

A Decline in Discipline Cited at Attica

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ATTICA, N. Y., — The hard discipline that once ruled the lives of prisoners inside the walls of the Attica Correctional Facility has been eased markedly in recent years by correction officials, according to a prison guard who is Mayor of the Village of Attica.

In an interview last week, Mr. Miller echoed the sentiments of a number of other guards that the prison was becoming "lax" and that such an atmosphere, combined with the rising militancy of a small group of inmates, endangered the officers who were charged with keeping order in the huge prison.

Ten guards and civilian employees were killed during a four-day inmate uprising, nine of them shot to death when police stormed the prison. One had died earlier of head injuries allegedly inflicted by inmates. Thirty-two prisoners were also killed, 29 by police bullets and three by stab wounds. Inmates had rebelled to protest what they called racism and brutality in the prison.

Earlier Attitude Recalled

"We never considered our jobs real dangerous," said Mayor Miller, who has been a guard for 10 years. "There were very few assaults on officers. But there have been more in the last year and a half than in all my years before. It just didn't used to happen."

Years ago, when two inmates were fighting, a guard was never afraid of breaking up the fight, Mr. Miller said, even if 40 other prisoners were standing there. He never expected to be attacked.

"An officer could only write a report," the Mayor explained. "A sergeant would investigate and it would go to disciplinary court. For a severe fight, they would get 10 days locked in their cells.

"Today, they would get just a verbal reprimand, or maybe lose one commissionary buy. It makes it more difficult for an officer to do his job. If you write him up, the next day he's out laughing at you."

Mayor Miller spoke without a trace of anger in his voice, just a quiet sorrow that seemed to reflect the somber mood of the town since the bloodshed.

Says Stick Was Not Used

He answered questions about reports by civil-rights lawyers that inmates had complained of being beaten by guards and state troopers after the police assault Sept. 13.

"I've carried a stick in that institution for 10 years," he said, "and in Green Haven before, and I have never used it except to rap on a wall. If you have 2,000 inmates going past you and you're standing there alone, believe me, you don't beat them."

The prison guards do not carry guns.

If any change in the relationship between guards and inmates has taken place in recent years, Mr. Miller said, it has been toward less formality, less distance between them.

"Young officers now are more willing to mix with the population," he observed. "It used to be against the rules for us to carry on a conversation with an inmate except to give an order."

Mr. Miller estimated that 150 to 200 prisoners were directly involved in the uprising that

broke out Sept. 9. "Most inmates go in, do their time and leave," he said. "A lot of inmates are scared because they don't want it to happen again."

Increase in Tensions

The tensions in the prison have made life more unpleasant for inmates as well as guards, Mr. Miller said. "It's harder for inmates to do their bit today," he remarked. "Older inmates say they would rather have done their time 15 years ago than today."

Mr. Miller also expressed the view that the uprising was well planned. "Inmates told me they were running right on a watch. A fellow would say, 'You have a minute and a half.'"

He said that some of the leaders of the uprising had been transferred to Attica from the Tombs in Manhattan after they had led the prisoner rebellion there a year ago.

And others, he said, had come from the state prison in Auburn, where inmates had rioted. "They practiced in Auburn and did the real thing in Attica," Mr. Miller said.

The Mayor has received scores of letters from throughout the country, some crank letters and some sympathetic. But he likes to point out that the prison is just outside the village line, although it is within the Town of Attica.

Despite the large number of Attica residents who work at the prison, or whose relatives and friends work there, "I don't think we think of ourselves as a prison town," he said. "I never did."

Some may not work there much longer, he speculated. A number of guards are planning to retire or resign, Mr. Miller said.