

Attica Reaction Widens; Prison Reform Proposed

By JOHN DARTON

Reaction from public officials and private citizens to the violent events at Attica took on a new dimension yesterday, broadening into general criticisms of conditions in penal institutions throughout the country.

In statements issued by Congressmen, mayors, governors and correctional commissioners of other states—statements in which the words “dehumanizing” and “deplorable” occurred regularly—the emphasis was on the causes behind the uprising and the need for prison reform.

Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson of Newark termed the suppression of the uprising “one of the most callous and blatantly repressive acts ever carried out by a supposedly civilized society on its own people.”

The demands of the inmates, Mr. Gibson said, were “basically” reasonable and human and their takeover of the prison cellblocks stemmed not only from “frustration,” but also from a new “political awareness.” The Mayor commended this awareness because “involvement of people in controlling their future is something to be encouraged.”

The statement continued: “When we look at prison conditions and the brutal use of force at Attica, we see the same face of racism which caused and then put down our country’s disturbances in this country’s ghettos.”

Gov. William T. Cahill of New Jersey, in Puerto Rico for the National Conference of Governors, said the Attica uprising was symptomatic of poor correctional facilities. Jails in his own state, as exemplified by the Trenton State Prison, are overcrowded and offer inadequate rehabilitation programs Mr. Cahill said.

“There’s so many things wrong, I could write a book,” Mr. Cahill added.

Also in Puerto Rico, Gov. Ronald Reagan of California commented that it was an unfortunate fact that prison hostages sometimes were killed in putting down take-overs. But he added, “I don’t think that you can allow prison authorities to be intimidated just because hostages have been seized.” He said that would encourage “revolutionary groups”

inside other prisons.

In an emotionally worded speech to the governors assembled in Puerto Rico, Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Democrat of Maine, said that “the Attica tragedy is more stark proof that something is terribly wrong in America.”

The rebellion demonstrated that “we have reached the point where men would rather die than live another day in America,” claimed the front-runner for the Democratic Presidential nomination. The only solution, he said, in his prepared text, was “a genuine commitment of our vast resources to the human needs of all the people.”

In Washington, three black members of Congress, Shirley Chisholm and Charles Rangel, Democrats of New York, and Ronald Dellums, Democrat of California, said in a joint statement that Attica dramatized the need for prison reform toward a system of rehabilitation.

The three Representatives said the present system, which “dehumanizes people to such an extent that life has no value within the prison,” should “shake the conscience of this nation.”

Senator Edward W. Brooke, Republican of Massachusetts, the only black in the Senate, said the nation’s prisons were “almost universally deplorable.” He warned that if the conditions continued, the threat of death would not suffice to stop other inmates from similar revolts.

“For years these men tried to be heard, but few would listen,” he said.

The president of the American Association of Wardens and Superintendents, Don Erickson, condemned much of the criticism as “coming from naive, self-appointed experts.” He said that investigations into prison revolts should be headed by prison wardens, and added that he had offered the services

of his organization to Governor Rockefeller in this regard.

For Indiana Correction Commissioner Robert Heyne, Attica reinforced an opinion that large, isolated penal institutions should be replaced with community centers and a few maximum security facilities.

For Winston E. Moore, the superintendent of Cook County (Chicago) Jail, who is black, Attica was a result of a system in which the wardens are white and “the percentage of blacks and Spanish-speaking people inside the walls is more than 60 per cent nationally.”

Donald H. Goff, general secretary of the Correctional Association of New York, which by state law visits penal institutions and reports to the Legislature, issued a statement saying the uprising was caused by a “few radical extremists” who could not have gained power had there not been a long history of repression in a dehumanizing system.”

Oswald Is Praised

Mr. Hoff’s statement praised Commissioner of Correction Russell G. Oswald for improvements under his administration, maintained that the prisoners’ demand for amnesty became impossible to grant, and hoped “that the carnage will arouse the public to demand action from the Legislature that will result in more humane treatment for prisoners.”

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People placed responsibility “not only upon the prisoners and law enforcement personnel—the actual killers—but also upon a dehumanizing penal system.”

A statement from the organization asserted that black prisoners served longer terms and received harsher treatment than did whites convicted of the same crimes, “and when their complaints and just demands are ignored, they are driven to desperation.”

Most of the statements were released before news of the medical examiner’s report, which disclosed that most of the hostages died of bullet wounds instead of knife wounds.

The report was called an “amazing development” by Senator Jacob K. Javits, Republican of New York, who withheld further comment.

Carlson Backs Move

By RUDY JOHNSON

Special to the New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14 — Norman A. Carlson, the director of the United States Bureau of Prisons, endorsed today Governor Rockefeller’s stand against granting amnesty to prisoners who rioted at the Attica Correctional Facility.

Mr. Carlson joined a number of officials, including the President and the Republican Senate Leader, Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, expressing support for the Governor’s position.

“I think it was extremely unfortunate,” Mr. Carlson said about the uprising. “I was dismayed like everyone else. But I support Governor Rockefeller on his position on amnesty.”

In a wide-ranging interview about the condition of the nation’s prisons, Mr. Carlson said that although he backed the Governor, “there is no question that the prisons have failed. People have been getting out as hardened, if not more so, than when they went in.”

Public Attitude Cited

He attributed this in part to what he called the public’s long-held attitude toward criminals of “out of sight, out of mind.” But he said that the public had been changing in the last five or 10 years as people became aware of the relationship between a high percentage of repeaters and a generally high crime rate.

“But if the public weren’t becoming more concerned,” he said, “we wouldn’t be seeing an increase in our resources, in staff, and in construction of new institutions.”

Commenting primarily on the Federal penal system, Mr. Carlson, a former Federal parole officer who started as a state correctional officer in Iowa, did not limit his remarks to prisons operated by the United States Government.

He cited the President’s directive two years ago, calling on the Justice Department, under whose authority the Bureau of Prisons falls, to make the 27 Federal penal institutions a model for all others in the nation.

The Bureau of Prisons chief singled out overcrowding as one of the glaring deficiencies in prisons across the country.

Prison Population Grows

Noting that the Federal prison population of 21,000 had grown since 1967 by more than a thousand inmates, Mr. Carlson said there were indications that prisoner ranks would continue to grow. Compounding this problem, he said, was a trend that saw prisoners becoming more “hard-core.”

“The prisons are housing a particularly volatile group of offenders. The courts tend to put the mild offenders on probation,” Mr. Carlson said. “What we end up with are more aggressive, more assaultive people who are not easy to rehabilitate.”

NYT
9-15-71