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Dunne Denied Permission To Talk to Attica Inmates

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ATTICA, N. Y., Sept. 28— State Senator John R. Dunne, chairman of the Senate Committee on Crime and Correction, walked through the cellblocks of the Attica Correctional Facility today, but State Correction Commissioner Russell G. Oswald barred him from talking with any inmate. As the Senator toured A and C cellblocks, he passed his hand over his mouth as inmates presse dhim with questions through the bars. A correctional guard lieutenant with him announced repeatedly that "Senator Dunne is not speaking to anyone."

Last week, on his tour of the state's major penal institutions, he was refused entry to Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora and denied access to transferees from Attica at Great Meadow Correctional Facility in Comstock.

Today he arrived at Attica shortly after noon and was taken to Superintendent Vincent R. Mancusi's office in the prison's administration building. There, he said Mr. Mancusi and Deputy Attorney General Robert E. Fischer sat behind Mr. Mancusi's desk. "When I walked in they said Mr. Oswald had called looking for me, and had asked that I call back," Senator Dunne asserted.

Interviews Barred

He said he had called Mr. Oswald in Albany and was told "two things — that under no circumstances would any other person be admitted inside Attica and that there was a complete restriction against my speaking to any prisoners in the facility."

"I told him I thought I should be allowed to talk and reminded him of my statutory authority to enter the prisons," Senator Dunne said. "He told me I could go in all right but I couldn't talk to anyone."

Senator Dunne said the restriction "relates to just how effective this committee can be and also limits the scope of our inquiry."

"We have a clear responsibility to make recommendations and to initiate action," he said. "It's basic that if our committee is not convinced that other investigations taken in the direction of fact-finding are not in earnest then we'll have to redouble our efforts."

He was obliquely critical of Chief Judge Stanley H. Fuld of the State Court of Appeals who has been named with four other justices to select a panel of citizens to look into the Attica uprising. Senator Dunne said "nobody has been selected or appointed yet to the panel." There has been continued pressure from Albany for Senator Dunne to delay his committee's investigation in deference to the Fuld commission, he indicated.

'Eerie and Quiet'

After his tour, Senator Dunne gave reporters a detailed description of what the interior of the facility looked like 19 days after the rebellion of the inmates here, which has taken 42 lives to date. There were, he said, "few people to talk to."

"It's eerie and a quiet pervades the entire institution," he went on. "There is a thorough program under way to clear away the debris, but that's all that's going on. There is substantial evidence of the five-day incident."

He said the paint shop, the metal shop, the commissary and the laundry had been completely destroyed and "it will be months before they're usable." Laundry is being done outside of the prison, he said.

Senator Dunne said that the prison was clean, that all of the inmates he saw wore clean uniforms and had clean linens on their beds.

"They're being encouraged to write to their families," he added, "but I didn't see anybody writing. I can't say I even saw any pencils."

He said great masses of personal effects were being swept up into piles in the cellblocks and would be sifted for valuables and personal effects later. Inmates are being taken into the yard in groups of about 100 at a time—the prison population has been reduced from its high of 2,250 during the rebellion to 1,235—and are being fed in small groups both in the prison messhall and in their cells, Senator Dunne said. Exercise is limited to 20 minutes a day, he continued.

"You have the feeling when you walk through that you're in a graveyard," he said. "There's just basic maintenance with all being done in deliberate fashion. There is no give-and-take between inmates and guards. There's really a pall in there."

He said he saw "a number of inmates whom they identified as leaders." Many prisoners "recognized me and expressed interest in talking to me," he said. "I could only shake my head and pass my hand over my mouth." He said the inmates seeing this shouted such things as "they won't even let Senator Dunne talk to us."

"There was clearly a resentment there," he asserted.

He said that when he went into Mr. Mancusi's office the superintendent "told me he didn't want to let me even go into the inmates' cellblocks much less talk."

"I told him I had a moral obligation to at least listen,"

he went on. "He was reluctant to even approve that. I just walke dout and left that unresolved." He said guards in the institution say freely and openly that they believe Mr. Mancusi was "too soft" in dealings with inmates. "They want to go back to the old ways," Senator Dunne said.

The Garden City Republican said that he had got an insight into several phases of the revolt.

"They set fire to the metal shop," he asserted. "A sprinkler system was activated. It was interpreted, I understand, as some kind of gas and the inmates ran out. The authorities were able to regain possession. If they extended their hold to this shop they probably have been able to make more weapons, I was told."

The Senator left tonight for New York. He expects to report the findings of his tour of nine prisons to his full committee on Friday. Before he left he said his visit to Attica had been "a frustrating experience."