SECURITY ISSUES IN PENNSYLVANIA STATE PRISONS

March, 1980

Recent outbreaks of violence in state correctional institutions in New Mexico, New York and Connecticut,[1] which some observers associate, at least in part, to overcrowding and understaffing, are beginning to cause concern about security in Pennsylvania state correctional institutions. Worries increased in March, when two convicted murderers -- Russell Shoats and Clifford Futch -- escaped from Farview State Hospital, Pennsylvania's only maximum security forensic psychiatric hospital in Waymart, Wayne County, with the assistance of a female visitor who allegedly brought them firearms inside the institution.

Also, while Pennsylvania has avoided major rioting by prisoners during recent years, the horrible lessons of New York State's Attica takeover, September 9-13, 1971, where 43 persons died -- 39 were killed and 80 wounded by gunfire during the 15 minutes it took State Police to recapture the institution -- were poignantly brought home again in a widely viewed television drama in March.

Pennsylvania has not been completely spared during these years.

Four adult prison employees have been killed on duty in this state since 1972, three of them at Graterford Correctional Institution

in Montgomery County, and one at Western State Correctional Institution in Pittsburgh. The most recent of these tragedies occurred at Graterford just one year ago when Captain Felix Mokychic was struck on the head by an inmate-wielded ballbat, March 20, 1979. The incident precipitated protests by correctional officers who succeeded in getting the institution to set up a 10-man emergency squad to assist in security.

During 1978, inmates at Dallas Correctional Institution, near Scranton, engaged in a two-day institution-wide work stoppage that was terminated without violence. Also in 1978, Huntingdon Correctional Institution officials were able to abort a mass escape plan in which several inmates tried to break out of their cellblock and take over the prison control center, but not before several officers were injured, one of them seriously.

According to the Pennsylvania Bureau of Corrections, there have been 16 violent deaths of inmates (11 suicides, one accident, four fatal assaults) in the state's nine correctional institutions during the last four years.

While the Bureau has made noteworthy progress in reducing escapes, the record since 1976 is not reassuring:

1976 - 169 escapes, including 76 from inside institutions[2]

1977 - 140 escapes, including 46 from inside institutions

1978 - 114 escapes, including 30 from inside institutions

1979 - 88 escapes, including 22 from inside institutions

Meanwhile, the number of Class I (major) misconducts among state inmates has increased by 22 percent since 1976.[3]

Year	Class I misconducts	Criminal charges against inmates
1976	8,055	177
1977	8,552	208
1978	8,858	222
1979	9,831	197

Questioned by members of the news media following the New Mexico riot, neither Pennsylvania Corrections Commissioner William B. Robinson nor Fred Davis, an official of Council 88 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) which represents Graterford Correctional Institution guards, was particularly sanguine about prospects for avoiding prison uprisings in this state.[4]

"I don't think you will get any prison officials to say that it (a prison riot) is not possible," said Robinson.

"How can we expect prisons to be safe?" asked Davis. "Our people are overworked and understaffed. There is never enough money to do the things that need to be done."

Commissioner Robinson last year[5] called for major renovations to three of the state's oldest prisons -- at Pittsburgh (built in 1882), Huntingdon (1889) and Graterford (1929). He also urged "a solution to the growing problem of overcrowding which already has placed most of the state correctional institutions at or near capacity, three of them seriously over capacity," as well as the "establishment

of a permanent facility for training state and county correctional personnel."

"We are constantly concerned about security, every day, every hour," Robinson said recently in an interview with the Citizens Crime Commission.

The Pennsylvania Legislature has failed to provide the Bureau of Corrections with capital funds for nine years, said one Bureau spokesman. Meanwhile buildings at the women's correctional institution at Muncy go unused because of lack of repairs, a major crack has developed in the wall at Western Correctional Institution in Pittsburgh, and Graterford exists without any indoor recreation facilities, thus forcing inactivity on inmates during bad weather.

Dallas Correctional Institution, one of the state's newer institutions, was built in the late 1950s for defective delinquents. "From a physical standpoint," says its superintendent, Glen R. Jeffes, "this is a medium security institution. Yet we are holding some of the most dangerous convicts in the state." (Shoats and Futch were taken there after being recaptured following their escape from Farview.)

"If we're going to have the kind of offender we have," said Jeffes, "then we ought to have at least a double (perimeter) fence."

Huntingdon Correctional Institution Superintendent Ronald J. Marks said it was built initially as an industrial school, and housed defective delinquents until the 1960s. "Security was no problem then," said Marks, "but now, for example, the gymnasium extends beyond the wall with only a fence enclosing it. We lack

adequate perimeter security."

The women's institution at Muncy has no perimeter security whatsoever.

"Violence is inevitable in the obsolete prisons we now have, inhabited by idle prisoners saturated with hostility for each other and for their keepers," according to John P. Conrad, a director of the American Justice Institute, Sacramento, CA.[6] "It is exacerbated by the overcrowding that nearly every major prison system in the land is experiencing.

"What we face now," said Conrad, "is a prison community haunted by fear -- fear of each other by prisoners of differing racial groups, fear of prison gangs, fear of staff by prisoners, fear of prisoners by the staff."

So far as prisoners fearing each other is concerned, evidence shows that it cannot be attributed solely and simplistically to racial animosities. The uncontrolled fury that wracked New Mexico State Penitentiary, for example, demonstrated that race provided neither the incentive for, nor protection against, inmate-to-inmate violence. Most of the dead there, according to published reports, were chicanos apparently killed by other chicanos.

Some observers say that fear of prisoners by staff, and the frustration that goes with it, stem from a bevy of court decisions during the 1970s guaranteeing various inmate rights and protections.

"Correctional employees have resented many of the courts' actions, judging them to be inappropriate intrusions into the operation of correctional institutions," writes John M. Wynne, Jr., of Sacramento.[7]

"Employee groups have disliked several of the court-ordered practices in disciplinary hearings, such as the inmate's right to call a correctional officer as a witness, the need for written disciplinary reports before certain specified deadlines, and the inmate's ability to use an attorney or attorney substitute to defend him before a disciplinary board even if the complaining officer has no such legal assistance. According to correctional employees, such decisions have contributed to an increasing breakdown in prison discipline.

"Whatever the validity of this assertion, correctional staff believe that these court decisions have shifted the balance of power within institutions away from the staff and toward the inmates."

According to Donald Cutler, assistant to Executive Director Gerald McEntee of Council 13 AFSCME, which represents Pennsylvania correctional employees, "guards are continually coming to complain to us that they don't know anymore when the lid is going to blow."

On the other hand, it has been repeatedly held by the courts, and accepted by leading correctional authorities, that a "prisoner retains all the rights of an ordinary citizen except those expressly or by necessary implication taken from him by law (first enunciated in Coffin v. Reichard, by the Sixth U.S. Circuit Court in 1944).

"Administrative convenience is no longer to be accepted as sufficient justification for deprivation of rights," summarized the Corrections Task Force of the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals in 1973.

Furthermore, as stated by Philadelphia's three-judge panel in the 1972 landmark Jackson v. Hendrick case finding imprisonment in the City's institutions to be "cruel and unusual punishment," concern for inmates' rights can help preserve order in the prisons.

"No one supposes that if our prisons improve we shall be free of crime," said the judicial panel. "If they become models for the

world, this will not occur. But at least by dealing with our prisoners justly we shall have made a start."

INMATE POPULATION

An analysis by the Citizens Crime Commission of average daily populations in Pennsylvania's nine correctional institutions, and its community service centers and group homes for 1974, 1976, 1978 and as of January 31, 1980 shows that the total number of inmates committed to institutions has increased by 22 percent since 1974, and that the number of inmates physically present in institutions, service centers, and group homes has increased 29% in the same period.[8]

As indicated in the accompanying charts, the number of inmates physically present on January 31, 1980 exceeded the number of usable general population cells at Camp Hill, Pittsburgh, Dallas, Muncy, and Greensburg, and was close to the limit in the other four institutions.

The number of inmates physically present at any one institution changes daily because of admissions, discharges and transfers. This fact alone forces the Bureau to draw up a list each week of available cells so that it may assign inmates moving from diagnosis and classification units into general population. On February 20, for example, there were no available general population cells at Pittsburgh but 149 at Graterford. One week later, there were six available cells at Pittsburgh but 134 at Graterford.

Deputy Commissioner Erskind DeRamus, in charge of inmate transfers, is thus sometimes forced to assign an inmate moving from the classification unit to a prison farther from his family than is

advisable, or to place him in a prison where proper programming, based on his diagnosed needs, is not available. This problem is especially acute for southeastern and southwestern parts of the state because 25 percent of the annual court commitments to the Bureau come from Philadelphia and 18 percent from Allegheny County.

Such transferring not only frustrates programming and creates tensions among staff and inmates, it also contributes to a massive movement problem. The Bureau moves about 300 prisoners a month using at least six vans each traveling about 25,000 miles a year.

The following chart lists the number of inmates physically in each institution, the number of guards (not including supervisors) on duty, and usable general cells.[9]

PRISON	1974	1976	1978	1980	CELLS
Graterford					
inmates	1,527	1,733	1,830	1,707	1,750
guards	266	287	298	298	
ratio *	5.74	6.04	6.14	5.73	
Camp Hill					
inmates	821	908	1,130	1,161	1,020
guards	194	206	211	206	
ratio	4.23	4.41	5.35	5.64	
Pittsburgh					
inmates	783	1,013	1,016	1,034	854
guards	190	190	206	205	
ratio	4.12	5.33	4.93	5.04	
Huntingdon					
inmates	756	933	1,041	981	1,044
guards	154	154	175	178	
ratio	4.91	6.06	5.95	5.51	
Dallas					
inmates	729	874	880	950	904
guards	207	207	210	208	
ratio	3.52	4.22	4.19	4.57	
Rockview					
inmates	716	920	825	843	953
guards	165	176	181	179	
ratio	4.34	5.23	4.56	4.71	
Muncy (women)					
inmates	178	222	218	240	218
guards	50	77	82	82	
ratio	3.56	2.88	2.66	2.93	
Greensburg					
inmates	189	196	187	233	120
guards	41	46	48	47	
ratio	4.61	4.26	3.9	4.96	
Mercer					
inmates	-	-	14	167	180
guards	-	-	56	56	
ratio	-	-	-	2.98	

* One guard per indicated prisoners

Total prisoners committed to the Bureau of Corrections, those physically present in institutions, community service centers and group homes, and total guards on duty were:

BUREAU	1974	1976	1978	1980	CAPACITY[10]
committed	6,768	7,590	8,181	8,247	8,141
physically present	5,886	7,078	7,441	7,585	
guards	1,267	1,343	1,467	1,459	
ratio to inmates within prisons	1 per 4.5	1 per 5.1	1 per 4.9	1 per 5.0	

As indicated, there were more inmates committed to the Bureau of Corrections on January 31, 1980 than there were usable spaces to house them. (Another 269 cells were unusable because of being in need of major repairs or use as storage.)

However, of the 8,247 inmates then committed to the Bureau, 386 were on authorized absences, 113 were in outside mental or other hospitals, 27 were being detained elsewhere, and 136 escapees were missing although still carried on the rolls. This, then, left 7,585 physically present in institutions and community centers and group homes.

It is therefore accurate to say that the Bureau of Corrections still has space available for several hundred more prisoners, but only by utilizing cells and dormitories not designed for confining them indefinitely. Greensburg Regional Correctional Institution, for example, is currently holding more than 100 inmates in improvised dormitories and day-rooms, and Huntingdon and Graterford have prisoners

assigned to temporary housing outside their walls.

While it is reasonable to assume that there will always be a sizeable number of prisoners on authorized leave and in county jails awaiting new hearings, and that a large number of escapees will not be returned to custody at any one time, the scarcity of general population cells forces the Bureau to hold some inmates in classification units longer than recommended, and to engage in long-range moving of prisoners as noted earlier.

Overcrowding in Pennsylvania has been temporarily staved off by --

- Freeing two cellblocks at Camp Hill for adults by closing that institution (in the mid 1970s) to juveniles sentenced by Family Courts;

- Commissioner Robinson last year ordering some 300 cells then used for offices and storage to be readapted to housing; and

- Opening of the new 180-bed Regional Correctional Institution at Mercer. Much of this new space, however, is being utilized by counties in western Pennsylvania for short-term offenders who would otherwise be housed in their own jails.

Population, that is numbers of prisoners within an institution, has been recognized by correctional experts as a problem in itself, contributing to difficulties in staffing, programming, movement within the walls, visiting, proper counseling, etc.

But density of population, that is overcrowding, adds a more serious dimension directly affecting security.

"It is axiomatic among correctional personnel that crowding has adverse effects on inmates, rendering them more antagonistic than usual," say authors of a 1977 report based on crowding in federal institutions.[11]

"Stress associated with crowding and confinement," they found, "stimulates symptoms of physical illness" and "crowding is frequently cited as a primary stimulant of disruptive acts."

A study at the Federal Correctional Institution at Tallahassee found significant correlation between density and rate of (misconduct) incidents. The less space, the higher rate of infractions.

Nacci, Teitelbaum and Prather reported from their study of 37 federal institutions that "high density is associated with high rates of assaultiveness, strongest in institutions housing young adults."

POPULATION TREND

If the current space issue is sticky, the future could be desperate.

Commissioner Robinson, based on estimates developed by Pennsylvania Committee on Crime and Delinquency, believes that Pennsylvania's prison population will hit 10,000 during the 1980s. That is the equivalent of adding two new institutions the size of Dallas or Rockview to the state's system at a cost that could reach $100 million (based on rule of thumb estimates of $50,000 a bed.)

Alfred Blumstein, chairman of the PCCD and director of Carnegie-Mellon University's Urban Systems Institute, says 10,000 prisoners

is a "conservative estimate, based on current practice."

"Current trends" -- that is the developing practice of judges to hand out longer sentences, and prisoners to serve longer actual terms before parole -- "are pushing it (the estimate) higher," Blumstein told the Crime Commission.

In 1977, Blumstein thought Pennsylvania's prison population might peak at about 8,500.

Except for possible conversion of Farview State Hospital into a maximum security prison for 500 inmates, with an adjoining regional medium-security unit for 200, there are no plans on the Bureau of Corrections' drawing board for new institutions. The Bureau has twice studied Farview for possible conversion, even preparing somewhat detailed drawings of new construction there, but the issue appears quiet at this time. One big reason is that there are no other places to transfer and treat the mentally ill patients there.

Likewise, long-discussed regional prisons for southeastern and northeastern Pennsylvania have apparently been dropped, as has multi-million dollar construction of a new Western Correctional Institution to replace the old facility in Pittsburgh.

According to Blumstein, new prison space will likely be needed only for a decade. He expects the bulge in prison population to taper off, then reverse after 1990, because of relatively fewer young adults (the crime prone age group) in the state's population.

"This means it's probably not worthwhile to go out and build more prisons because by the time you plan them, apply for the money

to build them, and then get them built, you will be over the hump," Blumstein has been quoted.[12]

"We will probably need new space only for a decade," Blumstein told the Crime Commission. "So, if we build new, we should prepare to phase out the old. Meanwhile, we should, to the maximum degree possible, find the least serious (inmates) and deal with them alternately."

Annual commitments by the courts to state prisons actually show a decline since 1976.[13]

Year	Persons Committed to the Bureau
1972	3,254
1973	3,402
1974	3,146
1975	3,575
1976	3,615
1977	3,581
1978	3,262
1979	3,178

But, during the 1960s, annual court commitments to the Bureau of Correction never exceeded 2,000. The highest for any one year that decade was 1,797 during 1961, the lowest 1,046 during 1965.

While stiffer sentences imposed by individual judges might well be one reason why prison populations are increasing in this state, enactment of a mandatory sentencing law would impact the prisons to a much greater extent. (One mandatory sentencing bill narrowly

defeated in the Legislature in 1976 would have required judges to imprison up to 3,000 more offenders a year, according to a House Judiciary Committee report.)

Of more immediate import to the prisons, however, is the growing number of mentally ill persons they are getting.

THE MENTALLY ILL

Early in March, the Department of Public Welfare announced that it was cutting off further admissions of mentally ill persons to Farview State Hospital until the population there dropped from 250 to 225 where it would be maintained.

In a letter to president judges throughout the state, Dr. Scott Nelson, deputy secretary for mental health, said that Farview was built to house only 200.

"The situation is no longer safe for either hospital staff or patients," Dr. Nelson said, "and meaningful evaluations and treatment cannot occur."

Dr. Nelson also said Farview and four medium-security forensic units would no longer accept involuntary, short-term commitments of inmates from other penal institutions.

Even before this attempted restriction on new patients at Farview, the state's correctional facilities were feeling the effects of Act 143, passed in 1976, in two ways: First, they were finding it increasingly difficult to transfer their mentally ill inmates to

outside mental hospitals, including Farview. Act 143 requires that before a person can be involuntarily committed to a hospital, he must have been found dangerous to himself or others.

Second, some mentally ill persons not admitted to hospitals are committing offenses that eventually result in their going to prison.

"Psychotics are getting harder to handle in prison, and it's harder to transfer them out since Act 143 became effective," says Dr. Ray Belford, a psychiatrist at Bureau of Correction headquarters in Camp Hill.

Dr. Belford spoke of "greater instability" in the prisons, causing a need for more manpower.

"More inmates are trying to commit suicide. We have to have more suicide watches.

"The irony of this," said Dr. Belford, "is that if we do a good job protecting a mentally ill inmate from hurting himself or others, then we can't transfer him under Act 143 to a mental facility.

"Act 143 was designed to prevent unnecessary loss of freedom, but our inmates are already without freedom. They need treatment."

Dr. Belford declined to estimate the number of seriously mentally ill persons in state prisons, but "most likely we transferred more (to mental hospitals) prior to Act 143," he said.

And, in the opinion of Dr. Gerard N. Massaro, director of Bureau planning and research, the prisons now are "receiving more

prisoners prone to snap out."

Back in 1969, Farview State Hospital had over 1,000 patients. Where are the 700 or more who might be there now except for the severe limitations imposed?

"They're mostly languishing in the correctional system," said one knowledgeable forensic psychiatrist who asked to remain anonymous. "Certainly fewer are being shipped to hospitals since Act 143 was enacted."

This same psychiatrist estimated that 10 to 20 percent of state prison inmates are suffering "serious mental illness -- psychosis, delusions, hallucinations. They are readily victimized, and usually kept in behavior adjustment units without adequate treatment."

"We've really emptied the mental institutions, and a lot of those people are winding up in prison," says PCCD Chairman Blumstein.

Mental health problems are not unique, of course, to Pennsylvania prisons.

According to New York Psychiatrist Frank Rundle,[14] who calls it the "largest single health care problem within prisons," 10 to 35 percent of state and federal inmates have serious mental problems.

Dr. Dennis Jurczak, medical director in Michigan's corrections department, is of the opinion that 20 percent of 14,000 inmates there have some serious mental disorder, and at any one time, one-third of these are in an "acute episode" requiring intensive treatment.

"In many cases," says Dr. Alvin Groupe, chief psychiatrist at

Vacaville, CA, "prisons breed psychosis."

Martin Meyers, of the American Civil Liberties Union National Prison Project, believes that "the very tension and pressure of living in a prison tend to exacerbate already existing mental health problems. . . ."

According to the new American Medical Association guidelines for prison psychiatric care,[15] "Psychiatric problems identified either at screening or after admission must be followed up by medical staff. . .

(The policy should be that) "patients with acute psychiatric and other illnesses who require health care beyond the resources available in the facility are transferred or committed to a facility where such care is available. If treatment is to be provided in the prison, it must be in a safe, sanitary humane environment. . . (with) staff within sight or sound of all inmates. . . (and) trained personnel available to provide treatment and close observation."

In practice, however, few prisons including those in Pennsylvania have the resources, if the will, to treat seriously mentally ill patients.

Dr. Belford said that the Pennsylvania Bureau of Corrections has available the services of 12 psychiatrists, and needs more.

But Corrections Commissioner Robinson doesn't believe that the prisons should be responsible for treatment of psychotics.

"I say take them to mental hospitals and treat them," he told the Crime Commission, "and then send them back to us."

Chris Dunn of the National Institute of Mental Health[16] is of the same view, that the mentally ill do not belong in prison.

"They are serious management problems; their personal needs are not being met, and most of them don't need to be punished. I would hope an enlightened policymaker would see that," says Dunn.

Many critics of mental care in prison say that all it amounts to is "medicate and maintain."

According to figures supplied by the Bureau of Corrections, 589 prisoners in Pennsylvania's nine correctional institutions are receiving "psychoactive medication", ranging from Valium to Prolixin, for psychiatric problems.

The counts range from 244 at Graterford (over 14 percent of the inmates) to 75 at Pittsburgh, 96 at Huntingdon, 30 at Camp Hill, 35 at Rockview, 3 at Greensburg, 5 at Mercer, 47 at Dallas and 54 women at Muncy (over 22 percent of inmates.)

The Bureau requires that every prisoner on such medication be examined, and his need for drugs be reviewed, by a psychiatrist every 30 days.

To get a clearer picture of the security problems caused by mentally ill persons in state prisons, the Crime Commission interviewed Superintendents Glen Jeffes of Dallas and Ronald J. Marks of Huntingdon.

According to Jeffes, who consulted with his director of treatment, David Larkins, an estimated five to 10 percent of inmates at Dallas have "serious mental disorders."

"If an inmate begins to show bizarre behavior," said Jeffes, "we move him (to one of four psychiatric observation cells in use) and try to stabilize him with medication."

Two psychiatrists visit Dallas two days a week to treat emergencies, he said.

"The problem these people create," said Jeffes, "might be termed a fear syndrome. Guards and other inmates don't know what to expect from them. It is difficult to cope with. Some of these people become social isolates. Others stay away from them. Many paranoids withdraw on their own. As a result, they don't get the interaction they could benefit from.

"Others are seen to be weak and are picked on."

The situation at Dallas is "much worse" now than five years ago, said Jeffes.

"The more psychotics you have, the more it contributes to security problems," said Larkin. "You could, for example, have an episode at any time, say in the dining hall."

Jeffes referred to one mentally ill inmate who, he said, was at that time ready to be sent to Farview, (even though the hospital was then receiving no more.)

"They aren't going to tell me no room," said Jeffes. "I'll send him (the inmate) to DPW's regional office in Scranton, and he can sit in the hall there."

"The problem of the mentally ill in prison is becoming acute very quickly," in Marks' words.

"We had one case who was taking off his clothes and throwing feces and water out of his cell. Farview won't take him. Mayview (Allegheny County) says it isn't equipped. The man is being held in restrictive housing. That's not healthy for him, other inmates or staff."

Huntingdon has only two psychiatric observation cells, according to Marks. Thus, he is forced to use cells set aside for disciplinary problems, he said.

"I don't like to do that. It is not therapeutic or humane."

One psychiatrist visits the institution three days a week.

"We have a number of inmates with mental health problems," said Marks. "Some are medicated so that they can be in general population. Others go to the psychiatrist when they develop signs. I think the really sick guy should get out quickly (to a mental hospital) but there is too much red tape.

"This crunch can't continue," said Marks.

STAFFING

With inmate populations growing to the point of overcrowding, with more major misconducts occurring, and with serious mental health problems to deal with, Pennsylvania's prisons are also beginning to realize shortages of guards.

Following an unsuccessful escape attempt in December in which two inmates used a gun allegedly tossed over Graterford's wall, Superintendent Julius T. Cuyler conceded that only five of the prison's nine watch towers were being manned during daylight hours.[17]

The prison, Pennsylvania's largest, was 30 guards short of its authorized strength at the time. Kenneth Robinson, Bureau spokesman, said officials were trying to compensate for the shortage by working some correctional officers overtime and shifting them about.

"We are keeping the posts covered," he said, "but it is tough to do."

Corrections Commissioner William Robinson contacted Philadelphia Mayor Green about recruiting some of Philadelphia's newly laid-off policemen as prison guards; and Superintendent Cuyler sent one of his aides to the Philadelphia Police Academy to seek possible guard candidates there.

"We found a little interest, but no applicants," Cuyler told the Crime Commission.

Kenneth Robinson said over 100 persons had been interviewed since 1978 for guard positions at Graterford which pay $11,767 to start and $13,666 after one year.

"The problem," said Kenneth Robinson, "is that the turnover rate is so darn high."

"We're not a dumping ground," said Commissioner William Robinson. "We want top people." This year, he added, the Bureau will begin

a policy of giving psychiatric and job-related physical tests to guard applicants.

Dallas Correctional Institution, as well, has pulled guards out of some of its watch towers.

Also, during the night hours when inmates are locked in their cells, some of the state's prisons are operating with custodial staffing at the bare-bones minimum. Dallas, for example, with an inmate population of 950, has only 23 guards on duty at night.

There were only 22 guards on duty at New Mexico's 1,240-man state prison when trouble broke out there in February, a ratio which one American Correctional Association official, Dale Sechrest, called "an invitation to rioting."

Prison work, of course, is a 24-hour a day, 365-days-a-year responsibility. With increasing fringe benefits for guards, such as sick leave, more holidays and vacations and shorter hours, Sechrest said it now requires 1.62 men to staff each post, each shift.

To state this another way, without spending vast amounts for overtime, Pennsylvania has only 900 of its 1,459-man guard force available at any one time to watch over 7,500 prisoners.

While the number of correctional officers (not counting supervisors) has increased by nearly 200 since 1974, prison populations have grown faster, thus reducing the statewide ratio of guards to inmates from one per 4.5 inmates in 1974 to one per 5.

At the same time, the Bureau has been trying to reduce overtime to save money. Such pay has been reduced from $4 million in fiscal

1974-75 to about $3.3 million last year. Again, this can be interpreted as meaning less manpower on post.

The guard per inmates ratio at Graterford is currently one per 5.7, the same as in 1974. But Camp Hill Correctional Institute, which houses mostly young adults who are generally considered to be the most difficult to manage, has dropped from one guard per 4.2 inmates in 1974 to one per 5.6 inmates.

The guard ratio at all other state prisons except the women's institution at Muncy has dropped since 1974. Muncy now has one correctional officer per 2.9 inmates.

Pennsylvania's newest correctional institution at Mercer, holding mostly minor offenders and equipped with some of the latest in electric security safeguards, has a higher ratio of guards -- one per three inmates -- than any of the so-called maximum security prisons in the state.

It is important to note that these ratios are merely averages and do not mean that the state's prisons have one guard available to watch five prisoners round the clock. On the other hand, Commissioner Robinson correctly points out that prison employees other than guards, such as counselors, teachers, civilians heading work groups, etc., likewise bear responsibilities for security while engaged in their other tasks.

There are about 1,020 other such employees, not counting clerical help, in the nine prisons, to supplement the custodial duties of 1,459 guards.

No recommended standards for guard to prisoner ratios have been developed nationally, according to Sechrest, director of the ACA's correctional standards program, because adult prisons greatly vary in size, design, programming and security-status (minimum, medium, maximum).

However, he said, one guard per six prisoners has come to be a generally accepted figure. Based on this ratio, Pennsylvania will need 200 additional guards if inmate population grows to 10,000.

The Corrections Task Force of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, for example, found in 1967 that the ratio of guards for adult state institutions was about one per 7.7 inmates. Even at that level, the National Survey of Corrections revealed that "many institutions had such a shortage of custodial personnel that programs were curtailed.

"For purposes of estimating staff needs, an average ratio of one custodial officer per six inmates was employed. Present shortages and the increasing use of smaller facilities in the future make this ratio seem a conservative one.

"Shortages of custodial officers in a prison mean curtailment of all kinds of institutional programs, including school, counseling and recreation, because such personnel are needed when inmates are outside of their cells and moving about an institution."[18]

The only ACA standard currently speaking to this issue calls on institutions to "systematically determine personnel requirements in all categories of employees working directly with inmates in order to insure access to staff and availability of services."

In 1973, the Corrections Task Force of the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals noted a "severe personnel shortage" in prisons and blamed it in part on the "reluctance of some correctional administrators to recruit actively the talented, creative, sensitive and educated persons needed to meet the challenge of the changing correctional structure."[19]

The Task Force urged utilization of ex-offenders, women, minorities and volunteers in prison and added:

"Most correctional agencies have been too preoccupied with day-to-day staffing problems to attempt systematic long-range planning to meet manpower needs. Sporatic efforts to remedy pressing difficulties, through raising wages, reducing workloads or other piecemeal actions do not get to the heart of the problems."

Rather, said the Task Force, it is the state's responsibilities to assess manpower needs, redesign present jobs, develop new recruitment methods, and training and staff development.

"Unless there is basic consolidation to eliminate the present balkanization of corrections, it is unrealistic to expect overall manpower planning."

Proponents of creating a systemwide Department of Corrections in Pennsylvania say that this change, in itself, will lead to better manpower planning.

Meanwhile, guard unions in Pennsylvania and elsewhere are bringing increasing pressure of their own for solution of the staffing crisis.

Guard unions really began to become a factor in prison management only about 10 years ago, according to one writer in Corrections Magazine,[20] and since then there have been dozens of strikes, job actions, work slowdowns and other signs of militancy often revolving around the staffing issue.

"There is one big difference in correctional officer unions," writes Joan Potter. "The labor-management relationship has a third component, the prisoners.

"The rights and privileges that prisoners have gained in recent years, and the rights and status that guards feel they have lost, have often become the focus of unrest. Many correctional officers feel that recent court decisions that mandate better prison conditions or add to inmates' rights have made the job of custody and security more difficult.

"The feeling is that the inmates are running the prison."

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) began representing prison guards in Pennsylvania in the early 1970s, and since then there have been a number of job actions in this state, including several affecting operations at Graterford, Pittsburgh, Camp Hill and Huntingdon Correctional Institutions.

The guards are now working under a three-year contract signed in 1978, and union officials say staffing will definitely be a bargaining issue next year.

"We definitely feel that staffing levels are down to the bone,"

Donald Cutler, assistant to Council 13 Executive Director Gerald McEntee, told the Crime Commission. "Arbitrators gave us 50 more slots statewide in 1978, but that doesn't mean we're properly staffed.

"With federal courts giving rights to inmates, it is far more difficult to deal with them. The correctional officers feel hamstrung. Next year the union will be going after hazardous duty pay, but the men would forego that if they could get an increase in the number of guards. Men are bringing us problems all the time. There is great stress in the job, and it's affecting their home life."

Edward J. Keller, head of Council 88 AFSCME which represents guards at Graterford Correctional Institution, said the state always uses the excuse that it has no money, "but what they have, they put into programs that aren't worth anything.

"We just feel that everything is for the inmates and nothing for us."

Like ACA, AFSCME has not gotten around to developing any recommended guard to inmate ratios except to point out some obvious "discrepancies" in specific cases.

For example, after a prison guard was killed on duty in Missouri in December, 1978, AFSCME surveyed states in that area and found that while Missouri averaged only one guard per 7.5 inmates, Kansas had one per 4.24 inmates, Iowa one per 4.05, Nebraska one per 3.99, and Illinois one per 3.8.

Pennsylvania again has one per 5 inmates.

To illustrate how involved guard unions can become about prison management, Council 82 AFSCME sued New York State in Federal Court in 1976, demanding either that officials take action to relieve overcrowding or that the court order the takeover of the state's 21 prisons by the federal government.[21] It also demanded the hiring of 400 more correctional officers to increase security.

With increased overcrowding, inmate activism and a growing financial crisis, "the American correctional system seems dangerously close to losing most of its newer methods of preparing men and women for release," says John M. Wynne, Jr., "and will perhaps revert to its custodial role of doing little else for prisoners besides keeping them imprisoned."

If and when that realization sinks in among Pennsylvania's 7,500 prisoners, it could become a security problem in itself.

FOOTNOTES

[1]At least 33 inmates died, many were horribly mutilated, when prisoners at the New Mexico State Prison at Santa Fe rioted and rampaged under the influence of drugs in early February, 1980. Four guards were injured, March 2, when attacked by 25 inmates at the Cheshire Correctional Institution in Connecticut. Twelve guards and two inmates were injured in two mess hall melees at Attica, NY in January, 1980.

[2]Other escapes include disappearing while on furlough or supervised leave, and walking away while on work release or education release.

[3]Class I misconducts range from murder and escape to possession of a deadly weapon, arson, robbery, sodomy, refusing to work or obey an order, intoxication, lying to an employee, unauthorized use of mail or telephone, bribery of an employee, gambling and disrespect toward a staff member.

[4]Quoted in "Prison riot brings tough questions closer to home," in the Philadelphia Inquirer, February 17, 1980.

[5]1978 Annual Report, The Pennsylvania Bureau of Correction.

[6]Speaking at the annual congress of the American Correctional Association in Philadelphia, August, 1979.

[7] Prison Employee Unionism: The Impact on Correctional Administration and Program. National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, January, 1978.

[8]Figures supplied by the Bureau of Corrections.

[9]Inmates include those housed in general population, disciplinary and administrative segregation, diagnostic and receiving cells, and prison hospital beds. Not included here are those assigned to an institution who are temporarily in county jails, in outside mental and other hospitals, on furlough and leave, or escaped and missing. Also not counted in these figures are inmates in community service centers and group homes -- 187 in 1974, 279 in 1976, 300 in 1978, and 269 on January 31, 1980.
CELLS refers only to usable general population cells, or designed bed space in dorms.

[10]Capacity, in the case of the Bureau totals, refers not only to usable general population cells but also space in administrative segregation, diagnostic and receiving units, community service centers and group homes. It does not count hospital beds or disciplinary cells in prisons because another cell must still be maintained for each inmate there, pending his recovery or release from segregated lockup.

[11]"Population Density and Inmate Misconduct Rates in the Federal Prison System," June 1977 issue of Federal Probation; Nacci, Teitelbaum and Prather.

[12]"New State Prisons Won't Be Needed, CMU Study says". Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, September 20, 1977.

[13]Bureau of Corrections figures.

[14]Quoted, as are other non-Pennsylvanians in this section, in Corrections Magazine, February, 1980, in an article, "Who Will Care for the Mad and Bad," by Rob Wilson. According to the author, "There are thousands of offenders whose mental illness is completely unrelated to their crimes, many of whom are driven insane by their experience in prison." pp. 5-17.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]"Graterford understaffed; some towers unmanned," The Bulletin, February 20, 1980.

[18]Task Force Report: Corrections. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967, page 96.

[19] Corrections, National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, 1973, Chapter 14.

[20] "Guards Unions: The Search for Solidarity," Joan Potter. Corrections Magazine, September 1979.

[21] Prison Employee Unionism: The Impact on Correctional Administration and Programs, National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, 1978.