

The American Political Prisoner

Reviewed by
Carl L. Nelson

The reviewer is Washington editor of the College Press Service.

America's federal prisons are model penal institutions. Today they are less crowded, have better food and accommodations, employ higher qualified and better paid guards, and minimize physical brutality to keep inmates cooperative—but that is not saying much. Authors Howard Levy and David Miller would not go back to them in witness to any cause without a fight because, like state and local facilities, they are, to use the words of Soledad Brother Fleeta Drumgo, "barbaric, oppressive, racist and murderous institutions." According to "Going to Jail: The Political Prisoner," the basic federal program for rehabilitation is still coercion, and the result is shattered lives and increasing hatred.

For any penal system to rehabilitate prisoners rather than institutionalize society's vengeance, it must first guarantee its inmates self-respect and due process. In

Books

GOING TO JAIL: The Political Prisoner. By Howard Levy, M.D. and David Miller.

(Grove, 243 pp., \$6.00)

this regard, Levy and Miller point out that federal prisons for men are little different than other penal institutions. Federal prisons may replace physical brutality with behavioral psychology, but the sad truth is that correctional philosophy—and on the state and military levels, correctional facilities and techniques—has progressed little from the black holes of British debtors' prisons that drove many inhabitants to North American shores in the first place.

Levy was imprisoned June 2, 1967, after conviction for refusing to train U.S. Army Special Forces medics bound for Vietnam duty. He contended that it violated his medical ethics. Miller's name saw headlines across the country at about the same time when he burned his draft card at the Sheeps Meadow demonstration in Central Park. He was convicted and served 22 months. Both men draw on

their experiences in the Lewisburg Federal Prison and farm camp and the Allenwood farm camp, both in Pennsylvania, and the United States Disciplinary Barracks in Kansas for material for the book.

The authors have two aims: to give to the general reader "a conceptual framework through which those who have never been in prison can comprehend and then challenge the prison system," and to provide a handbook for white radicals and liberals who may end up as political prisoners, an increasingly real possibility.

Within the limited aims of the book, it does well, outlining in a series of concise chapters what happens in the various areas of prison life, how a new prisoner fits into the truncated prison society, and how prison administrators orchestrate the inmate's actions through the carrots of privilege ("good time" toward parole or release, reading material, rec-

reation) and the sticks of discipline (the "hole," reassignment to the "jungle" wing of sexual psychopaths).

Prison literature as a whole, including this book, still lacks a detailing of the experience of the most forgotten of prisoners—women. As one woman in Broward County Jail in Ft. Lauderdale said last year, "we smell each other, we know each other. Once a month we get to shave our legs and once a week we get to watch television. But that's about it." Day after day. Year after year. Even in the report of the Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice—the most massive statement ever published on crime and corrections in America—there is no chapter or paragraph devoted to the female "offender."

"Going to Jail," is convincing in arguing that the system of prison administration has "no socially redeeming value and ought . . . to be abolished." But "a society which has not found the courage and the means to break its own shackles is in no position to break those it has placed upon its 'deviant' members."