

Attica Prisoners Have Gained Most Points Made in Rebellion

NYTimes By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY SEP 11 1972

In the tortured days before the final bloodshed at the State Correctional Facility at Attica a year ago, the rebel inmates made many demands for changes in the conditions of their confinement. It is a measure of the fever for reform in the state prison system that all but four of those demands have been at least partially met in the ensuing 12 months.

For the embattled Department of Correctional Services

and the 12,477 state inmates, the year since the rebellion has been dominated by slow, painful steps toward reform. There are those who say that progress has been glacial, or illusory, but there are few who would say that the 21 state correctional facilities and camps are the same places they were that grim September a year ago.

Commissioner of Correction Russell G. Oswald and his associates acknowledge that many reforms have been directed at surface things—clothing, food, visiting privileges, mail censorship, the number of showers a week permitted an

Continued on Page 29, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

inmate. Critics say that too much of the department's \$25-million budget increase has gone for new gun towers, gas masks and isolation cells.

However, Mr. Oswald also says that real beginnings have been made in improving basic programs—retraining of correction officers, education and rehabilitation of inmates, easing the transition from prison to freedom, making the parole system more rational and humane.

"The cross that I'm carrying is that they want all that didn't happen in 50 years to take place in one year," Mr. Oswald said in an interview last week. "To get the institutions where I want them, I think we're talking about another three or four years at the pace we're going, with a small budget increase this year."

Mr. Oswald's job has been reform in the shadow of riot since he took office in January, 1971. The aftermath of the revolts in the city prisons and the State Correction Facility at Auburn in the fall of 1970 were his introduction to the job. While the Attica rebellion and its toll of 32 inmates and 11 hostages clearly accelerated reform, many programs had been started earlier in his administration.

The Commissioner has found that accelerated reform has its drawbacks. One is that the commitment to the issue is still a fragile one in the public and legislative mind. Another riot, or worse yet, an escape that resulted in civilian deaths, would endanger everything. "I am without question taking some chances," Mr. Oswald says, "and God knows a couple of bad ones could so us harm"

He has also found that Attica has produced a backlash among some legislators and corrections officials. Rather than talking of reform, they concentrate on better security, or making life for prisoners less comfortable.

For one example, prisons in the last year have started recreation and educational programs in the evenings, when inmates used to be locked in their cells. For sustenance, the administration issued small packages of cookies or candy to participants. "You'd be surprised at how many officials called that mollicoddling," Mr. Oswald recalled.

Rising Expectations Cited

There is also a revolution of rising expectation among inmates; change is immediately followed by demands for more change. "The attitude is 'What's next?'" Mr. Oswald says. "It's like when I give my staff a raise. As soon as they get it, they're thinking about the next one."

Impatience is endemic among the inmates, whose view is that the reforms that have been instituted only show how much remains to be done. Last November, for example, the department got a Federal grant of \$1.9-million for new clothing for inmates.

"The next day, the guys were saying 'Where is it?'" Mr. Oswald says. It was not until last month that distribution of the new uniforms—a 31-piece kit of forest green, permanent-press wear—was begun.

In the recent history of penology, the impetus toward reform has involved a tension between the custodial and rehabilitative views of prisons. Reformers argue that it is irrational to spend millions of dollars and man-hours keeping prisoners and the outside world apart and then one day simply release the inmate into the world from which he had been kept apart.

Since state prison terms have grown shorter and parole made more lenient—the average term of a state inmate now is 22 months — the problem has grown more acute.

Reform in the state prisons in the last year has been directed both at the administration and the inmates. For the staff, the emphasis has been on increased training, hiring from minority groups, and appeal to the administrators from a non-custodial background.

The number of correction officers has been increased from 4,300 to 4,440, but, because of resignations and retirements, about 500 of the officers are new. Including those in training, the department now has

517 black and Spanish-speaking officers; before Attica, there were 256. In addition, 60 teachers have been added to the staff of 345.

New correction officers now get 13 weeks of training, compared with three or four weeks under the old system. Officers already in service are getting 52 additional hours of courses. The emphasis is on courses in human relations and the like, often given by professors or social workers outside the department.

Degrees to Be Required

Since Mr. Oswald took office, all but one of the wardens — now called superintendents — in the 21 state prisons have been changed.

An act of the Legislature this spring made it possible to

appoint superintendents whose background had not necessarily been purely custodial; the system before was one of promotion through the ranks. The department will soon conduct nationwide competitive examinations for superintendents; one requirement is that applicants have college degrees.

A new uniform is also on order for officers—blue blazer and gray slacks. Like the inmates, the officers will have their names over their breast pockets.

The department is currently preparing a master plan for its institutions, contemplating closing some and renovating others; it is to be presented in January. In the meantime, two changes are planned for next month.

The former women's prison at Albion will be reopened as a minimum security facility for men, and the 300 mentally ill patients at the Dannemora state Hospital will be transferred to Matteawan to make room for the Adirondack Treatment and Evaluation Center. The center will concentrate on inmates unable to adjust to prison routine or with histories of violent behavior.

Mr. Oswald says that no new maximum security facility is contemplated. "We have more than enough of those already," he remarked. Earlier this year the administration had planned a "maximum program, maximum security" institution for troublemakers, but abandon the plan following public and legislative protest.

The department got \$26.5-million this year as seed money for a bond program and is authorized to issue bonds up to 13 times the amount of its profits. Among "profits" last year was \$2-million from making license plates. It also receives fees from New York City for taking custody of 1,630 inmates transferred from city prisons. The department's sales corporation, Corcraft, produces a line of office equipment and other items manufactured by inmates.

Amenities Are Expanded

For the inmates, amenities have been expanded in the last year. Hygiene items, such as soap and razor blades, are now distributed free; inmates previously had to purchase

them. Showers are permitted twice instead of once a week.

Inmates can call home once a month, and there is little censorship of mail. Libraries have more books in Spanish and on black history. The list of approved publications has been expanded to include most periodicals, including, for example, the newspaper "Screw."

In visiting rooms, the wire mesh screens separating inmates and visitors have been taken down and hours expanded. Common-law wives have been added to the approved list of visitors.

In six prisons, \$12,000 law libraries have been opened.

Efforts have been made to increase the availability of legal aid, but inmates say it is still far from enough.