

The Question of Dealing With Rioting Convicts

Washington

Although American prisons have been struck by a growing number of revolts, riots and other disturbances recently, nothing in modern prison history compares with the bloodshed and violence yesterday in New York state's Attica State Prison.

The 37 hostages and inmates killed far outnumbered anything penologists could recall, and the tragedy initiated new concern over how prison riots can be handled, particularly when hostages are involved.

In the most recent other prison outbreak six were two inmate trustees and George Jackson, one of the "Soledad brothers" — at San Quentin prison in California.

Many prison disturbances are settled by negotiations. Even in the cases where shooting incidents break out, the number of persons killed historically has ranged from about two to five, officials said yesterday.

In the federal prison system, the last time heavy force was called upon was in June, 1959, when 106 inmates rioted at a mental hospital in the Springfield, Mo., prison. Tear gas, shotguns, and a bulldozer were used to rout the rebel inmates. Fifty-three persons were injured, but no one was killed.

There is a difference of opinion among experts and government authorities about what should be done when

prisoners take hostages and try to use them as bargaining levers for obtaining changes in prison life.

Prison employees in both the federal and state systems are instructed that, if taken hostage, their own lives may be forfeited if necessary to put down an insurrection.

Several officials, however, believe that negotiating with prisoners holding hostages is futile.

Ohio Governor John J. Gilligan said yesterday, "You've got to move quickly. Parleying doesn't do it. The demands get more and more rigid. There is no way you can parley with people when they're holding hostages . . .

. . . you've got to restore order and negotiate later." Governor Marvin Mandel of Maryland said, "I don't think

you negotiate" when prisoners are holding hostages.

The directors of correctional institutions in Texas and Missouri, George J. Beto and Fred T. Wilkinson, said negotiations should not be held with prisoners holding hostages and that force should be applied quickly.

Federal authorities point to the disruption in their prison at Atlanta in June 1968 as an example of firm, successful and non-violent handling of such cases. Four men held 21 prison employes hostages for 28 hours while they attempted to negotiate a series of grievances, during which time some demands were met. Ultimately, the four men tossed guns and ammunition out a window, released the hostages and surrendered. *Washington Post Service*

See similar story, "California's Ban on Bargaining With Cons," this date, filed San Quentin.