

LIFE'S LIKE THAT By FRED NEHER



"A most baffling case . . . SHE doesn't know what's wrong with her either!"

### Some Local Jails Called Abominable

By VINCENT THOMAS  
 Assemblyman, 68th District  
 Present-day state and federal prisons are generally operated in accordance with the highest standards of modern penological science. However, that is not always the case in county and city jails, it would appear. Several such institutions in California have been the targets for severe criticism.

As a result of its own investigations of conditions in several local jails, the subcommittee on custodial institutions of the Assembly committee on criminal procedure characterized them as "abominable" and said that "some jails are in actuality 'schools of crime' because of filthy, over-crowded quarters and the mingling of misdemeanor cases with felons in jail tanks. Officials of four counties were subpoenaed to answer questions concerning conditions in their institutions at a recent meeting of the subcommittee.

THE GROUP was told that while considerable progress has been made in improving jails during the past dozen years, some still do not have adequate bathing facilities, serve bad food, and require prisoners to sleep on dirty mattresses. The subcommittee investigator reported that one large city feeds its prisoners for 15 cents per day, though this was hotly denied by a spokesman for the city.

One witness, an attorney, told of winning a writ of habeas corpus for a client on the grounds that the latter was being held in a jail which had been condemned as a fire-trap. This witness asserted that the state fire marshal said that half the local jails in the state do not meet minimum fire safety standards. This fact raises the strong possibility, he declared, that the State Supreme Court may order release of prisoners in half of the county jails because the buildings are fire-traps.

THE SPOKESMAN for one

county which was called on the carpet because of conditions in its jail angrily said that his county "is not going to be bullied into anything." He maintained that the 1959 report of the state fire marshal which cited the jail as a fire hazard was not delivered to county officials until a month ago, but that corrections were promptly made after that.

The sheriff of another county complained about lack of coordination between state departments. He reported that plans for a new county jail annex were approved by the department of corrections, and the structure built, only to have the fire marshal demand that an expensive new heating plant be installed. He admitted, however, that he also has trouble within his own county government. He does not have control over the physical plant of his jail, so while he can request repairs that should take less than 30 days to finish, the county public works department may take a year to start them.

THE CHAIRMAN of a Senate committee which investigated correctional facilities last year and issued a report at the time told the subcommittee that his group found that many county jails tend to treat all prisoners as maximum security risks, even though most of them have not been tried or are awaiting sentence. This practice increases costs and is conducive to crime, it was said.

Subcommittee members raised the question as to whether the state should not make grants to local authorities for jail costs. The representative of the department of corrections commented on this by saying that he believes direct costs should be a local responsibility, with state aid confined to development of standards and training for jail personnel. Only a token amount of training is now available, the group was told.



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