

A Nickel for Rehabilitation

By RAMSEY CLARK

WASHINGTON—Attica reminds us how quickly America resorts to violence and how little we revere life. We created the "Big House," knew of the inhumanity there and waited for the recurrence of death and destruction that was bound to come. When the crisis arose we accepted, perhaps wanted, official violence to smash the prisoners we hated and feared.

The same qualities of character that call for shooting looters, that condone police killing Black Panthers, and support the National Guard when it fires high-powered rifles and takes the lives of unarmed students justify the avoidable slaughter of prisoners and guards. Attica can only remind prisoners throughout America of the value we place on human life—theirs and the men who guard them. Attica shows again America's reliance on violence as a problem solver.

Can society be expected to make a significant effort for people whose humanity it denies, whose lives it holds of such small value it will sacrifice them on the altar of order? If we are to begin to make sense with our treatment of offenders, we must first recognize our common humanity and want them to live at peace with themselves and others. Until then, whatever we say or do or spend will fail.

The Congress and state legislatures could quickly double national expenditures for corrections. We spend less than two billion dollars a year in all correctional activities, Federal, state and local. Sixty per cent of the expenditures are by state governments. We employ about 150,000 people. Our ability to train and beneficially employ additional personnel provided by such increases in a short period of time seems clear.

Ninety-five cents of every dollar spent in penology is for custody, pure custody. Five cents is for services essential to rehabilitation and crime reduction. Approximately 80 per cent of corrections budgets supports prisons and jails while 20 per cent is used in community activities. Prisons place the prisoner in the starkest possible segregation from the community to which he must return. We should not spend more than 20 per cent of our resources on prisons and jails. No funds should be invested in prisons or jails housing more than 100 inmates. Those in existence should be dismantled as soon as possible.

A mere increase in expenditures for corrections will be inadequate, even dangerous. We do not need more of the same. We require essentially different qualities in corrections activity. Priorities should include the following:

First, a philosophy of avoiding detention wherever possible through prevention efforts, community treatment and probation supervision.

Second, recognition that the needs of each individual are different. Corrections programs should be carefully tailored to individual needs.

Third, the creation of new substantive rights of persons convicted of crime that would impose duties on governments to fulfill basic human needs:

- Health—full social-medical services for the care and cure of alcoholism and addiction; adequate psychiatric and psychological treatment and counseling for all in need; mental health services; prohibition of unhealthy or overcrowded quarters; provision of good food and diet.

- Safety—freedom from assault by guards or other prisoners, forced homosexuality, corporal punishment and solitary confinement.

- Communications—free access to family, friends, advisers, attorneys and the press. Freedom to write letters,

articles and literary works.

- Education and Vocational Training—immediate placement in an academic program with remedial help as needed; vocational training, with special programs for the handicapped and retarded.

- Job Placement—in highest skills for which qualified at the earliest feasible time on work-release basis where partial confinement is necessary; programs for on-the-job training to teach higher skills.

Fourth, the creation of new procedural rights of prisoners, including

due-process standards, the right to see and hear all evidence, to confront witnesses, to an impartial trier of fact and to counsel on issues such as program, institution transfer, denial of privileges, release on parole.

Fifth, an intensive effort to move offenders to the community where they will live. Funding for full probation and parole services can make these techniques an effective tool of corrections. Work-release, pre-release guidance and halfway houses are but beginnings. The need is for small, unmarked community facilities with

skillful community service personnel to help assure the individual social stability as he continues schooling or vocational training, works at a job, adjusts with family counseling to return home.

If these priorities seem radical, it is because radical solutions are needed. We have tinkered long enough and tortured ourselves with antisocial conduct.

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