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Urgent Talks Here on U.S. Prison Crisis

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By Tim Findley

Top prison administrators from more than 30 states began meeting here yesterday in an unpublicized session to discuss prison violence and a national trend toward radicalism among convicts.

The two-day meeting due to end today at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel was organized and conducted in a confidential, almost secret, mood to avoid outside pressures on prison administrators, many of them troubled by prospects of rising political protests in and around prisons.

The meeting, being held officially under the aegis of the American Correctional Association, grew out of a similar gathering last August in Miami — a meeting that concluded on the day of the bloody escape attempt at San Quentin and two weeks before the incident at Attica Prison in New York.

ATTENDANCE

Those attending included state directors of corrections as well as top level administrators from numerous local jurisdictions.

Among them were officials from New York and California Director of Corrections Raymond Procunier.

But the prison authorities

See Back Page

From Page 1

were cautious about statements on their discussions.

The president of the Correctional Association, South Carolina Corrections Director William Leeke, said the group was expressing "serious concern" about recent violent outbreaks and were discussing opening "the channel of communications on new pressing problems of the '70s."

FIRST

It marks, Leeke said, "the first time this group of top administrators has gotten together in a purely workshop session." The meeting was also considered unique in that it was understood to have dealt with politically motivated prison disturbances, themselves considered a new phenomenon in American penology.

No advance publicity on the meeting was released, although Procunier said as far as he was concerned there was no intention to "hide" the meeting or conceal its findings.

Leeke said the group discussed "ways to prevent and deal with riots and the need for basic improvement in correctional programs," but he added that "no profound conclusions were reached."

Said the South Carolina prison official, "We talked candidly."

It was understood that no major policy statements would come from the meeting but that officials were exchanging notes and ideas on current prison problems. Similar meetings are likely to be held in the future.

Another prison story on Page 20.