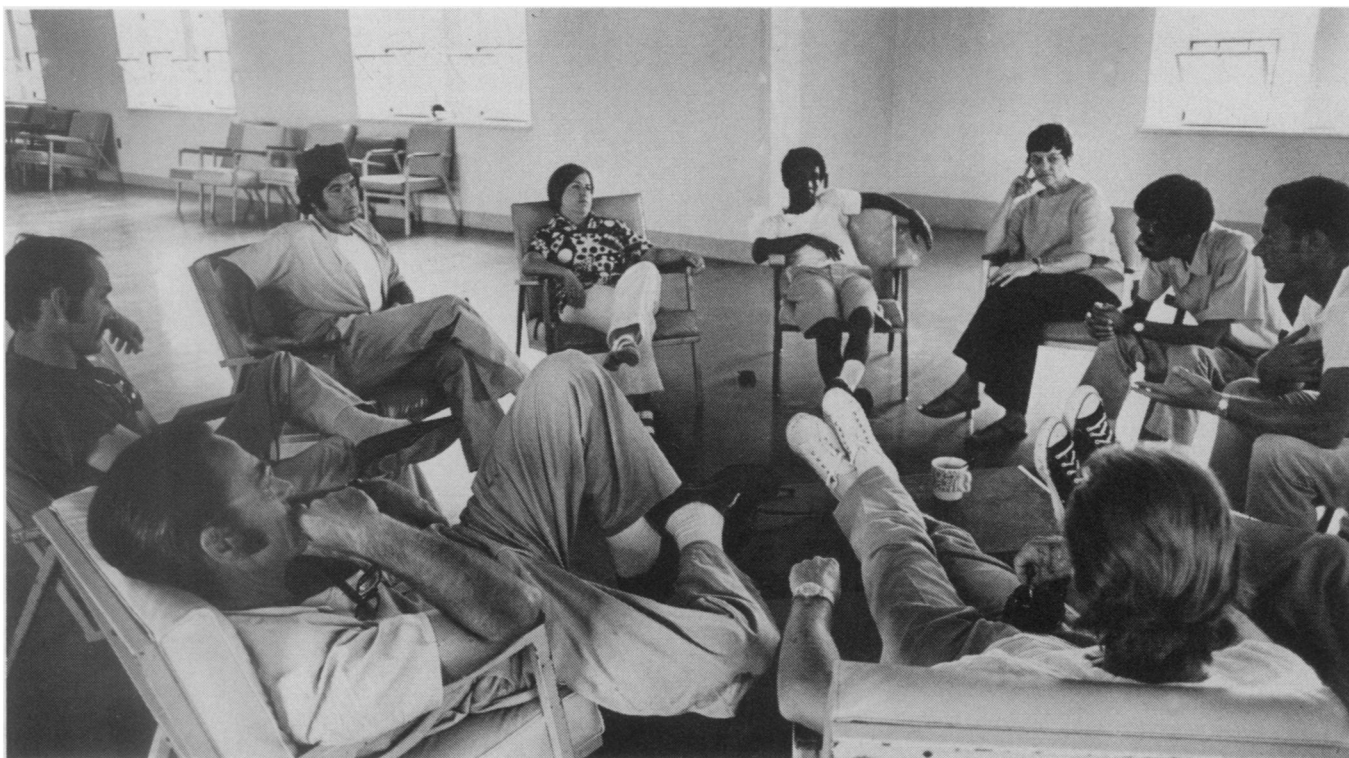
alcohol and other drug addicts take part in various therapies. A geriatric unit treats some mental patients and prisoners who have become debilitated by prison life and who are ill equipped to handle the problems of the community. The fifth unit is for women. Women prisoners take part with the men in all the prison programs. In addition to the rehabilitation programs, the prison offers on- and off-grounds opportunity for education and vocational training.

At capacity, 235 staff members will be in charge of 275 men and 100 women. Most of the male prisoners have about two years to go before they are to be released or become eligible for parole. The women's sentences may be longer, but all prisoners are selected primarily because of their need for the special facilities. Prisoners known to be violent, dangerous or escape-prone are excluded. Women from all parts of the country are sent to Fort Worth. Most of the men come from other prisons in the Southwest.

To an outsider the facility looks like a country club. There are no guards at the open entrance and none of the staff carry weapons. Men and women attend classes together, have one free hour together during the day and are free to spend time together after the evening meal until sundown.

There is probably some sexual intimacy between the male and female prisoners, says Warden Charles F. Campbell. But most of the prisoners seem to cooperate with the system and are not out to get involved sexually. They are more interested in taking advantage of the facilities and getting out, he says.

"We still have a lot to learn about controlling this type of situation," says



New York Times

In group therapy sessions at the Fort Worth institution prisoners concentrate on the problems that put them in jail.

Campbell. "because the Fort Worth facility is the first in the United States to attempt to keep adult male and female prisoners together." But the overall effect, he says, is beneficial and healthy for all concerned. The prisoners enjoy each other's company in a natural sort of way and the women make an attempt to be more feminine and attractive in their appearance. Also, says Campbell, there is no question that the situation is causing a decrease in homosexuality—especially among the men.

The prison grounds may look like a country club but Campbell insists that it is not. "Our inmates have made it quite clear to us that this is not an easy place to do time," he says. Inmates are kept under constant pressure to make the most of their time.

A recidivism rate of 60 to 70 percent is not uncommon at some prisons. Since opening in November, the Fort Worth institution has released more than 300 prisoners and none has been reincarcerated. Campbell warns that it is too early to brag about these figures, but he feels that this kind of prison will be the prison of the future. "I really don't think there is any future for the other kind."

The Federal Bureau of Prisons also operates an experimental prison for youthful offenders. The Robert F. Kennedy Youth Center in Morgantown, W.Va., was designed to take the place of the National Training School for Boys in Washington. It has been in operation for three years, but just

recently began to accept female offenders.

Like the Fort Worth institution, no guns or walls keep the inmates in. But instead of a country club atmosphere, the Kennedy Youth Center looks like a modern junior college. Instead of being a training ground for crime, as many reformatories are, this facility makes an attempt at meaningful rehabilitation, its administrators say.

The inmates (up to 23 years old) are psychologically tested and separated into four groups: inadequate-immature, neurotic-disturbed, unsocialized-psychopathic and socialized subcultural. Using the functional unit concept, small groups that share a common problem receive the necessary therapy and counseling. After an average stay of 13 months, most inmates have passed a high-school equivalency test and have been involved in vocational training.

As a form of social rehabilitation, all inmates work their way up a ladder of prestige and responsibility. Using a behavior-modification system, the staff rewards inmates with tokens at the end of each week. With these earnings inmates purchase special privileges (private rooms, civilian clothes and trips to town or home for visits) or save for when they are released. This and other programs are all part of the center's research on new correctional procedures.

Community involvement is one of the experimental programs being examined. "This is an untapped resource," says

Gerard, who was the first director of the Morgantown center. "Community involvement is difficult to get started and takes a lot of training and supervision," he says, "but it provides so many benefits that we are quite enthused about it." About 140 community volunteers presently spend time with the inmates at the Kennedy center. Everyone involved agrees that the inmates must maintain close contact with the outside world if they are ever going to function properly in it.

In addition to the outside volunteers there are 190 full-time staff members to care for 200 males and 50 females. At Morgantown, as at Fort Worth, the addition of females has been tried and found to be healthy. "We were worried at first, and the boys were a bit apprehensive but there have been none of the expected fights or jealousies," says executive assistant William Kennedy.

Escapes are not rare at either prison, but there have been fewer than expected for institutions that have no walls or bars. Only 28 inmates walked out of the Morgantown facility last year and almost all of them were recaptured. "We don't keep them here, the program does," says Kennedy.

Like Gerard and Campbell, Kennedy feels this system is going to work. "We are pioneering new methods in the whole realm of corrections, because society will no longer allow us to warehouse prisoners. We are trying to catch up with the demands of society." □