

Crime and Administration of Justice - 1971

The currently overloaded condition of the criminal justice system in the United States saps the capacity of the police and courts to deal effectively with criminal conduct, creating a situation inimical to the welfare of the public as well as to the elementary rights of the suspect himself. In facing this reality, citizens should understand that more than one half of all arrests are for crimes in which there may be no victim, or in which the only one hurt may be the perpetrator, such as in crimes of drunkenness, drug addiction, homosexual and other voluntary sexual acts between consenting adults, gambling and vagrancy. For many of these persons, the appropriate measures required are not the destructive sanctions imposed by legislation, the police, the court and the jail, but the services of medical and social agencies.

Therefore, in convention assembled in November 1971, in Los Angeles, California, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods recommends:

1. The interest of Sisterhoods and their members in this grave problem which shall lead them to further study of it;
2. The prompt establishment of study commissions broadly representative of the many interested sectors of the government and the public, including both professional and lay individuals, to examine:
 1. Which crimes now clogging the criminal justice system might be transferred to more appropriate social welfare, health or administrative services, with due protection for the civil rights of all persons, to allow police, courts and prisons to deal swiftly, humanely and redemptively with the more serious crimes against society, persons and property; all of these agencies must be fundamentally reformed and adequately supported from governmental revenues to improve their conditions and procedures.
 2. Necessary changes required in legislation to eliminate a number of "crimes without victims" from criminal codes.
3. Fundamental penal reform to overcome those conditions which brutalize human beings in the name of justice, which tolerate shameful conditions of sanitation and nutrition, which feed on racial and economic discrimination and which fail to restore people to a life of decency and hope—otherwise the terrible lessons of Attica may be a forerunner of similar tragedies elsewhere.

Furthermore, since the abuse of drugs has become a grave menace, not only in American society, but in contemporary civilizations of many lands, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods resolves that Sisterhoods:

1. Become involved with their congregations and communities in intelligent, in-depth educational programming against drug abuse utilizing the materials issued by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and other agencies;
2. Urge reform of existing Federal, State and City narcotics legislation so that punishment not be substituted for treatment, education and therapy;
3. Seek new legislation to distinguish among the severity of various drugs as well as the severity of legal consequences attached to "possession," "use" and "furnishing";
4. Strongly request the Federal Government and through it international agencies to continue to intensify efforts to stop the supply of illicit drugs both at their source and in transit.

Furthermore, since the increasing intrusion upon the freedom, privacy and possible Constitutional rights of Americans through surveillance now undertaken of private citizens, generally without their knowledge, by a score of private and Federal agencies and the development of computerized dossiers on millions of persons, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods resolves to urge on behalf of its U.S. members, the Congress of the United States to:

1. Enact legislation restricting the right of both government and private agencies to collect data on individuals except on a clear showing that the collection of such data serves a lawful governmental function;
2. Require that already assembled files on individuals which do not conform to the above be destroyed;
3. Allow individuals to examine their personal files when such files are legitimately maintained for proper governmental functions; and
4. Authorize an agency responsible to the Congress to oversee the protection of privacy, confidentiality and individual access to governmental files on individuals.