Breaking Men's Minds:

BEHAVIOR CONTROL AND HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION AT THE FEDERAL PRISON IN MARION, ILLINOIS

"Having spent a total of 2½ years in this experimental behavior laboratory type fortress, I have witnessed atrocities that are on the same par as Pinochet's concentration camps in Chile and that of Hitler's Auschwitz."

---Victor Bono, name plaintiff in class action suit to close the Marion long-term control unit.
INTRODUCTION

The use of behavior control and human experimentation techniques against prisoners is on the rise in the U.S. Indefinite solitary confinement, sensory deprivation, forced druggings and mind-control techniques---these are the psychic billy clubs that are being used more and more to break prisoners and stop their attempts to fight deteriorating conditions in U.S. prisons.

The most ominous of these programs is the Long-term control unit at the Marion, Illinois Federal Prison---the replacement for Alcatraz as the maximum-security prison in America. Many men have been driven insane in this unit. In the past five years, nine have committed suicide in the unit of just after being released.

Because of this growing crisis, the prisoners in the control unit, the Marion Brothers, have brought a precedent-setting class action suit against the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. Bono vs. Saxbe, which seeks to close the control unit permanently, was tried in 1975 in the federal courts. In April, 1978 the court ruled in favor of the Bureau of Prisons. While closing the notorious sensory deprivation boxcar cells, the court allowed the control unit to remain open. In fact, the court justified the use of the control unit with one of the oldest, most repressive legal doctrines---the doctrine of preventive detention. Under this doctrine, prisoners can be put in the control unit indefinitely on the basis of what behavior controllers call "predictive behavior"---that is they can "predict" that a prisoner will join a hunger strike, work stoppage, etc.

This decision is now being appealed. It is important that the Marion Brothers win. If the prison system wins, other control units like Marion's will be built. Even political activists who are imprisoned because of their work will be prime candidates for these units.

To let people know what that would mean, one of the Marion Brothers has written this pamphlet. Eddie Griffin has been in the Marion control unit. Here is his story.
Throughout the state and federal prison systems there are circulating stories and hearsay about the Marion, Illinois Federal Prison. These tales weave their way through the grapevine and, over a period of time and distance, become mystique and legendary—especially among young prisoners making their unfortunate debut into the system. It was not uncommon in 1972 at Terre Haute Federal Prison, for example, to hear young prisoners unfold myths about an "Underground prison" called Marion, where those who entered would never see the sun again until their release. Others would claim the Control Unit at Marion was underground, and whoever was placed there would spend the rest of their sentence in it. No one really knew for sure because up until then, no prisoner returned to Terre Haute from Marion. Real or unreal, a dread grew up around the myths. Whatever existed behind the walls of Marion generated apprehension of a legal form of assassination.

Prison officials at other institutions cultivate and exploit these fears by threatening to send certain resistive prisoners to Marion. A man is told to conform to the institution or else he will be sent to Marion to have his behavior "corrected". The thought of being "corrected" by unknown means has a chilling effect on the senses and tends to sterilize any resistance which might exist in prison populations. Evidently, Marion was a control mechanism for the prison system—a penal cesspool wherein other institutions discarded their waste.

"I would like you to think of brainwashing, not in terms of politics, ethics and morals, but in terms of the deliberate changing of human behavior and attitudes by a group of men who have relatively complete control over the environment in which the captive populace lives."

---Dr. Edgar Schein at a meeting of U.S. wardens and social scientists in 1962.
I was one of the so-called "incorrigibles" who had come into conflict with Terre Haute officials and was threatened with being sent to Marion. After receiving an injury in the prison machine shop where I narrowly missed losing a finger, I was patched up, administered a painkiller, then sent back to work. There was almost a repeat of the same accident soon afterwards, so I decided to quit my work in the machine shop. I was immediately locked up in segregation for refusing to work, and for eight months, I continually refused to work until I was guaranteed a job change. But the administration declared that they would use me wherever they needed me. Prisoners do not control their institution. My insistence about the work hazard led to my being shipped to Marion, no doubt to have my obstinate behavior corrected.

A BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION LABORATORY

Upon first glance, Marion differed radically in its appearance from what one would believe from the horrid myths. The ominous sword of Damocles over the prison system appeared to be no threat. But the human eye can be deceived by what is contracted on the phenomenal level. A vague but bleak sensation invades a man's being when he passes through the grill doors into the prison's interior. Each electronically controlled grill seems to alienate him more and more from his freedom—even the hope of freedom. A sense of finality, of being buried alive, is raised to the supra-level of his consciousness. He tries to suppress it, but the clanging of each door leaves an indelible imprint on his psyche. This is the first evidence that Marion is more than a physical star-chamber. It is a modern "behavior modification laboratory".

Behavior modification at Marion consists of a manifold of four techniques: 1) Dr. Edgar Schein's brainwashing methodology 2) Skinnerian operant conditioning 3) Dr. Levinson's sensory deprivation design (i.e. Control Unit) and 4) Chemotherapy or drug therapy. And, as I will point out, the use of these techniques, the way they are disguised behind pseudonyms and under the philosophical rhetoric of correction, and even their modus operandi, violate the
Nuremberg Code, the United Nations' Standard of Treatment for Offenders, the Department of Health Education and Welfare's policy on human experimentation and the 1st, 6th and 8th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

The constructs of the prison are somewhat peculiar. And some not so outstanding features do not make the least economical sense, and are often totally out of physiological order. But these features, when viewed from a psychological angle, begin to take on new meaning. For example, the prison is minced into small sections and subsections, divided by a system of electronic and mechanical grills and further reinforced by a number of strategically locked steel doors. Conceivably, the population can be sectioned off quickly in times of uprising. But even for the sake of security the prison is laced with too many doors. Every few feet a prisoner is confronted by one. So he must await permission to enter or exit at almost every stop. A man becomes peeved. But this is augmented by the constant clanging which bombards his brain so many times a day until his nervous system becomes knotted. The persistent reverberation tends to resurrect and reinforce the same sensation, the same bleak feeling which introduced the individual to the Marion environment. It is no coincidence. This system is designed with conscious intent.

Every evening the "control movement" starts. The loudspeakers, which are scattered around the prison, resonate the signal: "The movement is on. You have ten minutes to make your move." The interior grill doors are opened, but the latitudes and limits of a man's mobility are sharply defined, narrowly constricted. His motion, the fluidity of his life, is compressed between time locks. There is a sense of urgency to do---what prisoners usually do---nothing. It is just a matter of time before the last remnants of a prisoner's illusion will soon become obliterated.

"The control unit treatment program is long-term punishment under the guise of what is, in fact, pseudo-scientific experimentation."

---Congressman Ralph Metcalfe(D.-Ill.)
At the end of the ten-minute limit, the speakers blare out: "The movement is over. Clear the corridor." The proceedings stop. Twenty minutes later the routine is repeated, and so on, until a man's psyche becomes conditioned to the movement/non-movement regimentation, and his nerves jingle with the rhythmic orchestration of steel clanging steel. It is, in prisoners' words, "part of the program"—part of a systematic process of reinforcing an unconditional fact of a prisoner's existence, i.e. that he has no control over the regulation and orientation of his own being. In behavioral psychology, this process is called "learned helplessness"—a derivative of Skinnerian operant conditioning (which are commonly called "learning techniques"). In essence, a prisoner is taught to be helpless, dependent on his overseer. He is taught to accept, without question, the overseer's power to control him. Such a notion rebels against human consciousness. So some prisoners seek some means of resistance. Others try to circumnavigate the omnipotent force via escape.

But the omnipotent is also omnipresent. Nothing escapes Marion's elaborate network of "eyes". Between t.v. monitors, prisoner spies, and collaborators, and prison officials, every crevice of the prison is overlaid by a constant watch. Front-line officers, specially trained in the cold, calculated art of observation, watch prisoners' movements with a particular meticulousness, scrutinizing little details in behavior patterns, then recording them in the Log Book. This data provides the staff with keys on how to manipulate certain individuals' behavior. It is feasible to calculate a prisoner's level of sensitivity from the information; so his vulnerability can be tested with a degree of precision. Some Behavior Modification experts call these tests "Stress Assessment"; prisoners call it harrassment. In some cases, selected prisoners are singled out for one or several of these "differential treatment" tactics. He could have his mail turned back or "accidently" mutilated. He could become the object of regular searches, or even his visitors could be "stripped searched". These and more tactics are consistent with those propogated by one Dr. Edgar Schein.
HISTORY OF THIS BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION LABORATORY

In 1962 at a meeting in Washington D.C. between social scientists and prison wardens, Dr. Edgar Schein presented his ideas on brainwashing. Addressing the topic of "Man Against Man: Brainwashing", he said: "In order to produce marked changes of behavior and/or attitude, it is necessary to weaken, undermine, or remove the supports of the old patterns of behavior and the old attitudes. Because most of these supports are the face-to-face confirmation of present behavior and attitudes, which are provided by those with whom close emotional ties exist, it is often necessary to break those emotional ties. This can be done either by removing the individual physically and preventing any communication with those whom he cares about, or by proving to him that those whom he respects aren't worthy of it and, indeed should be actively mistrusted." Dr. Schein then provided the group with a list of specific examples:

1) Physical removal of prisoners to areas sufficiently isolated to effectively break or seriously weaken close emotional ties.
2) Segregation of all natural leaders.
3) Use of cooperative prisoners as leaders.
4) Prohibition of group activities not in line with brainwashing objectives.
5)Spying on prisoners and reporting back private material.
6) Trickling men into written statements which are then showed to others.
7) Exploitation of opportunists and informers.
8) Convincing prisoners that they can trust no one.
9)Treating those who are willing to collaborate in far more lenient ways than those who are not.
10) Punishing those who show uncooperative attitudes.
11) Systematic withholding of mail.
12) Preventing contact with anyone non-sympathetic to the method of treatment and regimen of the captive populace.
13) Disorganization of all group standards among prisoners.
14) Building a group conviction among the prisoners that they have been abandoned by and totally isolated from their social order.
15) Undermining of all emotional supports.
16) Preventing prisoners from writing home or to friends in the community regarding the conditions of their confinement.
17) Making available and permitting access to only those publications and books that contain materials which are neutral to or supportive of the desired new attitudes.
18) Placing individuals into new and ambiguous situations for which the standards are kept deliberately unclear and then putting pressure on him to conform to what is desired in order to win favor and a reprieve from the pressure.
19) Placing individuals whose willpower has been severely weakened or eroded into a living situation with several others who are more advanced in their thought-reform whose job it is to further undermine the individual's emotional supports.
20) Using techniques of character invalidation, i.e. humiliations, revilements, shouting, to induce feelings of guilt, fear, and suggestibility; coupled with sleeplessness, an exacting prison regimen and periodic interrogational interviews.
21) Meeting all insincere attempts to comply with cellmates pressures with renewed hostility.
22) Repeated pointing out to the prisoner by cellmates of where he has in the past, or is in the present, not even living up to his own standards or values.
23) Rewarding of submission and subserviency to the attitudes encompassing the brainwashing objective with a lifting of pressure and acceptance as a human being.
24) Providing social and emotional supports which reinforce the new attitudes.

Following Dr. Schein's address, then-director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, James V. Bennett, commented, "...one of the things we must do is more research. It was indicated that we have a large organization with some 24,000 men in it now and that we have a tremendous experiment concluded. We can perhaps do a little experimental work. There's a lot to be done. Do it as quickly as possible.
a tremendous opportunity here to carry on some of the experimenting to which the various panelists have alluded. We can manipulate our environment and culture. We can perhaps undertake some of the techniques Dr. Schien discussed. Do things on your own. Undertake a little experiment with what you can do with the Muslims. There's a lot of research to do. Do it as individuals, Do it as groups and let us know the results."

EXPERIMENTATION IN ACTION

That was 15 years ago. Since then "the results" have been compiled and evaluated many times over; and all but one of Dr. Schein's suggested techniques have been left intact at Marion---along with the addition of a few new features.

According to the Bureau of Prisons' policy statement (Oct. 31, 1967) which, after a test period, finally sanctioned experimentation on prisoners, the benefit from any experiments must be "clear in terms of the mission and collateral objectives of the Bureau of Prisons" and "for the advancement of knowledge". In other words, prisoners are expected to feel inspired at the thought of "advancing knowledge" to benefit science and corrections. But what prisoner knows that he is aiding and abetting the development of Behavior Modification techniques to be used in controlling and manipulating not only other prisoners, but also segments of the public? Besides other things, he is denied knowledge of what he is involved in---or rather forced into. The truth of Behavior Modification is that it is applied to prisoners secretly and sometimes remotely (via manipulation of the environment).

At Marion these techniques are applied for punitive purposes, and only one subsection of the prison population is allowed any relief. First, a man's emotional and family ties are broken by removing him to the remote area of southern Illinois and by enforcing a rule whereby he can't correspond with community people within a 50 mile radius. Sometimes the rule slackens, but when the correspondence expresses ideological perspectives it is enforced more strictly. Families of prisoners who move into the area are often discriminated against and harrassed by government agencies. Visitors complain of being
intimidated by prison officials, especially when the visits are interracial. Children are repressed in the visiting room. And on three occasions, a man's wife who had travelled from Puerto Rico was stripped and searched. This incident caused great concern among prisoners because it could happen to any one of their wives, mothers or children. Another tactic used to break a prisoner down is to punish him by removing family and friends from his visiting list, or by placing him on restrictive visits. These types of visits are conducted in an isolated, partitioned booth across a telephone. Such restrictions often discourage families from visiting, especially when they have to travel long distances to visit. Officially, close family ties are encouraged; practically, they are being severed. And more often than not, a man's family is looked upon and treated with the same disdain as a "criminal".

Another method of separating prisoners from friends and outside supporters is the two-faced campaign waged by the prison administration. On the one side prisoners are told they have been totally rejected by society and that even those who "pretend" to be interested in prisoners are "only using prisoners for their own selfish benefit". By this a prisoner is supposed to believe he was never a part of a community or of society in general, that his ties among the people were never legitimate and that their interest in him is a fraud. On the other side, a brutish, bestial, and "sociopathic" image of prisoners is presented to the public. The horror image further alienates the people from the captive and sometimes causes a family to fear their own loved ones. This further isolates the prisoner and makes him more dependent on the prison authorities.

But discernment into this sophisticated system is the furthest thing from a prisoner's imagination, or even his comprehension. It is impossible for him to conceive the total essence of his being, his human worth and dignity being reduced in the eyesight of humanity to the level of an amoeba and placed under a microscope. He can't understand why he feels the strange sensation of being watched; why it seems that "eyes" follow him around everywhere. He fears his
sanity is in jeopardy, that paranoia is taking hold of him. It shows: the tension in his face, the wide-eyed apprehensive stares and spastic body movements. Among the general population, paranoia tends to spread like wildfire—from man to man. Everyone knows that the paranoid is a walking state of danger. His moon is wrong, and it throws everything and everyone else out of equilibrium. The small world cannot contain the imbalance. A general alarm is sent out in hopes that someone can reach the individual before the chain-reaction ends with disaster. Sometimes the attempt is successful, sometimes not. In any case, the induced state of paranoia is the primary cause of the violence which has occurred throughout Marion's history.

The pervasive "eyes" at Marion are not without the complement of "ears". Besides officers' eavesdropping and the inside spies trying to collect enough intelligence to make parole, there are also listening devices out of view. The loudspeakers, for example, are also receivers, capable of picking up loose conversations in the hallways, cellblocks and mess hall. Recently a strange device which someone called a "Parabolic mike" was found. It is hard to figure out exactly how many more such devices are scattered around the prison, embedded in the wall or situated behind cells. The administration is noted for collecting an enormous amount of information on prisoners, some of which could only be gathered from such eavesdropping methods.

Sometimes a prisoner is confronted with the information in order to arouse suspicion about the people he has talked with. At other times, the information is kept secret among officials, and traps are set.

"...the protagonists of the practice of human experimentation justify their views on the basis that such experiments yield results for the good of society that are unprocourable by other methods or means of study. All agree, however, that certain basic principles must be observed in order to satisfy moral, ethical and legal concepts."

---The Nuremburg Code
Most sacred of all is a man's ideas. It is a standing rule among the prisoners: Never let the enemy know what you are thinking. A man's ideas, his private thoughts are his most vulnerable point of entry. At Marion, a man is labelled by his ideas, and his "differential treatment" is plotted accordingly. Thus, if a man's expressed ideas are at variance with the ideas and perception of the prison administration, Behavior Modification is used on him to reconcile the difference.

What life boils down to is an essay in psychological warfare. An unsuspecting, unequipped prisoner—a prisoner unable to adjust and readjust psychologically and develop adequate defense mechanisms can be taken off stride and wind up as another one of Marion's statistics. Prison officials and employees come well prepared, well trained, pre-conditioned, and well aware of the fact that a war is being waged behind the walls.

**BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION AND THE MISUSE OF THERAPY TECHNIQUES**

A new phenomenon is taking shape within the prison confines, and an age-old myth is being dispelled. No longer can prisoners be characterized as mindless imbeciles needing someone(on a superior level) to define right and wrong for them or to chaperone them so they won't kill each other off. The old theory of socio-pathology(supposedly prisoners' mode of action) is carrying the behavioral school of psychology to ruins. The school is based on the premise that the empirical world determines man's course of action, that man is only capable of reacting to the stimuli of his environment; and since he is only a higher form of animal and, essentially, there is no qualitative difference between the two, he is like a sheep following his animalistic instincts; and that over a period of time of reacting in the same way to the same stimuli all the time, his behavior becomes habitual and sociopathic. This would be true if man were not a thinking, cognitive being. However, through his cognition and rationalization, he can not only transform his environment into something new, but also transform himself into something new, into a different social being. Prisoners are making this transformation.
This situation has led to a reverse in social polarity between prisoners and prison authority. The disorder and perversions which do exist at Marion are largely spawned by the abnormal conditions in the prison system are are, ironically, nurtured by it. This reinforces the need for paternal authority. In essence, it legitimizes it. On the other hand, the "clandestine" socialistic influences in the prison, which advocate a change away from the perversions and abnormalities, are deemed a threat to the existing order. So they are repressed and/or modified into conformity. How does this take place?

There is a small, elite group in the prison population which is looked upon by the administration with great favor because the group shares the same basic ideals with the administration. The group's members see the prison authority as a "parent". They think of themselves as "residents" rather than prisoners or captives---because to change the word is to change the reality. And they believe that the program in which they are being trained will make them "qualified therapeutic technicians" and help them secure a change in residency.

At Marion, this program is called Asklepieion---which literally means nothing. The prisoners call the group "groders" or "groder's gorillas", named after the psychologist who implemented Dr. Schein's brain-washing program.

The "groders" live in a special cellblock which, by prison standards, is plush. They are allowed luxuries and privileges which regular prisoners can't receive. They, however, are convinced that they "earn" these things because they are trying to do something to "better themselves". Generally, they look on other convicts with contempt. When confronted with evidence that they are a brainwash group, they reject the proof and accuse other prisoners of being envious.

"The boxcar cells are only the tip of the iceberg. The prison's special control unit, an Orwellian approach to behavior control, ought to be abolished along with the boxcars that helped carry out its mission."

But the reality speaks for itself. The program employs a number of noted therapeutic techniques, e.g. Transactional Analysis, Synanon Attack-therapy, psychodrama, Primal therapy, and Encounter Group Marathon Sensitivity sessions. The administration's favorite is T.A. Essentially T.A. propagates the theory that people communicate on three different levels: parent, child and adult. These become character roles. It is up to the corresponding party to figure out which role the first party is playing, then communicate with the person on the proper counter-part level.

What this technique actually does is create an artificial dichotomy between people, each straining to fit into the proper character role. Thus, communication becomes artificial, stilted and utter meaninglessness in its content. Everyone sounds like a pseudo-intellectual. Ultimately, it propagates the idea that the authorities always fit the role of a "parent" and the prisoners must submit to the role of a "child". Although some "groders" pretend this practice is a fakeout on "the man", it still is a real social practice. Changing the words to describe it doesn't change the reality.

Other techniques include Dr. Schein's "character invalidation". These techniques are incorporated under the auspices of "Game Sessions" (Synanon Attack Therapy) and "Marathons" (Encounter group sensitivity sessions). In "Game Sessions", members of the group accuse a person of playing games, not being truthful with the group, lying; or he is accused of some misdeed or shortcoming. Before he is allowed a chance to explain (which is considered as only more lying), he is barraged by dirty-name calling until he confesses or "owns up" to his shortcomings. He is then accused of making the group go through a lot of trouble in having to pry the truth out of him. So, for this crime he is forced to apologize.

"Marathons" are all-night versions of literally the same, except that they include local community people who come into the prison to be "trained" in the techniques. After so many hours of being verbally attacked and denied sleep, a person "owns up" to anything and accepts everything he's told. After being humiliated, he is encouraged to cry. The group then shows its compassion by hugging him and telling him that they love him.
The purpose of the Marion control unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in the society at large."

---former Marion warden Ralph Aron

These techniques exploit the basic weaknesses in human (aggregative) nature, especially those weaknesses produced by an alienating society, e.g. the need to be loved, cared about, accepted by other people, and the need to be free. In turn, they are transmuted into "submission and subserviency", the type of behavior conducive to the prison officials' goal of control and manipulation. The "groders" will not resist or complain. Nor will they go on a strike to seek redress of prisoners' grievances. They are alienated from their environment, and their emotional interdependency welds and insulates them into a crippled cohesion (of the weak bearing the weak).

They aren't permitted to discuss these techniques outside the group because one of the pre-conditions for admittance is a bond to secrecy. Yet almost anyone can spot a "groder" because the light has gone out in his eyes. He literally wears the look of humiliation.

Some years ago, the prison population wanted to do them bodily harm because they allowed themselves to be used as guinea pigs, and because the techniques developed would be used on other prisoners and other people in the outside world. In their lust for freedom, they would sell out an entire generation. Today, they are generally looked upon as mental enemies. So prisoners just leave them alone. Nevertheless, the brainwashing techniques are still finding their way into commu-ities in the outside world—under a number of pseudonyms other than Asklepieion. And the "groders" still have hopes of joining these programs when they are sufficiently spread. They will become "therapeutic technicians". This is what Dr. Groder laid out in his "Master Plan", the utilizing of prisoners as couriers of the technique back into the community. It is also what former warden Ralph Aron meant when he testified
at the 1975 Bono vs. Saxbe trial (to close the Control Unit) that "the purpose of the Marion control unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in the society at large".

What the "groders" fail to realize is that even as "therapists" they will remain under observation long after their release from prison—under what is euphemistically called "post-release follow-through". And what Dr. Groder fails to realize is that by camouflaging Dr. Schein's techniques under pseudonyms, whereby prisoners who volunteer for the program cannot recognize its real meaning and objectives, extensive violations of the Nuremburg Code have taken place.

Even the implication of freedom as an inducement for volunteers is considered a means of coercion by the Code's standards. The Code states: "...the protagonists of the practice of human experimentation justify their views on the basis that such experiments yield results for the good of society that are unprocurable by other methods or means of study. All agree, however, that certain basic principles must be observed in order to satisfy moral, ethical, and legal concepts." The first principle in the Code proclaims, "...voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential. This means that the person involved should have legal capacity to give consent; should be situated as to be able to exercise free power of choice, without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, overreaching or other ulterior form of constraint or coercion; and should have sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the elements of the subject matter involved as to enable him to make an understanding and enlightened decision....Before the acceptance of an affirmative decision by the experimental subject, there should be made known to him the nature, duration and purpose of the experiment..." There is much that is not explained or accounted for at Marion. Prisoners are left to discover it all on their own—via studying the prison and the prison system's history. In light of most of the surprise discoveries one makes when learning this history, it should come as no surprise that some aspects of Marion are at variance with the Nuremburg Code.
CHEMOTHERAPY: THE MISUSE OF DRUGS

Chemotherapy is conducted four times daily at Marion. The loudspeaker announces: "Control medication in the hospital...pill line." Valium, librium, thorazine and other "chemical billy-clubs" are handed out like gumdrops. Sometimes the drugs mysteriously make their way into the food. For example, the strange month of December, 1974 recorded five unrelated, inexplicable stabbings. During the same time, eight prisoners suffered from hallucinations in the "hole" and had to be treated (with thorazine injections). Drugs are often prescribed for minor ailments and are commonly suggested to prisoners as a panacea for all the psychological ill-effects of incarceration. Some drugs such as prolaxin make prisoners want to commit suicide. Some attempt it; some succeed.

THE END OF THE LINE: THE LONG-TERM CONTROL UNIT

Segregation is the punitive aspect of the Behavior Modification program. It is euphemistically referred to as "aversive conditioning." In short, prisoners are conditioned to avoid solitary confinement, and to do this (avoid solitary that is) requires some degree of conformity and cooperation. But the "hole" remains open for what prison authorities and Dr. Schein call "natural leaders." These prisoners can be pulled from population on "investigation" and held in solitary confinement until the so-called investigation is over. During the whole ordeal, he is not told what the inquiry is about---unless he is finally charged with an infraction of the rules. If the prison authorities think that the Behavior Modification techniques will eventually work on the prisoner, he is sent to short-term segregation. If not, they use the last legal weapon in the federal prison system: the long-term control unit.

The long-term control unit is the "end of the line" in the federal prison system. Since there is no place lower throughout all of society, it is the end of the line for society also. Just as the threat of imprisonment controls society, so is Marion the control mechanism for the prison systems; ultimately, the long-term control unit controls Marion. Prisoners in the unit can feel the heaviness of this burden,
knowing that it is a long way back to the top.

Usually a prisoner doesn't know specifically why he has been sent to the Control Unit, other than that his ideological beliefs or his personal attitude toward prison authority is somehow "wrong". And he usually doesn't know how long he will be in the control unit. A prisoner is told he is being placed on 30-day observation and that he has the right to appeal the decision if he wishes. Until recently, most prisoners simply waived the appeal because they were given the impression that they would be getting out soon. One particular prisoner was told by the Control Unit Committee that he would be getting out of the control unit after the observation period because they "needed the room". Later, he was given an indefinite period in the unit—which is the case with most prisoners.

In the control unit a prisoner does only two things—recreate and shower. Only one range of men (18 out of 72) is allowed to work. Although everyone recognizes that the work is exploitative, it is generally considered a privilege. The rest of the control unit prisoners spend 23½ hours a day locked in their cells (which are smaller than the average dog kennel). According to what state the man's mind is in, he may read or write. He sees the Control Unit Committee for about 30 seconds once a month to receive a decision on his "adjustment rating". He may see a caseworker to get papers notarized, the counselor to get an administrative remedy (complaint) form and a phone call authorization (on a "maybe" basis). He may see the educational supervisor for books. Other than that, he deteriorates.

The cell itself contains a flat steel slab jutting from the wall. Overlying the slab is a one-inch piece of foam wrapped in coarse plastic. This is supposed to be a bed. Yet it cuts so deeply into the body when one lays on it that the body literally reeks with pain. After a few days, you are totally numb. There is no longer intercommunication between sense organs and the brain. The nervous system has carried so many pain impulses to the brain until obviously the brain refuses to accept any more signals. Feelings become indistinct, emotions unpredictable.
The monotony makes thoughts hard to separate and capsule. The eyes grow weary of the scene, and shadows appear around the periphery, causing sudden reflexive action. Essentially, the content of a man's mind is the only means of defense in terms of his sanity.

Besides these methods of torture (which is what they are), there is also extreme cold conditioning in the winter and lack of ventilation in the summer. Hot and cold water manipulation is carried out in the showers. Shock waves are administered to the brain when guards bang a rubber mallet against the steel bars. Then there is outright brutality, mainly in the form of beatings. The suicide rate in the Control Unit is five times the rate in general population at Marion.

At the root of the Control Unit's Behavior Modification Program, though, is indefinite confinement. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Control Unit to communicate to the public. Yet a testament to this policy was a man named Hiller "Red" Hayes. After 13 years in solitary confinement (nearly six in the control unit), he became the "boogie man" of the prison system—the living/dying example of what can happen to any prisoner. The more he deteriorated in his own skeleton, the more prisoners could expect to wane in his likeness. He died in the unit in August, 1977.

In essence, the Unit is a Death Row for the living. And the silent implications of Behavior Modification speak their sharpest and clearest ultimatum: CONFORM OR DIE.

"In several instances (the control unit) has been used to silence prison critics. It has been used to silence religious leaders. It has been used to silence economic and philosophical dissidents."

HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. Write letters calling for open, full-scale Congres-
sional hearings on the control unit and U.S. Bureau
of Prisons control unit policies. Write your own
representative. Also write: Robert Kastenmeier,
George Danielson and Thomas Railsback(all with prison
related subcommittee), John Conyers and Ron Dellums
(Congressional Black Caucus) and Don Edwards and
Robert Drinan(House Judiciary Committee), all at U.S.

2. Write letters supporting the Bono vs. Saxbe case
against the control unit. Write: 7th U.S. Circuit Court
Send copies to Judge James Foreman, U.S. District
Court, 750 Missouri Avenue, E. St. Louis, Ill. 62202.

3. Help distribute the documentary film "Marion: A
Prison Inside a Prison", a 23 minute 8 mm. sound film,
rents for $25 plus mailing and insurance and this
pamphlet by Eddie Griffin(60c each-bulk rates are
also available).

4. Set up speaking for committee organizers, ex-
prisoners, lawyers and Daniel Berrigan, who has done
speaking for the NCSMB for three years now.

5. Send a contribution. Your donation helps pay for
postage, phone, office expenses, printing, transpor-
tation, etc. Send contributions and information
requests to:

National Committee to Support the Marion Brothers
4556a Oakland
St. Louis, Missouri 63110
314-533-2234