

Gay Voices From Prison, cont. from page 6

- 1.) Rape by non-gay inmates
- 2.) Ban on gay literature
- 3.) Censorship of incoming/outgoing mail (sometimes non-delivery)
- 4.) Beatings and verbal harassment by inmates and guards without the interference of prison administrations
- 5.) Prison parole boards that won't parole gay inmates until they see a prison psychologist and go 'straight'
- 6.) Prison administrations that deny gay inmates the right to attend church services, attend school, or join work crews in order to make money to be used in the commissary
- 7.) Prison administrations that deny gay inmates access to openly gay free people through visits or letters.

O'Dell, 21, employed in a New York City crafts studio, became interested in prisoners while working with a California repertory acting company in state prisons in Idaho and Washington. He is currently active in S.T.O.P. (Stop the Olympic Prison), a group opposed to federal plans to convert a nearly-completed housing facility near Lake Placid, N.Y., into the first federal prison for 18-26-year-olds after it is used by foreign athletes competing in the 1980 Winter Olympics.

S.T.O.P., an organization supported by the National Moratorium on Prison Construction, local, national, and international gay and non-gay groups, "wants the facility turned into a center that will serve human needs and not into another prison that will waste lives."

#### North Carolina -- No. 5 in Prisoners

In North Carolina, an enlightened secretary of corrections, Amos E. Reed, oversees a 77-unit, 13,800-inmate prison system that the News and Observer calls a "troubled, overcrowded, obsolete tenderbox." He has supported efforts to build new cells, improve maintenance and upgrade conditions -- under threat of a federal takeover of the state's prisons. He hired the N.C. penal system's first Black Muslim chaplain, calling the September, 1978, action "entirely appropriate" in light of the estimated 250 to 350 Muslim prisoners.

North Carolina, the 11th most populous state, ranks fifth in prisoners, Reed told the Charlotte Observer. The prisons are overcrowded partly because the state sends criminals to prison for offenses that in other states would mean a county jail term, Reed said. He also blamed "judicial attitudes" in favor of stiff sentences for the state's large prison population.

Reed, 62, the father of six children, sees most inmates as "damaged people," the by-products of society's failure. In his view, they are imprisoned because the home, the school, or the various social services failed them.

Fortunately, many citizens are working to change the N.C. penal system. After visiting the Polk Youth Center in Raleigh, UNC-CH senior Jason Dowdle wrote the Daily Tar Heel and eloquently considered our individual responsibility.

"Everything that does or does not happen in state prisons is the responsibility of the state, and thus of the people. If we allow someone to act on our behalf but don't know or attempt to be aware of what is done, we do not show either responsibility or sense. The German people living around Auschwitz claimed ignorance of what was going on inside, too. Yet history has judged them guilty. How will it judge us?"

#### RESOURCES

Brian O'Dell  
N.Y. Gay Prisoner Support  
P.O. Box 2 Village Stn.  
New York, N.Y. 10014

N.C. Prisoners Labor -  
Union Newsletter  
Box 2842  
Durham, N.C. 27705

JOIN HANDS  
Box 42242  
San Francisco, CA 94142

For additional resources, feel free to call Stuart Wells (967-8591).