

CHANGES PLEDGED FOR STATE PRISONS

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Commissioner Plans Leaves

—New Role for Sing Sing

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The state Commissioner of Correctional Services has outlined a series of major innovations for the state's 16 prisons, including furloughs for selected inmates and the establishment of law libraries for "jailhouse lawyers."

In his first comprehensive policy statement since he was appointed Commissioner by Governor Rockefeller on Jan. 1, Russell G. Oswald said that he was also planning to set up community centers in New York City, Buffalo, Albany and in the Hempstead, L.I., area to ease the transition from prison to freedom.

Just as unusual as the basic changes envisioned by Commissioner Oswald was the method he chose to make the plans public.

In a nine-minute tape-recorded message over the public-address system, he outlined his plans Friday night to the 2,254 inmates of the Attica Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison about 40 miles east of Buffalo.

"I am certain you realize that change can't be accomplished the overnight," Mr. Oswald told the inmates, "but I can assure you that changes will be made just as some change has already taken place in the brief period of eight months" since he took office.

Two of the most noticeable changes made by Mr. Oswald—changes long sought by prisoners—were the liberalized access by newsmen to prisons and prisoners and the end of censorship of letters to prisoners from their lawyers and public officials.

New correction officers are to receive 120 days of training instead of the present one- to three-week orientation courses. The Department of Correctional Services employs 7,300 people, about half of whom perform guard duties.

Federal Grant Helps

In addition to a current operating budget of \$91-million, the department began receiving last week the first installment of \$3-million in Federal money. The grant is the first ever allocated to the state's prison system by the Federal Government. The grant is from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, established in 1968.

Federal funds will be used to convert Sing Sing prison in Ossining to a diagnostic and classification center from its present role as a maximum security prison.

Under Commissioner Oswald's new program, private individuals and community workers will be encouraged to tour prison facilities, make recommendations and help released inmates in finding jobs. Also, evening vocational and academic programs will be started at several institutions.

Last month, Mr. Oswald promised to resign if he "failed to move at least 30 per cent of these people [inmates] out of these people [inmates] out of maximum-security facilities" where they are afforded little chance for training and rehabilitation.

In making the pledge, Mr. Oswald noted that all of the state's 16 prisons are considered maximum-security institutions, with the inmates being convicted felons. The only minimum-security facilities the state has are four forestry camps for youthful offenders and the Wallkill Correctional facility, a medium-security detention center.

With a prison capacity of 21,000, the 16 prison now have a population of 12,800 according to G. T. Houlihan, the department's director of public relations, and of these, 2,800 are from city jails, most of them having been sent upstate to relieve overcrowding of the jails here after rioting last year.