

Are Things Better Inside Attica?

By PAT PETRASKE

The wall. Like the Great Wall of China, built to protect its domain and repel visitors.

"It's horrible," said Vi Brown of Fight, Inc., which was among the 17 organizations that sent representatives to the Attica Correctional Facility last week.

After braving the bitter winds of the open yard, 39 members of the Rochester Attica Coalition found things apparently better inside, as described by six inmates and two guards. Their panel presentation was part of Attica's Community Awareness Program.

"Attica has improved in every area except one. And that is in inmate and officer relationships. It's not a racial thing. But we have some people in here who don't belong around a dog," exclaimed Edward "Boots" Young, president of the Inmate Liaison Committee. He has served 14 years on a murder conviction.

The two-hour discussion with inmates, correctional officers and the prison chaplain surprised and confused the visitors. Roy Rugless, youth director for Action for a Better Community, was prompted to claim that the panel of two blacks, one Puerto Rican and three whites was "stacked."

Awareness rather than reform is the aim of the four-month old coalition that sponsored the Attica Defense Education Day. "We are focusing not on what Attica was," began Robert Staley in reference to the 1971 uprising, "but what conditions are now. There is a self-evident gap between rehabilitation on one hand and reality on the other," said Staley, who is an intern at the Unitarian Church and a member of the community group, Clergy and Laity Concerned.

In reality all of the 28 demands made by the prisoners who held Attica for five days, have been met, at least partially, according to Alex Brooks, an articulate

black inmate who works for the cell study program.

The inmates praised such improvements as the availability of medical programs, the ceasing of censorship of mail and the decrease in pork in the diets.

"Now all we need is a knife and fork to eat with," said Eugene Sugarman, who explained that the use of those utensils would necessitate a search for the knives and forks after every meal.

Having served five months of a one-year minimum sentence, Sugarman denies he is a "criminal," although he was tried

and convicted for bribery. The problems of the prison lie not with the officers and inmates but are due, he said, to "a misunderstanding" by the general community. "It's a lack of concern; before Attica no one could give a hoot in hell about the prisons," he said.

His voice rising in excitement, Sugarman declared, "It's not good to be here. It's not good to have to eat meat with a spoon. It's not good that someone can be put in a keep lock because you look cross-eyed at an officer."

The fact that 60 per cent of the

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Photos by Dave Witbeck

March For Life

Highlight of protests concerning the Jan. 22, 1973 Supreme Court ruling liberalizing abortion was a silent march last Saturday in downtown Rochester, organized by the Area

Right to Life Committee. A reported 600 persons marched in the protest from the Hall of Justice, to the Liberty Pole and back to the Hall. Other photo, Page 2.

Vatican Hails Mideast Pact

Vatican City (RNS) — Vatican Radio has hailed the Israeli-Egyptian agreement on separation of forces along the Suez Canal as "an important step forward" on the road to peace in the Middle East.

This accord, it said in an editorial comment, "leads us to hope that similar agreements will

be signed shortly as regards the other battle front (with Syria)."

The agreement worked out with the aid of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was announced simultaneously on Jan. 17 in Cairo, Jerusalem, and Washington.

Referring to other "complex problems" which, it said, "have

troubled the Middle East for too long," the radio expressed hope for their "resolution."

"What is of particular importance," it noted "is the situation of thousands of (Palestinian Arab) refugees, reduced, as Pope Paul said recently, to desperate living conditions or otherwise frustrated in their legitimate aspirations."