

SEP 18 1971

NYTimes

Attica's Aftermath

The announcement by Governor Rockefeller and Republican and Democratic leaders of the State Legislature that a citizens' committee will be appointed under impartial auspices to investigate "the events leading to, during and following the riot" at Attica offers the prospect of removing much of the fog still surrounding this enormous tragedy. The decision to have the investigating panel appointed by Chief Judge Stanley H. Fuld of the Court of Appeals and the presiding justices of the four departments of the Appellate Division represents a long step toward guaranteeing its independence and impartiality.

In the aftermath of Attica, as conflicting accounts of exactly what happened and why continue to circulate, nothing less than an absolutely thorough and detached inquiry will do. The state's legal officers can be expected to prosecute crimes committed during the five-day rebellion. Other state legislative and Congressional groups are pressing ahead with separate inquiries of their own. But the need for a sweeping review of all aspects of the tragedy can best be met by the non-political, outside panel now in process of selection.

In another positive development, Attica's gates are finally being swung open to lawyers, doctors and citizen-observers charged with protecting the rights of prisoners during this post-rebellion period of continued extreme tension. There have been troubling reports that injured prisoners received less than adequate medical care after the police assault on them. Other accounts tell of prisoners being beaten in the wake of the rioting.

Everything about the episode underscores the need for thoroughgoing prison reforms. The 28 concessions that Governor Rockefeller promised in a vain attempt to end the uprising without bloodshed were all reforms the state should have undertaken on its own initiative long ago. The cause of justice will be advanced if he and other state officials move toward implementing these reforms as soon as possible. An end to the inhumanity that is the enduring reality of existence at Attica and most other prisons is a necessary start toward civilized relations between jailers and the jailed.