

SF Examiner

Q Guards Sue for Safety

San Quentin correctional officers have asked for criminal prosecution of the prison administrators on charges arising from the stabbing death of Officer Leo Davis, 38, in the prison hospital July 21.

Al Thompson, president of the San Quentin chapter of the California Correctional Officers Association, said he has asked Marin County District Attorney Bruce Bales to investigate possible violations of the state labor code.

The prison management, Thompson charged, has failed to provide a "safe place of employment" for the guards. This, he said, helped to make Davis' slaying possible.

Knifed to Death

The guard was knifed to death as he stood, unarmed, outside the hospital cell of inmate Herman Johnson, 25, who had been stabbed two days earlier in the prison yard.

Johnson had testified against the defendants in the trial of the "Soledad 7" for the killing of a guard at Soledad prison.

Two inmates and an outsider have been locked up for investigation of the crime.

Prison officials said at

least three men made their way down a blind corridor to the place where Davis was on guard, and stabbed him in an apparent effort to seize his keys and get to the informer Johnson.

They fled when he fell, bleeding profusely.

Thompson said the day before Davis was slain a correctional officer received a tip from a trusted inmate source, saying that an effort would be made to assassinate the already-wounded prisoner.

His Whistle

The guards also want the state Industrial Relations Department to conduct an investigation into allegedly unsafe conditions in the big penitentiary.

Associate Warden James Park commented, dryly:

"There are damn few safe places in this prison or any other prison."

Warden Louis Nelson and Director of Corrections Raymond Procunier have already agreed on several safety changes at the prison.

For example, a grilled gate will be installed at the head of the blind corridor where the killing took place, and "special custody" inmates such as Johnson will be housed behind it.

The two arranged for improvements in the prison warning system of buzzers, lights and telephones, and began a study of the possibility of increasing the correctional staff.