

State Panel on Attica Urges Locally Based Prisons

The special state committee appointed after the Attica prison riot to recommend penal reform called yesterday for an end to the present prison system, with its "central focus" on "bastille-like" institutions better suited to the 19th century, and for the creation of a one with community-based facilities and "a whole constellation of degrees of security."

The committee said it was considering 41 specific proposals to help bring about the new system—as well as one general proposal that would, among other things, divest the State Commissioner of Correc-

tions of his policy-making power.

The 15-member committee, appointed by Governor Rockefeller and legislative leaders of both parties, and composed of lawyers, community leaders and eight state legislators, will hold public hearings on its proposals in February.

"We are profoundly troubled that the present correctional system reflects an anachronistic, bastille-like philosophy," Hugh R. Jones, the chairman of the committee, said in releasing its preliminary report. "We doubt that there is any real hope that it can accom-

plish society's objectives today," he said.

Mr. Jones, who is also president of the State Bar Association and who made his announcement on the opening day of the association's convention here, continued:

"Needed protection is not now furnished the public; the system is not fair or even safe for its personnel; and it is not consistent with the technology, the administrative knowledge, or the standards of inmate treatment of the last half of the 20th century."

The 22-page report was for the most part couched in what Mr. Jones later described as rather "gentle" language, lest it offend those whose support would be needed to achieve reform. It reflected, he said, the interests of three distinct groups—the public, the correctional staff and the inmates.

No Analysis Attempted

Nor did it attempt to analyze the circumstances of the revolt at the Attica Correctional Facility, where 43 hostages and inmates were killed in the five-day uprising there in September. The committee had been created as a result of Attica, but other committees, as Mr. Jones pointed out, have been commissioned to investigate the facts surrounding that.

What the report did do, however, was to describe the present system, with its "massive," often remotely placed prisons, as antithetical to such purported goals of a correction system as deterrence, rehabilitation and protection of society.

Proposals Weighed

"This state of affairs," the report said, "stems primarily from two interrelated factors: (1) apathy and misunderstanding of the public as well as on the part of those responsible for designing and using the correctional system, reflected in many ways including meager budgetary appropriations; and (2) the failure of the state to reconceptualize the system along modern lines."

The committee then presented a series of proposals for making the correction system

one that would place an inmate in the type of institution or program most appropriate to his and society's needs.

The panel noted that it was merely considering these ideas and that it would not recommend them officially until public comment had been heard.

It proposed that the chairman of the State Commission of Correction no longer be the state's Correction Commissioner. The commission alone would thus have the job of policymaking for the state's correction system, while the Correction Commissioners role would be limited day-to-day administration.

A spokesman for the Correction Commissioner, Russell G. Oswald, said that Mr. Oswald would have to read the report in full before discussing it.

Plans for Bill of Rights

Under the same proposal, the commission would create and run an "inspector general service" to monitor penal institutions.

In addition, it would determine the "substantive and procedural rights and responsibilities of inmates." This provision, Mr. Jones said later, was designed to provide for a so-called "prisoner's bill of rights" — something many penal experts have been recommending lately — without using the words "bill of rights" and the "emotional overtones" they carry.

The specific proposals in the report ranged from the establishment of residential treatment facilities in or near major urban areas and of medium- and minimum-security facilities within existent institutions to such proposals as better food, improved visiting privileges, less censorship, and "a crash program to deal with illiteracy."

Mr. Jones, asked how much the proposals would cost, said that the committee would not "price them" until after it had heard public comment.

The hearings are scheduled for Feb. 8 in Albany, Feb. 10 in Buffalo and Feb. 11 in New York. The committee expects to have its final report in March, in time to submit proposals, if need be, to the Legislature.

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