

Society Criticized At Prisons Parley

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WILLIAMSBURG, Va., Dec. 8 — "Society has done damn little in ending poverty and illiteracy that provide the seeds of unrest and problems that lead people to prisons," declared the New York corrections commissioner here today.

Russell G. Oswald, one of the many state and federal penologists attending the first national conference on corrections here, made the criticism during the windup session of this three-day conference.

Oswald, known as one of the new wave of reformers in the corrections field, was the chief bargainer for state authorities during the riot at New York's Attica prison last fall.

Prisons are "the only programs receiving federal aid that are lacking federal standards or guidelines," he declared.

Oswald's remarks mirrored the feelings and hopes of many of the officials gathered here. They made clear during the three-day conference that they hope for a new day of awareness by society of the shortcomings of both the prisons and society itself.

Jerris Leonard, head of the Justice Department's Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, signaled federal concern over the lack of uniform standards in the prisons with the announcement of a \$1.5 million grant to the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals. The money will be used to begin a complete survey of the nation's criminal justice system.

But Norman Carlson, director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, told a press conference that the problem of inadequate and brutalizing prison facilities extends far beyond the state level, into each county, town and hamlet in the nation.

Reform and modernization at this local level must be the No. 1 priority for state officials, he said, because it is in these lockups where every prisoner—felon or misdemeanant—is introduced to an "archaic" correctional system.

By way of underscoring the lack of accurate data on such facilities, Carlson said one official's estimate that 70 percent of all prisoners are confined in local jails was "close" but that no one knows for sure because of lack of information.

Compilation of this kind of data to help shape aid and money programs is one of the aims of the National Advisory Commission.

There was no unanimity in the observations and recommendations emanating from the more than 50 workshops but the 350 conventioners agreed that they had begun to overcome one of the major flaws in the system—what Florida's youth services chief O. J. Keller called the "correctional incest" syndrome.

In the past, Keller said, needed improvements have been prevented to a large degree by political maneuvering that hid the system from critical analysis and brought together only isolated, like-minded groups who failed to see the connection between the courts, the police, the psychologists, and the prison officials.

"Those of us in one field talked only to our colleagues," Keller remarked, with many of the delegates concurring.

Not all the delegates were enthusiastic about the sessions.

One delegate remarked—and others echoed his sentiments—that the conference was "cliche-ridden with glittering generalities and tokenism" and a "complete waste of time and money."

A spokesman for the Justice Department, which arranged the conference, said almost \$128,000 in grants had been authorized for the session but the final cost would not be known for months.