

## PRISONS

# Medical care in pen criticized

By Marc Levinson

**I**N JULY 1975 DALE VINSON WAS OPERATED on for hemorrhoids. The operation, Vinson says, will leave him bleeding for life. Vinson, a convicted bank robber, is one of 2,160 inmates at the U.S. Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta. "The medical treatment there is just about completely lacking," says Vinson's lawyer, Ralph Goldberg. "What there is is a systematic denial of medical treatment. We're not talking about individual cases of neglect. We're talking about a system set up there to deny inmates medical treatment."

Vinson has been on holdover status at the Atlanta penitentiary since 1973. He claims he was to be sent to the Fort Worth, Texas, penitentiary for alcoholism treatment. Atlanta penitentiary Warden Jack Hanberry says he knows nothing about Vinson's case.

Since 1974 Vinson has been in and out of the penitentiary hospital with hemorrhoids. In July 1975 he was operated on by Dr. John Woodhams, a staff surgeon.

According to several inmates, Woodhams' hands shake continually. An inmate who witnessed the operation as a medical aid states in a signed affidavit that Woodhams told him he clipped the wrong blood vessel, which would leave Vinson bleeding for life.

Vinson was later taken to a private hospital in Atlanta, where surgeons tried unsuccessfully to correct the mistake.

## Only one of many cases.

Vinson's case is one of many this reporter learned of during visits to the penitentiary, talks with lawyers and reading of court papers.

One prisoner, operated on this spring for a hernia, claims his left testicle is no longer visible and that doctors refuse to help him. "Since performance of the operation, I've suffered from acute pain," the inmate says.

Another inmate, Nathaniel Jeffers, claims the federal prison system transferred him from Terre Haute, Ind., to Lewisburg, Pa., for heart treatment. When Lewisburg was unable to treat him, they sent him to Atlanta, where prisoners with heart problems are treated at Grady Memorial Hospital. A friendly doctor put him in the prison hospital until he could be sent to Grady, Jeffers says, but when the physician left the Bureau of Prisons, penitentiary medical director Dr. Joseph Alderete removed him from the hospital, sent him back to Lewisburg and wrote in his file that Jeffers refused treatment.

After the National Prison Project, a Washington-based prisoner support group, intervened in his case, Jeffers was returned to Atlanta and treated—after a year of being bounced from one penitentiary to another.

Yet another inmate, James Lang, came to the Atlanta penitentiary with a history of back injury. Lang, a convicted bank robber, says Dr. Alderete called him a malingerer and refused him treatment. Eventually, Lang collapsed in a prison corridor from the pain. When 50 inmates surrounded him and threatened to riot, officials promptly sent Lang to the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, Mo., for an operation.

The operation was successful but since his return to Atlanta, Lang claims, prison officials have attempted to keep him from doing the exercises prescribed by the doctors in Springfield.

Penitentiary officials refused to be interviewed regarding medical treatment at the prisons. Requests to inspect the prison hospital and to interview Dr. Alderete were denied.

In a written response to questions submitted in writing, Warden Jack Hanberry pointed out that the prison hospital was recently reaccredited by the Joint Com-



The Atlanta federal penitentiary (above) has been the target of many criticisms about inadequate medical care for prisoners.

mission on Accreditation of Hospitals, a national organization. The medical staff, he says, consists of five physicians, three dentists, a pharmacist and a psychologist, along with 50 local consulting specialists. Through an arrangement with Grady Memorial Hospital, the Atlanta penitentiary serves as the cardiac center for the entire federal prison system.

## Congressional consideration.

Health care throughout the federal prison system is now being discussed by the House of Representatives subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and the Administration of Justice. The subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Robert Kastenmeier (D-WI), has asked the General Accounting Office to investigate the quality of health care in both state and federal prisons.

Subcommittee staff member Tim Boggs says he is uncertain whether the problems with health care exist throughout the federal prison system. "We get 100 letters a week from inmates and rarely

do I recall complaints as serious as that," Boggs says. "I think an effort has been made by the Bureau of Prisons to have relatively high-quality medical services, considering the fact they must use Public Health Service doctors. I'm not sure the problem is systemwide."

Al Bronstein, director of the National Prison Project, disagrees. "What you find there [in Atlanta], you find in most places," he says. "In fact, Atlanta's better than most. Most of the locations are so remote they have even less access to medical care. In places like Leavenworth, Ks., or Marion, Ill., or Terre Haute, Ind., they have a hard time getting good medical personnel, so they rely heavily on technicians. Most qualified people don't want to deal with prisoners for a very small salary when they can make more money on their own. You get doctors with foreign medical degrees or who can't pass the license exam."

The most common complaints the Prison Project gets, Bronstein adds, relate to the unavailability of special diets, dia-

betics not receiving insulin, overuse of drugs and failure to treat common problems such as high blood pressure.

On several occasions federal prisoners have sued the Bureau of Prisons to force medical treatment. "All litigation against this medical facility has been decided in favor of the medical facility," Atlanta's Warden Hanberry says.

However, according to both prison officials and court personnel, most prisoner suits are dealt with by a letter from the court to penitentiary officials asking for information or directing them to provide treatment. Often prisoners are able to get immediate relief from pressing medical problems in this way.

The court generally refuses to accept the suit unless the inmate has completed the prison system's six-months-long grievance procedure. No prisoner suit relating to medical treatment at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary has ever come to trial, so neither prisoners nor prison staff have been examined about the situation under oath.

# Energy plan

Continued from page 4.

of any regional plan in the direction of energy conservation. They contend that the utility forecasts of energy shortfalls that the PNUCC plan is based on err on the high side.

Weaver's bill would aggressively promote conservation through a Columbia Basic Energy Corporation that would replace the BPA. The Weaver plan would give purchasers of power ten years to ensure "every structure regularly accessible to the public and every residence within the service area of the purchaser is to be insulated, weatherized and provided with conservation devices" to reduce demand for electricity.

Cheap power would be allocated equally to residential users of the region under the Weaver plan. Power from private utilities might still be more expensive, but this would be due to their need to turn a profit and the more favorable tax laws that apply to public bodies. Public participation in running of the CBEC would be guaranteed by a board of directors

that would include representatives elected from Washington, Oregon and Idaho/Montana with two additional members appointed by the President.

At this point the future of regional energy planning in the Pacific Northwest is uncertain. It is unlikely that either of the two major plans will be adopted without modification. Some compromise will have to be worked out by interested parties in the region and legislators at the federal level. Regional representatives in Congress have generally been noncommittal on the issue.

However, some points of a likely compromise can be specified. Public utilities will have a difficult time holding on to their historical preferred position. Continued rate disparities will predictably raise a howl from private utility customers over unfair advantages enjoyed by one class of consumers.

Whatever plan is adopted will probably contain greater provision for public participation than is contained in the PNUCC legislation. This was a particular point of controversy in regional hearings conducted by Rep. Lloyd Meeds (D-Wash.). (Meeds himself came under fire for a lack of openness in his hearings.)

Finally, there will probably be an in-

creased reliance on conservation measures to reduce demand, even if the stringent measures advocated by Weaver are not enacted into law. The city of Seattle, for instance, has called for stronger conservation measures as an alternative to building new generating capacity.

Although the details of any future compromise are uncertain, there is considerable impetus for development of some plan and fairly soon. the BPA's new administrator, Sterling Munro, has argued for a compromise on the grounds that "if we do nothing then factions will keep tearing and scratching at each other." Munro knows little about management of electricity but he does know politics, having served as leading assistant to Sen. Henry Jackson, chairman of the Senate's Energy Committee.

At least some additional tearing and scratching is likely before a final plan emerges because the allocation of energy resources touches every individual and group in the region. If various factions are unable to reach a regional compromise the energy future of the Pacific Northwest may be decided in Washington, D.C.

David Mathiason is a free-lance writer in Seattle.



## IN THE WORLD

## GREAT BRITAIN

# Thatcher casts racist shadow over coming vote

By Mervyn Jones

LONDON

**C**ONSERVATIVE LEADER MARGARET Thatcher has made a desperate decision. She has become increasingly worried by the Labour government's recovery since it was in bad trouble a year ago, by Prime Minister James Callaghan's imperturbable style, and by the difficulty of finding an issue that clearly divides the parties. Now she has opted for an appeal to racism.

It isn't called racism, of course; it's called "the immigration issue." But the years have rolled on since the immigration happened, and successive restrictions have reduced the current inflow to a trickle. Of the two million people of black or Asian descent now living in Britain, more than half were born here. The real issue is whether or not they are to be accepted as equal citizens.

On Jan. 30 Mrs. Thatcher was interviewed on a peak-time television program. British people, she announced, are afraid of being "swamped by people of an alien culture." The word "swamped" is patently emotive, since blacks and Asians make up only 3.3 percent of the population and demographic forecasts—allowing for a higher birth-rate of mainly young families—don't project this beyond a maximum of 5 percent in the 1990s. Bradford, the nearest to being "swamped" of our industrial towns, has a 20 percent minority population.

What is needed, Thatcher went on, is "a clear prospect of an end to immigration." The fact is that 28,000 blacks or Asians entered Britain in 1977, as against 26,000 white people from such countries as Canada and Australia, who presumably aren't alien in culture. This doesn't include the Irish, who are traditionally allowed in without passports, or west Europeans who gained free rights of migration when Britain joined the European community.

Most of the 28,000 are dependents—

wives, children or aging parents — of men settled here. Some are Asians who had lived in Kenya or Uganda, never held citizenship of these African countries, and therefore retained British passports. The tiny (750, to be exact) number of new immigrants consists of individuals qualified by special skills, mainly doctors badly needed in our hospitals.

Labour and Tory governments have hitherto been agreed on admitting the dependents, and it was a Tory government that granted the right of entry to the Asians living in Uganda and Kenya when those nations became independent. To reverse these policies requires the breaking of clear pledges. Yet there is no other way of achieving an "end to immigration." Not surprisingly, Thatcher has ducked invitations to explain how that objective could be reached. There is supposed to be a Tory study group examining the problem.

In any case, since the growth of the black and Asian population now depends on natural increase rather than continued immigration, the only real way to avoid it is to make the people resident here pack their bags and go. Enoch Powell, the maverick politician who has built a reputation on the race issue, urges voluntary repatriation with money incentives. The National Front stands for compulsory expulsion. Either course means a clear declaration that the blacks and Asians are not wanted here. Thatcher has yet to take such a line, but logic—the logic of bidding for the votes of the British people who hate the sight of the blacks, and the logic of the "alien culture" phraseology—leads her in that direction.

## Charges of dirty politics.

Callaghan, naturally, has challenged Thatcher to say just what measures she proposes, and has charged that she is stirring up prejudice for its own sake. Mervyn Rees—the minister in charge of immigration—has attacked her in forthright terms. Speeches from Labour platforms resound with cries of "shameful," "dis-



Conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher

graceful," and "dirty politics."

In this response, there is a fair degree of hypocrisy. Callaghan himself, as Home Secretary in 1968, was the first to introduce immigration rules which discriminated on plainly racist grounds. Labour spokesmen, just as much as Tories, have advanced the theory that strict immigration controls can go hand in hand with equal treatment and good race relations within Britain—a patent illusion, since discrimination at the airport is a major grievance among blacks and Asians and instills in them an irrevocable feeling that they are second-class citizens.

This government has done just as much as its Tory predecessor to bring immigration down to the modest 28,000 mark. The wives and children, guaranteed entry in principle, often wait three years for actual permission and are not infrequently rebuffed if they fail to prove their identity to perfect satisfaction.

However, Callaghan has been delighted to don the mantle of virtue. His calculation, as usual, is shrewd. He is mobilizing genuine progressives in his own party, who had been highly critical of him on other issues.

Although Thatcher picked up some support in the polls, Callaghan may eventually be the gainer at the ballot box. Thatcher is bidding for the racist vote; but it is often outnumbered—especially in marginal inner-city districts—by the tolerant vote plus the vote of the blacks and Asians themselves.

## Tories split.

Callaghan has grasped a chance to divide the Tories. At least one ex-minister has publicly regretted Thatcher's statements, and others are known to be unhappy. "Tories Split on Race" is a front-page headline on the day I'm writing; we may be sure that it has helped Callaghan to enjoy his breakfast.

An unhappy man these days is William Whitelaw, Tory deputy leader. He is a country gentleman from the remote county of Cumberland, steeped in old traditions of decency and honesty. When the party leadership was at stake in 1975 he expected to secure it, but bungled his tactics and saw Thatcher snatch it from un-

der his nose. As "shadow" Home Secretary, he has the official responsibility of shaping Tory policy on immigration.

Reporters have established that Thatcher's words in the television interview came as a complete surprise to Whitelaw. Though she had made the recording five days earlier, she had avoided mentioning it to him, let alone consulting him in advance. Whitelaw is explicitly on record that his party will stand by the pledges to dependents and to Asians from Africa, and his position could become untenable if they are repudiated.

Amid the furor, he kept an appointment to address a club for citizens of Asian origin. To his distress, they refused to receive him and picketed the hall instead of going in to take their seats. TV viewers saw Whitelaw standing in the rain and pleading with the pickets, trying to convince them that the Tory party still stands for equal rights and equal treatment for all British citizens, regardless of race or creed.

Asked by a TV reporter what he thought of the alleged fear of white people being "swamped," he replied: "I don't accept for one moment that it's justified." Political history affords few examples of such a yawning gap between a party leader and a deputy leader.

The kindest interpretation that can be placed on Thatcher's motives is that she is trying to halt a drift of votes to the National Front. But, by putting herself in a position of competing with the Front—still a fringe group without a single MP—she has helped to bring it into the center of politics. She may also have hoped to extend a hand to Powell and induce him to return to the Tory fold; but he has made a frosty reply, saying that Tory policy won't satisfy him until it includes his nostrum of repatriation.

Thatcher has undoubtedly done harm to the fabric of British politics by raising the temperature of racial hostility and increasing the likelihood of a very dirty election. It may well be, however, that she has blundered too.

Mervyn Jones writes for the *New Statesman* and is *IN THESE TIMES*' correspondent in Great Britain.

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