

# Burger Urges Reform, Classes For Prisoners

By Nancy Scannell  
Washington Post Staff Writer

WILLIAMSBURG, Va., Dec.

7—Chief Justice Warren E. Burger ticked off a list of problems in the nation's correctional system tonight and said that prisoners should be given the opportunity of education.

"The figures on literacy (of prisoners) alone are enough to make one wish that every sentence imposed could include a provision that would grant release when the prisoner has learned to read and write, to do simple arithmetic, and then to develop some basic skill that is saleable in the marketplace . . . to which he must someday return," Burger told the nation's first Conference on Corrections here.

More than 350 delegates—including ex-convicts, judges, wardens, police chiefs, parole officers and congressmen—have come together in this historic town for three days of seminars and discussion groups.

The conference is expected to send a set of recommendations to the Justice Department on Wednesday for establishing penal reform programs.

In what he referred to as "cursory observation" of the corrections system as compared to the expertise of the delegates, the Chief Justice said that urgent attention should be given to crowded prisons; lack of basic academic and vocational skills of many inmates; inadequate recreational facilities, and the need for more sensitive, better trained corrections officials "from the lowest guard to the highest administrators."

The Chief Justice also suggested that inmates are in danger of losing their ability for self-control and management if a correctional institution exerts total control over prisoners' personal lives.

"What can be wrong with allowing prisoners to practice, on a small scale, the very things we will insist they do when they are again free?" he asked.

Other points Burger made:

- The recent turmoil at Attica and San Quentin prisons, two of the most modern facilities in the country prove the weakness of the "bricks and mortar" approach to corrections. He said smaller structures are needed in locations that allow work release programs, convenient housing for prison officials and accessibility for family visits to inmates.

- "Just anybody" will not suffice as a corrections officer. He hailed Attorney General John N. Mitchell's announcement on Monday of plans to create a National Corrections Academy for the training of prison officials as "one of the milestones in American correctional history."

- Improved classification procedures are needed to segregate "riot-prone" prisoners from others, and useful and first offenders from recidivists, incorrigibles, drug addicts and the mentally disturbed.

- Recreational facilities sufficient to end the "terrible effect of boredom, frustration of empty hours and pointless existence of prison life" should be provided.

- A means of regular communication should be established between inmates and prison officials.

The Chief Justice said the judicial system is attempting to "put our house in order" by creating programs approved at a special judicial conference in October that would expedite trials, the appeals process, and avoid instances of delay.

"In some places, the time lags between arrest and trial is hardly less than a public disgrace," Burger said, attributing the laxity to overloaded court dockets, overworked defense and prosecution lawyers and the "maneuvering of lawyers who misconceive their function" as seeking trial delays.

Defendants who "exploit procedural devices" to postpone a final guilty verdict for a number of years, said their "warfare with society has embedded and intensified their hostilities and rendered prospects for future improvement virtually zero," he added.

Furthermore, Burger said, sentencing delays expose the public to added dangers when the accused is in fact "an incorrigible criminal whose release on bail is exploited to commit new crimes."

And in some cases, the criminal thinks he risks only a concurrent sentence for crimes committed while awaiting sentencing, he said.