

Gaol English

Letter received from the Commissioner of Prisons, Pretoria:

You are referred to your publication *English Usage in Southern Africa*, Volume 5, No. 1 of May 1974, in which, inter alia, attention is given to so-called 'South African Gaol Argot'.

Although this Department believes and accepts that it was not your intention to deliberately create distorted or warped conceptions, we are forced to draw attention to some of the mis-representations.

- (a) 'The punishment block is Bombay, –
(so-called because *punishment diet* is rice-water) ...'
(our underscoring page 9).

The so-called rice-water diet was abolished during the first half of 1971 and *replaced by a nutritious diet which however is not appetizing*.

- (b) 'Being what it is, the society produces its own lovers and the terms, like the practices, *are widespread and very common*'.
(page 10, our underscoring).

Although the Department does not claim that sodomy never occurs in prisons, a statement that it is widespread is definitely groundless.

- (c) The following quotations on pages 11 and 12, are gross misrepresentations:

'Some rokers *frequently* get their kicks by drinking Brasso, strained through bread; or paint thinners – or by consuming *vast* quantities of aspirins or *stronger* drugs'. (our underscoring).

It would be appreciated if you would ensure these misrepresentations are corrected.

Editors' Comment:

There was no intention on the part of the editors to reflect on the practices of the Prisons Department; our intention was simply to indicate some language usages where these had been noted. Where, in fact, we seem to have impinged (unconsciously) on the subject of treatment and practice we offer sincere apologies. Clearly, the Prisons Department should be in a better position than the editors to comment on the realities of prison situations.