

Letters to the Editor

Prison Reform—Who Needs It?

To the Editor:

A dissenting voice should be heard. The public, at least that part of it to which I belong, does not buy prison reform.

The liberal establishment through The Times, Tom Wicker, Senator Birch Bayh and the innumerable other politicians, from their remote ivory tower fastnesses, in their anguished pleas for what is referred to euphemistically as "prison reform," do not speak for those of us who walk the streets, in contrast to those who ride through them in their limousines escorted by publicly paid for motorcycles.

It amazed us to note the discrepancy between the real world of our daily experience, only faintly reflected in the news columns of The Times and the schizoid fantasy world of the editorials, columnists and politicians. To believe the latter, only the convicted felons (the merest tip of the iceberg of our experiences) are the oppressed and the daily victims of unpunished violence and thievery are the oppressors.

Those who preach "off the pigs," "black power" and the rest of the mindless threats of violence are revolutionary heroes. The rest of us, the designated victims of these slogans, are obvious racists. What in the lexicon of the liberal establishment, carefully insulated in their Park Avenue and Georgetown preserves and their exclusive private schools, could be more reprehensible?

To read The Times' editorial of Sept. 11, "Now, Attica Again," one would be tempted to believe that only the

convicted felon, in this land, lacked "decent food, good medical care, adequate recreational facilities."

It probably will come as a surprise to The Times that there are countless thousands, who earn their bread, who have never committed murder or rape or burglary, who also lack these amenities.

The implication in the advocacy of prison reform, that recidivism would thereby be reduced, is wholly without merit or proof. Indeed, the contrary is the case. The multiplication of procedural reforms, the increased services in the areas of probation and parole and release on bail, have been accompanied not by a reduction in crime, but by an increase.

So, money spent in this area, in our view, is wasted. Time enough to make the felons' lot a happy one when the more urgent needs of the society at large have been met.

Tom Wicker, poor innocent, is pained that officials may have lied to convicts. How tragic! Has it escaped his attention that Lyndon B. Johnson was less than candid to us for years on end, that Richard M. Nixon continues to be so. Would it surprise him to learn that we have become inured to this state of affairs. I refer, of course, to the non-felons among us. We have learned to expect nothing less from our betters, witness the Pentagon papers.

In short, the passion of the liberal establishment for prison reform arouses only a negative response in us. We do not accept the explanations of the forces leading to crime and even less condone them. ABRAHAM S. HAFT, M.D.

Tuckahoe, N. Y., Sept. 18, 1971