

U.S. Courtrooms to Be Smaller, Safer

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Government architects have altered the blueprints for federal courtrooms now under construction, making them smaller and more "secure," in keeping with the expected recommendations of a committee of lawyers and judges named by Chief Justice Warren E. Burger.

The committee, which has inspected courtrooms in Chicago, San Francisco and London in preparing a report for the U.S. Judicial Conference, has been asked to make long-range design suggestions for nationwide implementation.

Sources close to the committee said yesterday that it will probably urge changes which increase the capacity of the federal courts for handling trials, while reducing courtroom space for public spectators.

The new design plans raised the question whether the federal courts will continue to be able to accommodate large numbers of onlookers at controversial trials of special interest to the public.

Committee sources have stressed that security is only a secondary consideration to that of efficient design and operation.

"We paid a great deal of attention to courtroom security," one member said, pointing out that there had been discussion of the physical relationship of courtroom to cellblock and of the extent of public access.

Among the courtrooms visited, he said, was the one in Marin County, Calif., where black militant Angela Davis will be tried on first-degree murder. Authorities have erected a "physical separation" between the trial participants and the public there, he explained.

The committee's report, based on months of study, is

to be drafted at a meeting here Tuesday and presented to the Judicial Conference Oct. 28.

One aim, a committee member said, is to give the General Services Administration (GSA) new "guidelines" for courthouse and courtroom construction.

Under traditional specifications, which set out minimum size and little else, the committee member said, judges have often sat in "big mausoleums" while court calendars began to bulge with backlogs.

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COURTROOM, From A1

The committee is also expected to comment on a touchy issue in judicial politics, whether retired judges are entitled to retain full court facilities while newly appointed ones are short-changed.

Robert L. Kunzig, the GSA administrator, who accompanied the committee members on the inspection tour, said yesterday that his agency has been "cooperating in every way" to facilitate the group's work.

He said new design techniques have already been incorporated in the federal courthouse under construction in Philadelphia.

As the committee is expected to recommend, that courthouse will contain more courtrooms—and smaller ones—than originally planned. Individual courtrooms being added to buildings around the country will be similarly adapted.

Every courthouse facility is expected, however, to keep at least one large ceremonial courtroom of the variety used for swearing in newly natural-

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els, thus limiting their movement. One source said the Judicial Conference committee would like to develop a courtroom design that permits a spectators gallery of flexible size and which can be adjusted according to the needs of a particular trial.

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Chief Justice Burger named the committee last spring. It is officially labelled an ad hoc unit of the Judicial Conference, the organization linking all federal judges.

It includes federal district judges Edward J. Devitt of Minnesota, Lloyd F. MacMahon of New York, A. Sherman Christensen of Utah and Aubrey E. Robinson Jr. of Washington.

Also on the panel are five prominent lawyers, W. Reece Bader of Chicago, William T. Kirby of San Francisco, B. Warren Hart of St. Paul, Robert W. Meserve of Boston (scheduled to be the next president of the American Bar Association) and Edward Bennett Williams of Washington.

The chief justice has frequently expressed his concern about the need to achieve speedier justice in the federal courts.

In several speeches this year, he has also expressed his concern about courtroom security and the alleged misconduct of "a small minority of lawyers" whose vigorous advocacy has become an issue in trials with political overtones.

Burger was reportedly impressed with the courtrooms he and several committee members observed last July during London meetings of the ABA. In those courtrooms, the judge and other trial participants are on different lev-