

Nixon Repeats Support For Governor's Action

NYTimes

By JOHN DARNTON

SEP 17 1971

President Nixon reaffirmed yesterday his support of Governor Rockefeller's handling of the uprising at the Attica Correctional Facility, and said of the rebellion that, "like all tragic events, it has its affirmative aspects."

"When a man is in a hard place and makes a hard decision and steps up to it, I back him up and I don't try to second-guess him," the President said. "The next day, when some of the other returns come in, I still back him."

Mr. Nixon's comments, at a news conference at the White House, were his first public statements since autopsies disclosed on Tuesday that nine hostages held by the prisoners had died of gun wounds, not of slashed throats.

On Monday, the day the upstate prison was retaken from the inmates, Mr. Nixon expressed his support to the Governor over the telephone.

Yesterday the President said: "I knew that he would never have gone this far when he called that morning, when I was in the Cabinet meeting, unless he felt it was the only thing he could possibly do to try to save some of the guards that were hostages."

The President termed the experience "the most painful, excruciating" one that the Governor—"a very good man and a very progressive man—has had in his term of public service."

Prison Reform Aspect

He added that public officials, including Presidents, "cannot give in to demands for ransom." The "affirmative aspects" of the events at Attica, the president said, could be a new push for prison reform.

"I talked to the Attorney General," he said, "and we're working on this project. Perhaps this will give the additional impetus."

Comment on the Attica situation by public officials and private citizens continued yesterday. Some were condemning, some were supportive.

In a letter to the Governor, State Senator John J. Marchi supported Mr. Rockefeller's actions and drew an analogy to the Allied demand for unconditional surrender from the Nazis. "You had no other rational option," he said.

Representative William L. Clay, Missouri Democrat, termed the Governor's actions "callous and irresponsible" and said he should immediately resign and possibly face criminal prosecution.

Herbert G. Klein, the White

House communications director, criticized Senator Edmund S. Muskie for saying on Monday that Attica demonstrates "something is terribly wrong in America."

"There should be more talk about what's right in the country," Mr. Klein asserted.

A member of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee, Tom Soto, who spent four days in the prison during the uprising, asserted at a news conference that the Governor and the state Correction Commissioner, Russell G. Oswald, had never intended to negotiate, "but were merely using the time to prepare for the massacre that took place."

Negotiations Opposed

John J. Gilligan, the Democratic Governor of Ohio, said at the Biltmore Hotel here: "A situation like this must be dealt with very firmly and very quickly. It is not possible to negotiate one's way out of it."

Calls for investigations by special agencies came from numerous organizations, including 13 black members of the House of Representatives, the New York Urban League, the National Legal Aid and Defender Association and the Buffalo Council of Churches.

Many specified that investigators should be armed with subpoena power, include "representatives of the entire community" and inquire deeply into the actions of state officials.

Others criticizing the course taken at Attica included former Senator Charles E. Goodell, the executive council of the United Church of Christ and the New York Committee to Abolish Capital Punishment.

Police Commissioner Patrick V. Murphy, while not commenting directly on the events upstate, said the term "correctional facilities" was a gross misnomer.

"Our so-called correction system is a system that turns inmates into men more inclined to crime—it is a failure," he told a meeting of the Harlem Lawyers Association.

Tensions continued to run high in several upstate prisons. At Auburn five guards have resigned since Tuesday—whether in protest or fear was not known.

At the Elmira facility, 30 students demonstrated outside the prison walls, protesting the Attica assault by state troopers. In Ithaca about 200 blacks marched across the Cornell campus in a mock funeral procession to a memorial service at the African Studies and Research Center. Whites were excluded.