

Legislature

Agreement on Prisons Probe

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Sacramento

Assembly leaders have agreed informally to a Senate proposal for a joint legislative investigation of the state prison system.

Chairman John L. Burton (Dem-SF) of the Assembly Rules Committee told The Chronicle yesterday that a resolution introduced Tuesday by Senator John A. Nejedly (Rep-Walnut Creek) calling for "an objective, in-depth" probe of prison operations will be "handled expeditiously" when it reaches the lower house.

Burton said Assemblyman Bill Greene (Dem-LA) has agreed to drop a resolution of his, which had been scheduled for hearing in rules committee today, in favor of Nejedly's proposal.

Greene's measure, introduced last April, called for an investigation by the Assembly alone and was aimed primarily at racial strife in state institutions. Burton said Nejedly's plan for a two-house probe is "broader and all-encompassing."

Nejedly, a former Contra Costa county district attorney with a reputation as a tough prosecutor, said his move was "stimulated" by the August 21 "incident" resulting in the death of three

inmates and three guards at San Quentin and a subsequent meeting he held in his Walnut Creek office with a group of prison guards.

"In view of the emotionalism and numerous charges and counter charges surrounding the issue, I believe that such an investigation must be of legislative origin," Nejedly said here yesterday.

"I am not prepared to state at this time that legislative action is needed and I want to make it clear that I am not proposing a reform commission.

'IMPERATIVE'

"However, I believe it is imperative that positive action be initiated to prevent further risks to prisoners and guards alike. Above all, I believe the public and the Legislature must be provided with the whole truth regarding the issue."

The Nejedly resolution, which appears headed for speedy passage by both houses, would create a Joint Legislative Committee on Penal Institutions comprised of five members of each house.

Ordinarily, the author of such a resolution becomes chairman of the joint committee, but Burton said composition of the special panel will be hands of the rules committees of the two houses. Nejedly asked that the committee "study and analyze" prison problems and make any recommendations for needed law changes to the Legislature.