

PRISON LAW COLLECTIVE
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*** "Imagine, if you can, a world where men have regressed into a state of bestiality paralled to that of dogs, where the products of the American Tobacco Company are a social religion, and God himself is a pack of cigarettes; where dominoes, homosexuality, and the pursuit of cigarettes rule the mental faculties of man. A business community where men are forced to produce products for public consumption for wages of Two (2) pennies an hour; operating the most dangerous machinery without any form of industrial compensation insurance; the danger of their employment is enhanced by the fact that many of them cannot even read the safety instructions on the machinery they operate!

You are told upon arrival here that you must adjust, be able to fit in, with the scheme of this unimaginable horror before you will be considered socially responsible enough to be placed back into free society.

Incredible? Unbelievable? Yeah, I can dig it. That's exactly what it is. But it's happening, it's happening every minute of every day."

*** "For five years I have not seen the sun, one and a half on death row and the rest in the hole, where guards beat on guys for almost nothing, where one Doctor H took convicts by force out of their cells and gave them shock treatments strapped on a common barbershop chair."

*** A prisoner by the name of William Thornton committed suicide? By hanging in a strip cell. He was about 26 years of age, and was to go home, I believe some time in March of this year. I was told that he had called for, and told the psychiatrist that he could not take the strip cell, that he wanted out; and that the psychiatrist said 'there's nothing wrong with you,' and then he left. You wonder why I get so frustrated in here - pigs, filthy pigs using psychological cruelty to murder by suicide and there's no way I can prevent it."

*** A prisoner who won a court order requiring the prison to give him medical treatment: "After court I was brought back to the hole. I asked the officer in charge, 'Is this where they are going to keep me? I thought the judge told them to put me in a regular cell, and take me out of the hole.' The officer stated, 'You should have stayed in the judge's chambers because he don't run this in here.'"

Most of America agrees that our prison system needs change. Articles and studies pour out, documenting what we already know - that prisons are horrible places which damage rather than rehabilitate people.

Public outrage is not easily translated into action. Prisons are forbidding places closed to the public; prison officials, despite protestations to the contrary, discourage communication between people inside and people outside. Only lawyers have a right to see prisoners.

The Prison Law Collective is made up of six people, three lawyers, two legal workers-community organizers, and one writer. We have been working in California prisons for the past year, many of us for two years. We are in contact with hundreds of men and women in prison throughout California who tell us what is happening inside - in letters, and when we visit, we are told, for instance, when a prisoner has been beaten, when groups of prisoners are locked up for political beliefs, or are denied medical care, or are locked arbitrarily in the hole. We investigate and try to remedy the situation, either by negotiating with prison officials, filing a lawsuit, holding a press conference, or whatever means most appropriate.

Our presence in the prisons gives prisoners some recourse to outside help and lessens their isolation a little. The work we do - arranging for some medical care, struggling to obtain due process for prisoners, straightening out mail and visiting problems, suing guards who brutalize prisoners, informing prisoners and their families of their rights, and publicizing prison conditions, does not make headlines. But the need is great; and your support can help us continue. We hope you can come to the dinner.

LINDA CASTRO, RICHARD DOCTOROFF,
BRIAN GLICK, EVE PELL,
PATTI ROBERTS, DEIRDRE STONE

