

the state

# Charges against TDC exaggerated conditions are better, inmate testifies

**United Press International**  
HOUSTON — The Texas Department of Corrections is "one of the best institutions today," and horror stories about abuse and officially sanctioned lawlessness within prison walls are exaggerated, a convict has testified.

Charles Hardin testified Monday conditions are better in state prisons than other inmates have charged in a lawsuit demanding court-ordered changes in the TDC.

"I feel there's been a lot of things said down here that are not only totally untrue, but are lies," Hardin told a federal judge. "I've read in the newspapers so many things that I know didn't happen."

"I've always felt, even during the

years that I was against the administration, that inmates themselves have helped make TDC one of the best institutions today. It's come a long way. I don't want to see it destroyed."

Plaintiffs contend Texas prisons violate inmate rights through overcrowding, systematic abuse, denial of access to the courts, substandard medical care, lack of adequate rehabilitative programs and other substandard conditions.

Inmates and the Justice Department finished their case two weeks ago. The state is presenting its response to months of adverse testimony about the allegedly inhumane conditions.

U.S. District Judge William

Wayne Justice, who is trying the 7-year case without a jury, warned Hardin sternly that he risked prosecution for perjury if he admitted to earlier lies in court.

Hardin said he was aware of the

risk he was taking.

Hardin, 36, has served 11 years of a life sentence but is eligible for parole in 1980. He identified himself as a former "writwriter" who helped file inmate lawsuits against officials.

"We used to all get together and plot who was going to be the plaintiffs," Hardin said. "I used to try to frame the officials. We spread them out. We discussed them at pretrial conferences. I had a negative attitude then."

Hardin testified conditions in the nation's largest state prison system had been misrepresented by inmates who had testified before him.

Hardin said many two-man cells in TDC have an extra inmate sleeping on a mattress on the floor but "they rotate it around where it's fairer for everybody."

"The food is good," Hardin said. "There's nothing wrong with it. The food is what you'd eat at home except maybe it's not prepared as well."

Hardin said guards generally are more polite than they once were.

"The communication inmates have with officials today is model. It's perfect," Hardin said. "You're not going to get away with anything because somebody's going to tell on you. There's that many inmates that care about other inmates."

Hardin said he experienced a change of heart about prison when he learned he had a son by a marriage that had been annulled after 30 days.

"My wife was pregnant. I didn't know it," he said. "Five years later I got a letter with a picture in it. When I found out I had a son, I was heading in another direction."

Hardin said correctional officials had been trying to change his attitude, but learning of his son "had a hell of an effect on me" and officials now support his efforts to start a new life.

"They believe in me," Hardin said. "They know my values have changed."

## Gas pump shutdown threatened

**United Press International**  
AUSTIN — A decision by the 3,300 service station owners who belong to the Texas Service Station Association whether to turn off their pumps in a nationwide gas station shutdown this week, rests with the Department of Energy, a spokesman says.

Bill Ligon, managing director of TSSA, said Monday there was "a real good chance" the station owners would vote to close in the planned national shutdown Thursday through Sunday if the DOE fails to increase profit margins from 1974 levels.

But Ligon said the group was trying to avoid such a strike and had petitioned the DOE to increase the profit margins.

"If and when there would be a strike take place, it would be as a last resort," he said.

"We're the only businessmen in Texas whose profits are frozen," Ligon said. "The oil companies couldn't care less if we get our margins increased. They get their money regardless — this won't hurt them."

Ligon said the association had informed its members through a newsletter that a group of gas dealers and TSSA officials went to Washington in April to push for the higher margins and would return if the request was not approved within the month.

Ligon said the DOE last authorized profit margin increases in March 1974, even though oil companies have been allowed to make record profits.

Ligon said consumers might be inconvenienced but not actually suffer by a gas station strike since small grocery stores and independent stations probably would remain open. He also said it was unlikely the TSSA stations would lose money during a shutdown because they can always sell all their product whenever they are open.

## Wiretaps OK'd in narcotics cases

**United Press International**  
AUSTIN — Gov. Bill Clements Tuesday said Senate passage of a bill authorizing law enforcement officials to utilize wiretapping procedures in major narcotics cases was the needed tool to combat the perennial illegal drug problem in Texas.

"This is what the people of Texas want," Clements said shortly after the Senate gave the bill tentative approval with a 20-11 vote.

"This is the best tool we have had (for combating the drug problem) in many, many years."

The Senate last week had refused to consider the bill by Sen. Ed Howard, D-Texas, on a 20-11 vote. It takes two-thirds concurrence to get a bill before the floor for debate.

Tuesday's count was 21-10 with Sen. Bob Vale, D-San Antonio, switching his vote. Vale said he had not been persuaded to change his vote.

"I just prayed over it," he said. Clements said passage of the bill proved he had some support in the Senate.

"I think this has made some believers of some people," the governor said. "I've been telling people we thought the Senate would do some things. I am most pleased and gratified."

Howard said that under provisions of the bill, wiretap orders would have to be obtained from the presiding judge of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals and could be utilized only in major narcotics cases. He said the law enforcement agency requested the wiretap orders must first prove that all other alternatives in obtaining information in the case have been exhausted.

## Lethal toxins found in East Texas lakes

**United Press International**  
CORRIGAN, Texas — Spring rains may have washed enough potentially lethal chemicals into lakes, streams and soil to introduce the toxins into the bloodstreams of East Texas, a congressman has warned.

In making the announcement, Rep. Charles Wilson, D-Texas, said a congressional subcommittee will travel to the east Texas town of Corrigan this month to investigate reports that lethal amounts of cyanide and other toxic chemicals were mixed with oil used to pave roads throughout the area.

In a news release issued this week, Wilson said he made a personal inspection of Reiley's Village subdivision in Corrigan, where large amounts of cyanide and nitrobenzene have been found on roadways.

Wilson said some of the stories told by subdivision residents were "chilling."

"One woman said more than 300 fish died in a pond behind her home when the first rains fell after the oil was poured."

A young man explained that his lungs and nostrils burn from the odor of the road and said he suffers from headaches and itchy eyes, a malady he didn't have before the roads were paved.

Wilson said the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations would hold hearings at Corrigan.

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