

Crooks

The inmate cook can deftly skim sugar and yeast off the top of a recipe, hide it and take it back to his cell for prison-made alcohol, "pruno." He can find ways of sifting sugar into a kitchen sink, then recover it when the coast is clear. He can hide a wad of dough in his pants, then take it back to his house for yeast in his brew. The cunning inmate will carefully look over his shoulder, or enlist another inmate as a lookout. He knows making pruno is against the rules, but believes it is only wrong if you get caught. As a sophisticated criminal, he has learned different ways not to get caught. And only under competent supervision will the inmate cook stay straight.

Even with good supervision, the criminal may only get caught because he was snitched out. The same may be said about prison administrators. After doing a few years of prison work, staff members share their tales of administrative corruption with me, snitching out those who have departed or those at other institutions, but they hold information about those still in the game, keeping that for their "juice cards."

Senior Romer, had his last drag from his cigarette, and dropped it under his boot. Romer was in a hurry, because the unit was short-staffed again. He was tired of serving 350 meals a day on every 12-hour shift--when it only took one psychotic inmate to ruin his day. At breakfast, Tony Applesauce*, propelled a tray at him during, and now Romer had to figure out how to write a report showing he had violated safety regulations. To make matters worse, Dr. Crestor, the only psychiatrist at Mojave Prison, was burning his sick leave. So Tony had to stay in the unit, locked up, yelling out on the tier.

The experienced officer was still fuming that he hadn't gotten tower duty this year.

Romer said softly, "oh yeh, it's common knowledge Director Mancuso got kickbacks on cigarettes. You know, got his brother the prison contract for the inmate store. When the heat came down on that sexual harassment suit, he just took another director's job in Kentucky."

"I want to show you this. See that floor buffer? We wanted to buy a perfectly good buffer for \$500, but the people in Carson City told us to buy a \$1500 one. We have to get one from an approved vendor." Nothing illegal, it's just the way it's done between friends. I shook my head.

"If you think that's bad, Saloman" Romer whispered, "those motherfuckin' psychs in Carson City get paid full-time, but only do 20 hours a week, tops. "And you know," Romer added "the fucked up thing is that it's all legal." So you got nurses doin doc's jobs because the docs aren't there. Even when they're there, the docs bring in cell phones and do outside business. That part's against the regs, but who's gonna snitch 'em off?"

I said, "but isn't the Department cutting costs to the bone?"

Romer replied, "it makes sense all right: as long as the docs aren't prescribin meds, the department saves money. You gotta remember how those motherfuckers think. Cheaper is better. Look at all the money we'll save. Some'll die anyway. People like this, people who don't contribute to society, like the young, old, people like Tony, are unimportant. Fuck 'em, that's their mentality.

*mental health inmates frequently have their psych meds served in applesauce