

An End to Attica

More than four years after the brutal police action in the retaking of Attica prison at a cost of 43 lives, the former chairman of the state commission that initially investigated the 1971 uprising has urged a "closing out of this unhappy chapter of our history." Without in any way denying the serious wrongs inflicted by the state and its officials on the prison's inmates, Robert B. McKay and the commission's former chief counsel, Arthur L. Liman, concluded that "constitutional rights to a speedy trial cannot be secured nearly five years after the events."

The recommendations, which call for an end to the investigations, dismissal of all pending indictments against correction officers, state troopers or inmates, and the review of all present convictions "for opportunities to exercise mercy" represent the sensible and humane way out of a tangle that now defies unraveling. Efforts at a fair resolution of the violent tragedy were hampered from the outset by Governor Rockefeller's blanket praise of the police action that could never be condoned either on humanistic or tactical grounds. The one-sided state-ordered prosecution that followed obscured many of the facts that a more evenhanded investigation might have brought to light. Time has done the rest.

Messrs. McKay and Liman rightly conclude that "there is more profit in working for a better future than in agonizing overlong about past errors." Alfred J. Scotti, who, under a mandate by Governor Carey and Attorney General Lefkowitz, is the latest legal official to sift the evidence, also expressed the desire to "come to a quick conclusion." The best way to accomplish just that is now to close the book on Attica.