

The Administration and Attica--Two Reactions

Washington

President Nixon refused yesterday to second guess New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller's handling of the Attica prison uprising, but the administration's highest - ranking black official did.

Press secretary Ronald Ziegler told a White House news briefing that Rockefeller "had the responsibility to deal with a very difficult situation. He met that responsibility . . . The President is not going to second - guess him."

At another news briefing, Assistant Secretary of Labor Arthur Fletcher criticized the governor for not going to the prison to talk to the prisoners and discounted Rockefeller's assertion that the revolt was part of a nationwide conspiracy.

MARYLAND

Fletcher, whom the President recently named to the United States delegation to the United Nations, said Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel, a Democrat, had sent word to inmates after a recent uprising at a Maryland prison that they must release their hostages before he would come to the prison to talk to them.

Fletcher said Mandel's "quick action kept the lines from hardening." He added that "it worked and I'm inclined to believe it would have worked in Attica."

The black official disagreed with any assumption that the Attica riot was part of a conspiracy. He said he believed it was caused primarily by treatment of the prisoners and conditions in the prison itself.

WORDS

Fletcher noted reports that guards' nightsticks are called "nigger sticks" in the Attica community and that the word "nigger" is synonymous with "prisoner." About 70 per cent of the Attica prison's inmates are black.

At a later briefing, deputy White House press secretary Gerald Warren, asked if Fletcher was speaking for the administration, replied: "Mr. Fletcher was speaking for Mr. Fletcher. He is free to express his own views and does."

Fletcher's meeting with newsmen had been arranged by White House officials to discuss other subjects.

TALK

Ziegler revealed that the President and Rockefeller had talked by telephone again Tuesday but said he did not know who initiated

the call. The President called the governor Monday evening to express support for Rockefeller's decision to use force to break the prisoner revolt.

In other Washington reaction:

• House Crime Committee Chairman Claude Pepper (Dem-Fla.) said a four-man subcommittee of his group will meet soon with Rockefeller and then tour the Attica facilities. The congressman quoted the governor as say-

ing that reform of the prison system is long overdue.

• The 13 Negro members of the House called for a congressional investigation of the Attica riot and also urged that a federal grand jury "take appropriate action." The group called attention to charges that injured prisoners were not being provided adequate medical treatment and urged Rockefeller to prevent reprisals against prisoners by prison officials.

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