

THE STATES-ITEM

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The States-Item prints the news impartially. It supports what it believes to be right. It opposes what it believes to be wrong, without regard to party politics.

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The Attica Assault

Based on the title and content of its lead editorial yesterday, The Times-Picayune accepts as inevitable the killing of 41 hostages and inmates at Attica Prison. In an editorial bearing the head "Attica Decision Had to Be Made," The Times-Picayune, showing scant concern for those who died in the assault, declared: "New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller had no choice but to stand firm against unreasonable demands . . . The revolt had to be put down."

No alternative?

We ask: Does The Times-Picayune really believe there was no alternative to the massacre of 41 people?

" . . . a capitulating attitude toward extremists," The Times-Picayune editorial concludes, "would only spread the permissive virus and lead to a greater contagion of prison revolts."

Again we ask: Does The Times-Picayune believe that anything less than a full-scale assault would have amounted to capitulation to the forces of extremism?

It is our belief, based on purely pragmatic considerations, that the precipitous use of force in this case may well have achieved a result opposite that desired by The Times-Picayune, that is, strengthened the hand of the extremists by winning them the sympathy of people who up until that time did not care.

Significant deterrent?

We question whether it was necessary to kill 41 people to accomplish the objective which both we and The Times-Picayune desire. Evidence suggests that killing is not a significant deterrent, especially when many of those killed are innocent people.

The wives and families of the hostages killed at Attica likewise are questioning the wisdom of the assault. They have accused New York authorities of recklessly disregarding the lives of their loved ones by ordering the assault, before exhausting all other remedies.

In an effort to drum up public support for the assault, New York authorities distorted the facts and lied outright. They said that inmates had slit the throats of hostages and in some cases emasculated

ed them. A report by Dr. John F. Edland, the medical examiner who performed autopsies on eight of the nine deceased hostages, cut the ground right out from under that contention. Dr. Edland concluded that "all died of gunshot wounds." Said Dr. Edland: "There were no throats cut, nor was there any kind of mutilation."

This, of course, means that contrary to early reports, the rebellious inmates did not kill the hostages, since prison authorities concede they did not have guns.

Massive coverup?

Lending credence to the view that despite calls for a thorough investigation New York authorities actually are attempting a massive coverup is the refusal by prison officials to allow a team of doctors, nurses and lawyers to enter the prison on grounds that a "state of emergency" still exists.

Past experience indicates to us that because of the highly emotional nature of the incident at Attica, this editorial will be misinterpreted by many who read it. As a consequence, we would like to make the following point clear:

We do not suggest that those who transgress the law be exonerated. Those who break the law must be prepared to accept what follows. The fact that an individual breaks a law in what he considers to be the pursuit of worthy objectives does not absolve him from punishment.

What we are saying is this:

Patience is a virtue and talking is better than killing. Killing is an admission of failure. It is what society does when it doesn't know what else to do. It seldom accomplishes anything.

We find ourselves in agreement with New York Congressman Herman Badillo, a member of the team which tried to mediate the prison dispute.

"There's always time to die," he said. "I don't know what the rush was."

The best way?

And so we ask again: Was force the best way to handle the rebellion at Attica?

The Times-Picayune, without equivocation, says it was the only way. We believe that time will show it was a mistake.