

A State of Siege In Riot-Torn Prison



AP Wirephoto

Prisoners raised fists during a negotiation session

N.Y. Cons List New Demands

Associated Press

Attica, N.Y.

Rioting inmates at Attica State Prison remained in control of one cellblock last night in an abortive attempt to expand their territory.

Negotiators summoned by the 500 "hard-core" inmates who spurred the takeover Thursday were briefed by prison officials at midnight.

The negotiators also met with the convicts in an attempt to agree upon demands that could be met.

The rebel inmates demanded total amnesty, freedom and guaranteed transportation to political asylum in a "nonimperialistic country."

Authorities reported 30 to 32 hostages, most of them guards, in good condition.

Among the negotiators were William Kunstler, defense attorney for the Chicago 7; Tom Wicker, associate editor of The New York Times; and Rick Roth, a reporter for the Buffalo Courier-Express.

PRISONERS

Talks between the prisoners and State Corrections Commissioner Russell G. Oswald ceased shortly before 1 p.m. yesterday.

Guards used tear gas to quell an abortive attempt by the inmates to extend their control from one cellblock bastion to an adjoining one.

Hundreds of state troopers, sheriff's deputies and guards, riot guns at the ready, patrolled outside the walls and through secured areas inside.

Helicopters clattered overhead. Fire engines stood by, along with ambulances.

Authorities reported a shortage of drinking water within the prison and very widespread destruction with almost every window shattered in cell blocks. Burned bedding littered hallways

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and barricades of furniture had been set up.

The problem is the inaccessibility of the hostages. They are being held in one of four courtyards deep inside the walls, alongside cell block D which the rioters hold. To reach the men, state police and guards would have to move down a long tunnel, cross prisoner-controlled catwalks and break down the barricades.

The rioters also hold a key watchtower nicknamed Times Square at the crossing of four walls and overlooking the yard containing the hostages.

The hostages are blindfolded and huddled in a circle for most of the time. A local physician who visited them early yesterday said he saw lacerations, muscle strains and a few small fractures among those being held captive and some of the rebelling inmates — but no serious injuries.

In presenting demands to Oswald, a black convict read a statement terming the riot the result of "the most unmitigated oppression wrought by the racist administration network of this prison."

The rioters also demanded several people he brought to Attica to inspect prison conditions. They included Huey P. Newton, of the Black Panthers; Federal Judge Constance B. Motley, a black New York City jurist, and representatives of the Black Muslims and the Puerto Rican Young Lords.

OAKLAND

(In Oakland, Black Panther Chairman Bobby Seale said the Panthers were having a meeting of their central committee to determine if Newton or some other Panther representative would go from Oakland to New York.

(Seale said a Panther leader would definitely respond in person to the inmate's request, and that Panthers would demand of officials that there be absolutely no reprisals against the convicts, including additional criminal charges.)

Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller dispatched Representative Herman Badillo, (Dem.-N.Y.) to talk to the prisoners. He is the first native Puerto Rican elected to Congress.

Badillo later was joined at the prison by State Senator Robert Garcia; Publisher Clarence Jones of New York City's Amsterdam News; Alfredo Mathew, a community school district superintendent in New York; and Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, a Baptist Pastor and the governor's special assistant for urban affairs.

Oswald said the prisoners had expressed confidence in the five men, who will be called upon once order is restored to see that the rioters are treated fairly.

The immediate cause of the riot — the worst in this institution's 40-year history — remained uncertain. Some officers speculated the discontent might have been fanned after an inmate was locked up Wednesday night after hurling a piece of glass at a guard.

The deeper causes of tension lay rooted in more complex circumstances. Corrections Department officers, in quiet conversations, said there was the changing nature of prison populations in general. For the first time, blacks and Puerto Ricans are in the majority at Attica. All the prison guards here are white.

Many of the rural-oriented guards admit they fear a new militancy among some of the minority inmates — who are from big cities. The guards, officials admit quietly, at times have trouble distinguishing rhetoric from deeper threats. Also, meaningful rehabilitation programs are very scarce at the institution officials admit.

One week ago, Oswald visited the prison to discuss grievances and planned new programs. But the tour was cut short because of family illness, and he didn't have a chance to meet with the inmates.