

Attica Prison Among the State's Newer Facilities

By NICHOLAS GAGE

Less than a week before the riot started at Attica prison, Corrections Commissioner Russell G. Oswald chose the institution as the place to announce a vast program to improve conditions in the state's 16 prisons.

These reforms, he said in a nine-minute tape-recorded message over the prison's public address system on Sept. 3, would include furloughs for selected prisoners, the establishment of law libraries for inmates, and the creation of offices in the state to help ease the transition from prison to freedom.

Even before the announcement, Commissioner Oswald, who took office last Jan. 1, began a number of extensive reforms to improve the lives of prisoners, according to his subordinates.

There of these changes, they said, were liberalized access to

prisoners for newsmen, the elimination of censorship of letters to prisoners from their lawyers, and the removal of screens that separated prisoners from their visitors.

2 Pig arms Closed

"The Commissioner even closed down two big farms feeding prisons because Black Muslim inmates had complained about too much pork in their diets," said Deputy Commissioner William Baker.

One lesson of the Attica revolt, Mr. Baker said, may be that prison riots, like proletarian revolutions, occur in a climate of rising expectations.

John E. Van De Car, another deputy commissioner, said that despite the Attica riot, the State Department of Correctional Services remained committed to the reform program started by Mr. Oswald.

"But we know it's going to be a lot tougher because of the riot," he said. "The public sup-

port we were counting on will be hard to win now."

Corrections officials said they were dismayed that trouble should break out at Attica because the facility had the reputation as one of the better maximum-security prisons in the state.

Cost \$9-Million to Build

The prison was built from 1929 to 1931, which made it newer than four of the five other maximum-security institutions. The one exception is Greenhaven prison, which was built in World War II.

The four older prisons are Auburn, Clinton, Great Meadow and Sing Sing.

Attica Prison, with slightly more than 2,000 cells, was built at a cost of about \$9-million. The cells measured 8½ by 6 feet with a ceiling height of 7 feet 9 inches.

At the time the riot broke out there were 2,243 inmates in the prison. "Practically all of them had individual cells,"

said Mr. Baker. "There was no question of overcrowding."

Attica serves as the receiving center for prisoners from the western part of the state but also takes in men from all over New York, according to corrections officials. About 55 per cent of the inmates are nonwhite, they said.

The prison, on a 15-acre tract, has walls of solid concrete 30 feet thick. "The place breathes security," says a pamphlet about the prison.

Cell Blocks Linked

The four cell units occupy the central portion of the prison grounds. They are set up in a quadrangle enclosing seven and one-half acres. Through the center of this space are four cross-connecting corridors linking the cell blocks.

The arrangement divides the open area into four parts designed to allow segregated group control during exercise periods.