

Editorial

Prisoners prompt changes by pointing out problems

Nearly a dozen years ago, 1,200 inmates at the Attica State Correctional Facility in New York rebelled. They held 38 guards hostage in an attempt to improve living conditions. What ensued was a bloody, full-scale riot that ended the four-day confrontation.

On Sept. 13, 1971, after negotiating with inmates to reach a peaceful settlement, New York Commissioner of Corrections Russell Oswald gave the order for the attack on the prison. Fifteen minutes later, 29 inmates and 10 hostages lay dead from gunshot wounds inflicted by 1,500 state troopers and police. Then Gov. Nelson Rockefeller defended the lawmen's actions.

Early yesterday morning, just 11 days after taking office, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo announced the end of the 53-hour siege at the Ossining Correctional Facility. The state prison, known as Sing Sing until 1980, holds 1,250 inmates. Of the 570 inmates in Cell Block B, 560 took part in the uprising that began Saturday evening. The prisoners held 17 guards hostage throughout the revolt.

The prisoners' demands seemed simple enough—mainly regular mail and package delivery and better medical and recreational facilities.

Fortunately, the prisoners were satisfied with receiving television publicity about their demands. Soon after local news shows aired the demands, the remaining hostages were released unharmed.

Thomas Coughlin, New York Corrections Commissioner, noted that the inmates' demands would be granted, with the

exception of an amnesty guarantee.

The special police unit trained to deal with prison uprisings must have learned from the events of Attica. While the number of hostages and inmates involved at Ossining was nearly half that at Attica, no one was seriously injured.

But the inherent problem hasn't changed. Cell Block B was only reopened, Coughlin said, because of the tremendous influx of prisoners. Robert McKay, head of the Attica investigation, agreed that overcrowding is the culprit. In 1972, New York state prisons held 12,000 inmates; today there are more than 28,000, leaving little opportunity for education, recreation, hospital care and vocational training.

"They are mostly involved in idleness," McKay said, especially at Ossining, where most prisoners are awaiting transfers to other institutions.

This lack of vocational training merely perpetuates the problems facing these men who are no better equipped to make an honest living upon release than when they entered prison.

At Ossining, the inmates and officials avoided violence in their settlement. But it was the threat of violence that lurked in the back of the minds of those who couldn't help but remember the Attica tragedy.

If publicity can avert violence, as it did at Ossining, it is a valuable asset. Next time—if there is a next time—let's pay attention to the issues before they culminate in another Attica.

Society a victim of wimpdom

As we sign the check, we should all remember why we are paying extra for tuition this semester. We should all take the big breath required of big thoughts and realize that we are all victims of incipient wimpdom. Everywhere you look, you will find wimps in public office, those very offices which have ultimate responsibility for the public welfare.

Instead of showing responsibility while in office, these wimps are avoiding it, bending their principles until they break.

Dave Milo Mumgaard

They become spineless nothing-heads, interested only in covering their hind ends when it gets a little hot. As a society we are afflicted with them and we've got to do something about it.

Unfortunately, Ronald Reagan is not a wimp. Wimps sacrifice principles in order to further self-interest. President Reagan is not a wimp, though he has abandoned responsibility for the millions he threatens with nuclear carelessness or the millions he abandons when he cuts Medicare, food stamps, or threatens to cut Social Security.

Even though he responds not to what is best for the greatest amount of people, but to his cohorts whispering Ayn Rand's virtue of selfishness in his ear, he is not a wimp. He holds his principles firmly to his breast, refuses to compromise them, and in the process has produced a nation reeling from unemployment and loss of human dignity. Ah, he's not a wimp.

Wimps are predominately found among the legislatures of our states, in the governors' mansions, in public university administration buildings, in student government. These appear to be the people most concerned with preserving their station in life and responding to outside pressures, whether it is as a regent responding to his pocketbook or as a student leader responding to some odd idea that to do nothing is probably best for all.

Governors are often wimps; they are subservient to political ambition as vice-chancellors are to university presidents.

Governors and vice-chancellors will both sell out their principles if it means a promotion.

To bring the concept of wimpdom home to Nebraskans, we need only to look at our tuition surcharge. Fundamentally, we are paying a surcharge because Congress abandoned all its sanity when it passed substantial income tax cuts, cut vital social spending and approved incredible increases in defense spending. The Congresspeople looked around, saw primarily their big campaign contributors (only the wealthy, of course, are big campaign contributors; they are invariably wimps because the accumulation of wealth takes a tremendous accumulation of self-interest) pressing hard for all that gleeful selfgain, and proceeded to toss their principles and responsibilities to the winds.

In turn, the economy has become a wretched thing. Here in Nebraska, the "state of the economy" has forced our political leaders to make hard decisions whether to raise taxes or cut vital spending. Charley Thone, who was truly a wimp, became an eternal optimist, refusing to raise taxes since he foresaw the economy recovering. Optimism is a good thing, but when it comes from the mouth of an obvious wimp, it is only misleading roo-ram.

The Unicameral ducked and dodged and cut the budget accordingly, revealing its true colors as a convention of wimps by abandoning the realizable promises they had made to their constituents when they were elected.

Since the University constitutes the by abandoning the realizable promises they had made to their constituents when they were elected.

Since the University constitutes the largest segment of the state budget, we were hit proportionally hardest. Our administration and regents, wanting to preserve good relations with the governor and the Legislature, fought past budget cuts only half-heartedly. Last fall, however, when further cuts were proposed, they finally put up an admirable fight.

Continued on Page 5



Clipped contrasts keep truth of poverty, pomp, neglect alive

The daily newspapers arrive, dropping another load of contrasts at my doorstep.

On one page we are told that Reagan may cut a billion dollars from the food and nutrition programs. Further in the paper, in the food section, we are told that "Houston alone ate two tons of pate in December."

What are we to do with these two pieces of information? The newspaper has neatly separated them into compartments. Should we do the same thing, keep these items apart so the facts won't rub against each other, igniting our emotions?

I clip these entries and add them to my collection. I already have two items



Ellen Goodman

from the New York Times Magazine of Jan. 2: a description of a woman in a housing project in Brooklyn who cooks chicken backs and noodles for her family's one daily meal (page 22) and a full-color recipe for oysters with leek butter (page 27).

I also have a Washington Post from the week before. In one story, the formerly middle class in Detroit are lining up for handouts. In another, the chic people in Washington explain that they only pick at elegant buffets: "You've seen one shrimp, you've seen them all."

There are others, of course. In New York, a movie producer, Dino De Laurentiis, has opened a giant gourmet store which he named DDL Foodshow, as if food were for show. The salami there can cost \$6.99 a pound and veal goes as high as \$8.75 a quarter pound. I am told that the aisles at this store are almost as full as the stairway at the Yorkville Common Pantry soup kitchen a couple of miles away.

What does one say about these culinary displays of the gap between haves and have-nots? What do you say about the ads for weight reduction and tales of people shoplifting milk?

With a scissors in my mind, I feel like a curator of cliches. But these are not our cliches. They are the cliches of Theodore Dreiser, of Charles Dickens. They are the cliches, for heaven's sakes, of Pravda.

I won't label my exhibit with morals. I am not suggesting that the people of Houston give up their passion for pate. I won't admonish the people at embassy parties to think of the poor starving child-

ren in Detroit and clean their plates. Nor shall I tell the Foodshow to become a soup kitchen.

Americans learn to live in a culture of haves and have-nots. We coexist with some inequality and teach our children the survival techniques of dulled sensibilities. We walk around certain people, drive around "bad" neighborhoods, and comfort ourselves with the notion that our government is helping, and besides, America is better than . . .

But there is a point, a moment — and I think this is one — when we wonder whether we've become too good at not noticing. We see again all the contrasts, all the gaps, as if we were visitors in Calcutta.

Maybe it's happening again because the numbers of poor have increased to some critical mass. Maybe it's because the contrasts are so stark: Last year the stock market rose 171 points and unemployment rose 2.5 million. There is little subtlety in that statistic for my collection.

For the first time in most of our lives, the first time since the New Deal, we have a government that is not muting inequalities but sharpening them. How dulled a sensibility could be immune to the news that the government has been considering more cuts in food stamps and school lunch and child nutrition?

Suddenly America is not better than . . . Every day now, European journalists call Nancy Amidei of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) asking whether it can be true that unemployed steelworkers in Pennsylvania are eating leftover onions donated by farmers.

Continued on Page 5

Daily Nebraskan

EDITOR Margie Honz
 GENERAL MANAGER Daniel M. Shattil
 ADVERTISING MANAGER Jerry Scott
 PRODUCTION MANAGER Kirby Policky
 MANAGING EDITOR Michale Thuman
 NEWS EDITOR Sue Jepson
 ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITORS Mary Bahns, Duane Ratzliff
 GRAPHICS EDITOR John G. Goecke
 NIGHT NEWS EDITOR David Wood
 ASSISTANT NIGHT NEWS EDITOR Leslie Boellstorff
 ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR Patty Pryor
 SPORTS EDITOR Bob Asmusen
 ART DIRECTOR David Luebke
 PHOTO CHIEF Dave Bentz
 ASSISTANT ADVERTISING MANAGER Carol Fahr
 PUBLICATIONS BOARD CHAIRMAN Doug Netz, 472-2454

THE DAILY NEBRASKAN (USPS 144-080) IS PUBLISHED BY THE UNL PUBLICATIONS BOARD MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY DURING THE FALL AND SPRING SEMESTERS, EXCEPT DURING VACATIONS. POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE DAILY NEBRASKAN, RM 34 NEBRASKA UNION, 68588. SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$13/SEMESTER, \$25/YEAR. SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT LINCOLN, NEBRASKA. ALL MATERIAL COPYRIGHT 1983 DAILY NEBRASKAN