

The one-time gateway of hope has become a hotel of detention.

subdued, waiting to be told what to do next. When they did talk, it was in conciliatory, almost supplicating, tones, trying vainly to learn why the visas that had been issued them were no good now.

Buses took the aliens from the ship's pier to the Ellis Island ferry slip on South Street, two and a half miles away. The wayfarers gobbled up the view from the windows as the bus rolled through Manhattan's streets. When they got to the shabby waiting room at Slip 7, the excitement had passed. Here and there a woman wept quietly. A few persons looked out the window at the street which is being torn up for the approaches to the Battery Tunnel, at the drab buildings of the neighborhood, shutting off the glistening towers of the financial district.

A GUARD threw open the ferry gate and the aliens shuffled aboard the spruce green craft that bears the name of the island and flies the pennon of the United States Immigration Service. It was a lackluster legion that pushed toward the front of the boat. The children were cranky, the parents subdued. These people, dressed in their sober best, rumpled now and not at all stylish, were the kind of people you might see in a Brooklyn subway or a Detroit trolley car or a Pittsburgh bus.

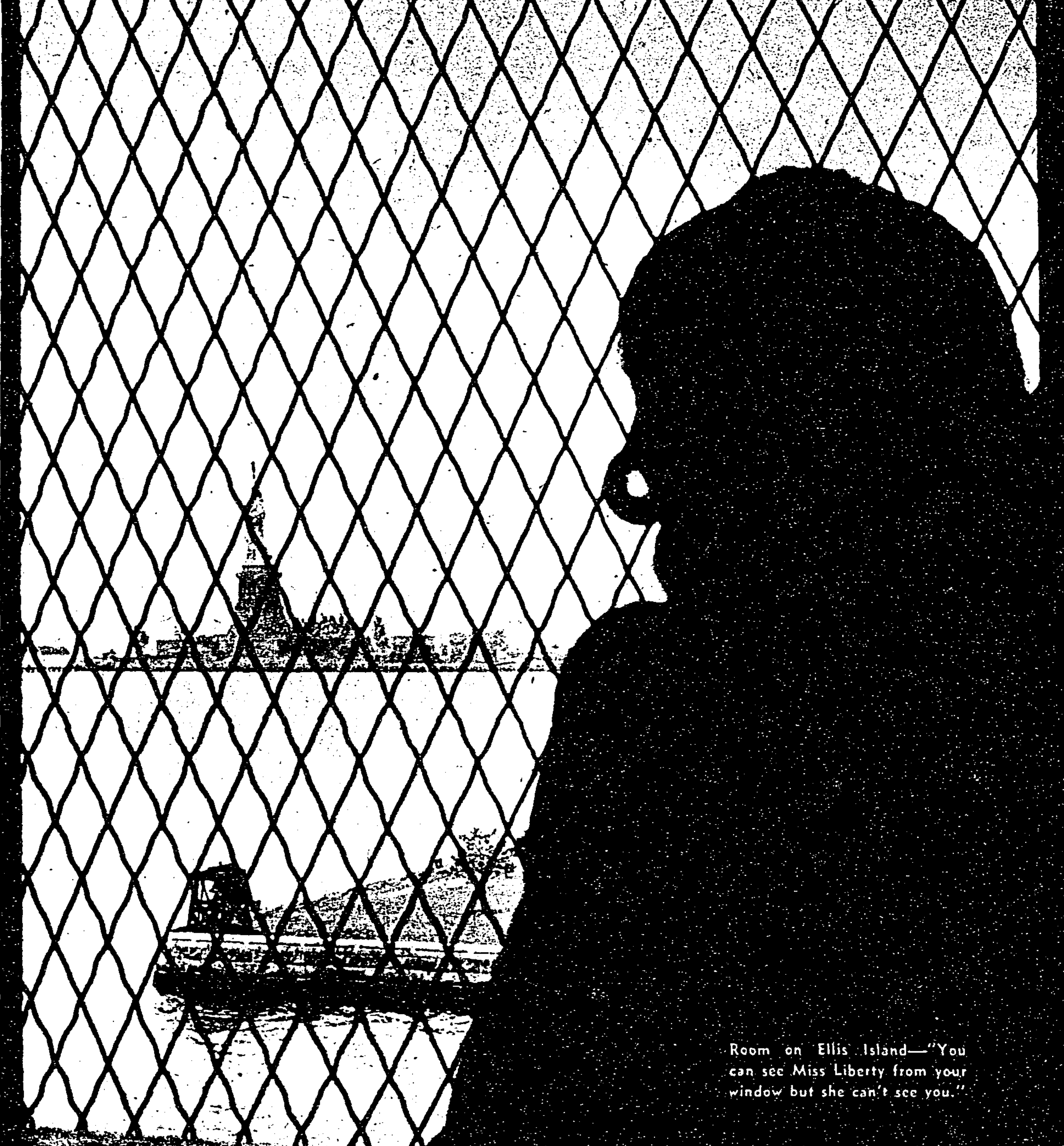
By the time the ferry finished its ten-minute run, dusk was settling over the twenty-seven acres of Ellis Island. When the sun is on it, the island looks attractive enough. The main immigration building is a big red-brick structure cut along the lines of a convention hall. White sandstone trim sets off the brick, and huge vaulted windows dominate the midsection. In the manner of frustrated wedding-cake bakers, the architects littered the exterior with a great accumulation of spires, globes and other gimcracks, but the total effect is not displeasing.

It is only when the ferry draws close that one notices the double fence topped with barbed wire and the guard houses. The newcomers tramped wordlessly down the ferry ramp; every few feet they passed an arrow pointing in the opposite direction and labeled "New York." An elderly commercial artist comforted his sobbing wife, a naturalized American citizen, who refused to let him go alone to the island. A father carried his slumbering 6-year-old son. Another dragged two tiny waifs behind him. A Polish rabbinical student and his pretty wife edged along with the throng.

PASSING through a dimly lit tunnel, the travelers found their progress obstructed every fifty feet by wire partitions. A guard would unlock a door in the partition, then lock it after they passed through.

A few minutes of plodding along spotless white tile floors and high-ceilinged corridors, with more stops for unlocking and locking doors, brought the group to a vast gymnasiumlike room. It runs through two floors of the building, with a balcony overhanging it, and is the chief recreation center for detained immigrants during their waking hours.

Here their names were called and they were (Continued on Page 75)



Room on Ellis Island—"You can see Miss Liberty from your window but she can't see you."

New Role for Ellis Island

IN the early years of this century Ellis Island was the gateway to the United States. Through these gates passed immigrants who could not speak a word of English, yet eventually became leaders in the business, cultural and political life of the nation. Millions of impoverished and persecuted peoples of the earth went through the portals and swelled the legion of American citizens. It was the site where newcomers took their first steps on the soil of the land of opportunity, the center of reunions for those families brought over by the efforts of earlier venturing members, a place of hope.

In the period following World War I its character changed as a result of restrictions on immigration voted by Congress. The island was no longer needed for the examination of the smaller number of immigrants because the authorities were able to look over their papers as the ships came up the harbor. Only a handful of immigrants was taken there, and it acquired a new name as a deportation dock. Even when the

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tide of immigration swelled again with the admission of the displaced persons of World War II, few of them went through the Ellis Island processing. The island's name had become a symbol for being unwanted by America.

In recent weeks an unforeseen effect of the nation's efforts to defend itself against Communist agents has filled the island again with immigrants. Hundreds of aliens were brought there because their applications for entrance to the United States appeared to have been invalidated by the new Internal Security Act. Believing until their arrival that they had passed the last barrier when they obtained visas and boat tickets, they were baffled and bitterly disappointed.

FROM one ship that docked in New York recently, 130 men, women and children were taken to Ellis Island, and their experience was typical of what happened to some immigrants each day until the United States Attorney General called a halt to the procedure. They had gone through anxious hours of questioning as the ship steamed to-

ward its North River pier. In German, Italian and halting English, they assured the immigration inspectors they believed in democracy.

It was true, some of them admitted, that they had attended Fascist schools or belonged to Hitler Youth organizations or been conscripted into the Wehrmacht. But one had to live, one had to eat. None of them had any use for Hitler (dead) or Mussolini (dead). All they wanted was the right to come into the United States and live as Americans live.

Some insisted they never had anything to do with fascism or nazism, even under compulsion. But the authorities shook their heads grimly and said they had "general information" that required the alien's detention. Never any more than that. The closed book, the protection of "confidential sources," data known only to the Department of Justice and its immigration officials.

The immigrants took it stolidly. There were few outbursts, few denunciations of the authorities. These were people used to dealing with totalitarian governments. They did not argue with men in uniform. They sat morose and

A New Role For Ellis Island

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sent down to the cafeteria, where they had soup, bologna, cookies and tea for supper. The cafeteria is big enough to seat 350 persons at a time. It has long green tables and brightly painted red and green chairs. The walls are buff and brown, and there is an air of cleanliness about both the cafeteria and the open kitchen in which the cooking and baking is done.

THE Government spends 59 cents a day on food for each immigrant, but preparing and serving it brings the total bill to \$1.11 a day. The menu is on the starchy side and there are frequent complaints about the food, but it is plentiful and the cooks try hard to prepare it in a way that will meet the diverse tastes of people from a score of countries. In a recent week the main course at dinner on successive days was boiled beef, grilled sausages, stuffed peppers, roast milk-fed veal, meat balls and spaghetti, finnan haddie and curried veal. Soup, vegetables, dessert and the other courses of a standard dinner are always served.

The combined influx of alien passengers, picked up on ships and planes, and alien Communists, rounded up in American cities under the new law, is beginning to strain the facilities of Heartbreak Hotel, as some of its involuntary guests call it. However, the register is still far short of the 1,600 to 1,800 persons it reached during the war years. A few days ago there were 651 persons under detention, of whom 177 were being held for deportation and the rest were passen-

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gers whose right to admittance was still under consideration.

Families among the new arrivals are given rooms of their own. Each room has three or four iron beds, a chair or two and a wooden chest of drawers. Sometimes there is a second chest or a clothes tree. A closet with a toilet completes the equipment. The families must limit themselves to a couple of suitcases of personal belongings, just enough for one change of clothes, but every morning there is a baggage call and they are allowed to go down to the cellar of the building and swap their soiled garments for fresh things from their trunks.

OLD furniture and the bare walls of the forty-seven-year-old rooms give most of the family quarters a stark look, but occasionally a woman will get some lace curtains from her trunk and put them across the wire-screened windows. The authorities do not require any of the immigrants or deportees to make their beds or clean their rooms. Some do, but most don't. When they don't, regular civil service cleaners do the job. Fresh linen is supplied every week, and insect control is remarkably good.

An electric refrigerator is kept in a pantry off the family quarters, and the children have milk and cookies six times a day—three times at meals and three times between meals. Snacks brought by visitors or purchased at the island canteen are also stored in the family refrigerator. It is common to see a chubby youngster with a milk bottle clutched in one hand and a piece of apple pie in the other wandering around the corridor in search of his mother. A relieved explosion in some foreign tongue heralds the reunion a few seconds later.

Single women are installed in rooms with five or six beds. Each bed has a chair beside it. A common wardrobe is available for the few extra clothes the girls may bring to their rooms. Usually the visitor finds a book or two in evidence and a profusion of pink and blue lingerie draped across chairs to dry. In the last few weeks, a space problem has forced the use of a long, open dormitory with fifty beds for women. An adjacent wash-room has three showers and a half-dozen toilet stalls.

MEN are in two big dormitories, except for a few with characteristics that make it advisable to keep them separated from the main group. The rising bell for deportees sounds at 7 A. M. The immigrants have another half-hour to sleep. Breakfast starts at 8 A. M. and keeps going for about an hour.

Then the long, round of boredom sets in. The immigrants assemble in the big day room or recreation center. There are tables for ping-pong,

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billiards, checkers and cards. There is a canteen run for the benefit of the New York State Commission for the Blind, which sells candy, soda, cigarettes, stamps, stationery, even tuna fish, salmon and sardines. When some graduates of a D. P. camp told the concessionaire they longed for butter, instead of the oleomargarine served at the island, the butter was forthcoming.

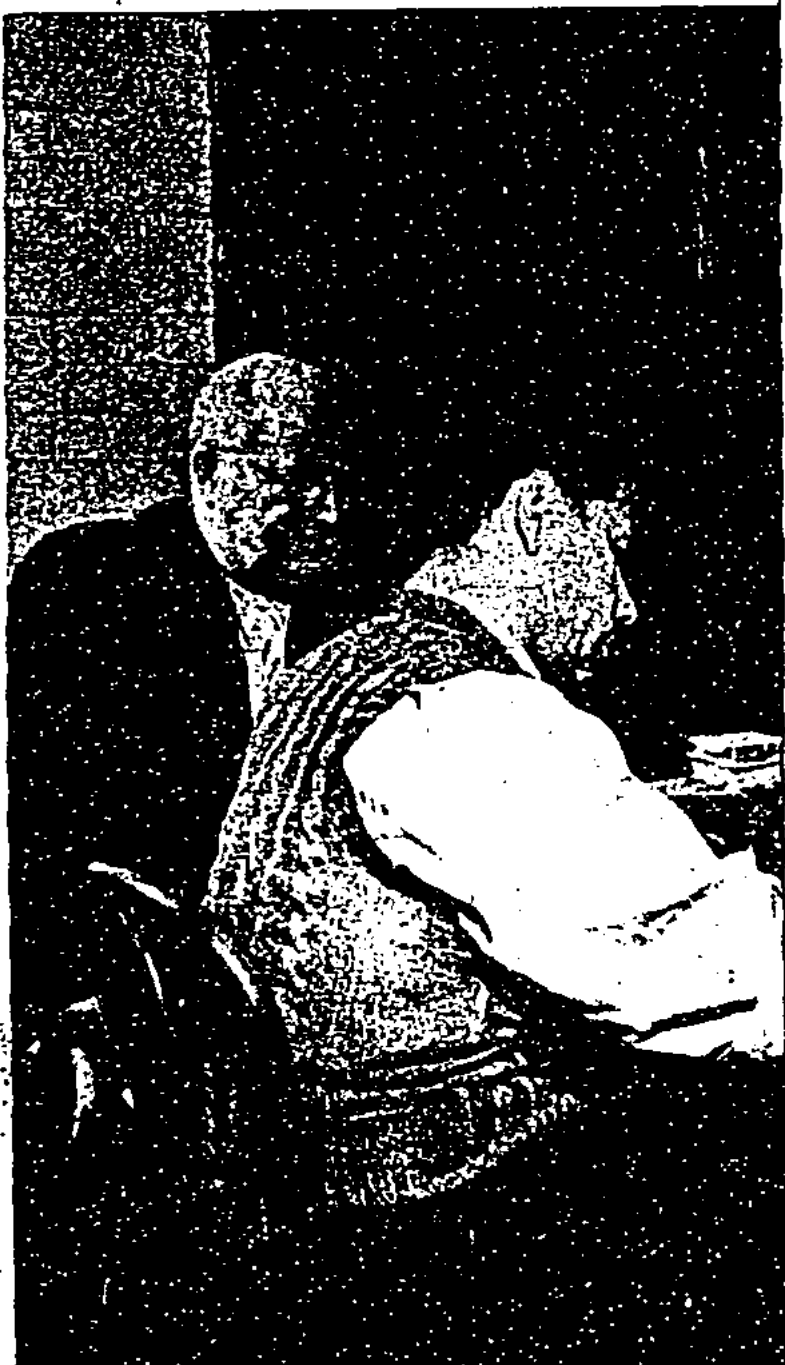
THE doors leading to the yard outside the day room are always open. Sometimes the immigrants organize a game of soccer or volley ball, but usually there is no game in progress. When the weather is good, men and women tramp endlessly up and down the yard with the fixedness of people who don't like to admit they are not going anywhere. A little more than a mile off, through the double wire fence, are the storied skyscrapers of Manhattan, but the newcomers can't walk that far. Even closer, with her back half-turned to the island, is Miss Liberty.

At 9 A. M. and 2 P. M. the mail comes, and that is always a spirited time. If the Post Office Department cut Ellis Island to one delivery a day, half the interest in life would evaporate for many of the island's "citizens." Soon after the mail distribution, library call is sounded, both morning and afternoon. There are 20,000 books in the library, which is operated by the Salvation Army. The big call is for fiction, with books on art running second. Newspapers and magazines in many languages are given out in the day room, and these are snatched up quickly.

Dinner is from 12:30 to 1:30 P. M. and supper from 5 to 6:30. In between, immigrants may have visitors. They write the names of the relatives or friends they wish to have visit them in a pass book in the day room and the passes are issued by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Two visitors may come each day from 2 to 4 P. M. Sunday is the only exception. The conversations take place at little tables in a large room. One guard keeps a general eye on the proceedings, but makes no attempt to listen in on individual conversations. Visitors are permitted to bring anything but narcotic drugs or liquor.

THERE are movies two nights a week in the social hall, and sometimes there is an impromptu show or concert. Opera singers, night club entertainers and musicians of all kinds have performed in the dour hall, which doubles as an interdenominational chapel on Sundays.

Deportees have pretty much the same routine in their day room and exercise yard. They do not have any billiard tables, however. Officials don't think much of putting cues in the hands of men who might decide pool was too tame. Nor are they allowed knives in the



To "Heartbreak Hotel guests"

dining room. There are often murderers, narcotic peddlers and other felons among those being held. The bulk are seamen who jumped ship, stowaways and, particularly in recent days, alien Communists.

The Ellis Island guards carry no guns or other weapons. All they have is a whistle to summon their fellows if an emergency arises. There are 211 security officers in all, but they work on a three-shift basis, so there are never anywhere near that number on duty at one time. They don't have much trouble.

ON rare occasions someone manages to elude the barbed wire and swim to the Jersey shore, but that has not happened in more than two years. The most troublesome guests the island has had in recent years were the European boys our G. I.'s smuggled back in their duffel bags. When they wound up in Ellis Island, these kids came close to putting the place out of commission permanently, what with smashing all the glass in sight and stuffing soda bottles down drain pipes.

The thing all the people at the island want to know most is whether they are going to get into America, and that is usually the thing about which they can learn least. The average stay at the island is eight days, and many are freed after only a few hours. But for some the period of waiting is very long. You see them sitting endlessly on a bench staring off into space. They clutch at the jacket of an official passing through the day room, seeking word about their status. Too often there is none to give.

It is not that the officials in charge are indifferent or unsympathetic. Philip Forman, chief of the island, and George German, the assistant chief, recognize that the very fact of detention is intolerable to a man yearning for freedom.

"We know no one likes the idea of confinement," is the way Mr. German puts it after



chess is a popular pastime.

twenty years as an island official. "We don't blame people for resenting being under restraint. And we certainly don't condemn anyone for trying to get into the United States. We all appreciate it too much here ourselves to have that feeling."

Unarmed guards, freedom of communication, second helpings at mealtime, a school for the children, an excellent hospital for the sick, a constant effort on the part of officials to make themselves approachable, if not always informative—all these are signs that we are not aping Hitler's concentration camp methods. Or Stalin's labor camps either—no one has to work at Ellis Island. Those who want to help in the kitchen may volunteer to occupy their time that way at a nominal wage of 10 cents an hour. There are always more takers than jobs, the chief steward says.

ELLIS ISLAND is probably the most cosmopolitan bit of earth in the world. Its size was stepped up ninefold by the dumping of ballast from ships flying every flag. It is One World in microcosm, a prototype of the United Nations spirit. Yet the institution that occupies this global dot of land is the antithesis of the U. N. idea. It is the embodiment of isolationism and exclusion, the shutting of America away from the world.

From time to time, the immigration authorities propose that the station on Ellis Island be abandoned even as a detention place for undesirables and a new location found somewhere in lower Manhattan. It would be much more economical, much more efficient to operate. But most of all, it would remove the physical symbol of an institution that for many newcomers means the end of hope, not its beginning. The throngs of immigrants caught in the net of the new security law emphasize that the nation needs a new gateway.