

Prisons Chief Defends State Pass System

By Jack Welter
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SACRAMENTO — State Director of Corrections Raymond Procnier today defended his agency's work-furlough and weekend pass programs for inmates and said he had no plans to resign.

Procnier's comments were in response to criticism yesterday by conservative Sen. H. L. Richardson (R-Arcadia).

Richardson, a former John Birch Society staffer, urged Governor Reagan to fire Procnier because of "obvious mismanagement and rank incompetence." He particularly criticized the work-furlough and pass programs, which the senator contended released dangerous criminals into society.

Procnier, a veteran corrections official, said the programs were successful and that he had no plans to scrap them.

3 Murders

"You never know if it's a good decision until after the fact," he said in response to Richardson's claim that three murders were committed by inmates out on one of the programs.

"I feel badly about the murders," the director said, "but I feel we have a good work-furlough program. I don't lose faith if the parole goes bad."

Asked if he would resign under fire, Procnier smiled

and replied: "Hell no. If the old man asks me to quit, I'll quit. I don't want to work for someone who doesn't want me."

Richardson also labeled Procnier a "liberal" penologist, to which the corrections chief responded by saying "I consider myself a reasonable person . . . right down the middle."

Too Fast

Governor Reagan, meantime, stood by Procnier, saying he regretted that Richardson "has moved so precipitately on this."

"He (Richardson) could have found out that we have been engaged in a study of this entire subject for some time," Reagan told Capitol newsmen.

"California has become a model in correctional systems for the whole nation,"

Reagan said, citing Procnier's implementation of the tremendously successful "family visit plan, state subsidization of local probation, the work furlough programs and high success in rehabilitation."

Others Watch

"Many other states are coming here to look at our system and how we have reduced the number of prisoners," he said.

Recent incidents, he said, had raised concern whether — in the zealotry for reform — "perhaps not enough attention has been paid to whether we are causing or increasing crime on the outside."

On this basis, Reagan said, a thorough study of the entire system is under way by the Governor's and Attorney General's offices, the department and law enforcement.

Asked whether Procnier's future depends on the findings, Reagan replies: "Let's just say the whole system."

Need to Know

Emphasizing that it cannot precipitately be concluded that "someone's at fault here . . . just throw this man out and everything will be all right," Reagan said, "we want to find out if the system is working."

Human Relations Secretary James M. Hall said his agency also is continuing an investigation begun last November into the entire Don Lugo operation.

The facility houses convicts due for parole within six months who leave during the day for jobs in the surrounding area. Hall said assignment of potential parolees to the 90 man unit was halted in mid-January when four inmates became suspects in crimes committed while they were supposed to be working in private employment.

Locked Up

Last Friday, Hall said, the center's remaining 68 inmates were locked up at Chino while 50 officers shook down Don Lugo, finding two handguns and other contraband including several marijuana "reefers" and empty liquor containers.