

GOVERNOR SCORED BY BLACK LEADERS

Group Assails His Behavior
During Attica Rebellion

By C. GERALD FRASER

A group of prominent black leaders assailed Governor Rockefeller yesterday for his behavior during the Attica prison revolt and suggested "steps toward prison reform" for him to act upon immediately.

"At no time was the way out of the tragedy clear," said a statement signed by 15 persons. "But the failure of the Governor to come to the scene and the wholesale use of firearms to retake the prison make abundantly clear that all efforts were not exhausted to preserve human lives."

Other local developments related to the revolt included a controversy over the use of state armories to display dead inmates' bodies and charges by lawyers that Attica inmates who were transferred to The Clinton Correctional Facility were being subjected to a "reign of terror" at the hands of state policemen and prison guards.

The 15 leaders were represented by six spokesmen at a news conference in the library of the Metropolitan Applied Research Center, at 60 East 80th Street.

Absence Is Attacked

More present were Dr. Kenneth Clark, president of the research center; Roy Wilkins, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Vernon Jordan, executive director-designate of the National Urban League; Mrs. Eleanor Holmes Norton, Commissioner of the city's Commission of Human Rights; Roy Innis, director of the Congress of Racial Equality, and Hayward Burns, executive director of the National Conference of Black Lawyers.

The group appeared to be particularly disturbed by the Governor's absence from Attica during the four-day revolt.

"No public official is so precious that he can withhold himself," Mrs. Norton said.

The group said that it deplored what it viewed as the Governor's failure to take personal command at Attica, President Nixon's "blanket endorsement" of the "wholesale use of indiscriminate force" and the "irresponsibility of the state's initial sensationalistic response following the attack."

The group said it did not want to believe that the way

to prison reform could lie only in prison insurrection.

"Those in power," the group said, "only seem prepared to recognize that problems do exist when confronted with the immediate challenge of prison insurrection."

Mr. Wilkins also decried prison officials who had said that black inmates had been "stirred up by unnamed outsiders." He said this was a cliché from the days of the civil rights movement when the authorities would say that disturbances were caused not by "our local Negroes" but by outsiders.

"We're tired of that red herring," Mr. Wilkins said.

Mr. Innis asserted that the effort to recruit black correction officers was not so strong as the effort to, as he put it, "recruit" black prisoners.

Terror Reign Charged

Chief among the steps for reform that the group proposed was "immediate follow-through on promises for institutional reform made by Commissioner [of Correction Russell G.] Oswald to the Attica inmates." Others called for investigation of prisoner treatment throughout the state, establishment of grievance machinery, informing families of Attica inmates' health, training programs for personnel and expanded visiting opportunities.

At the news conference, Mr. Burns repeated charges made at news conferences earlier yesterday by William M. Kunstler, the lawyer who served on

a citizens' group that tried to negotiate a settlement at Attica. Both said they had received letters from Attica inmates who had been transferred to Clinton, in Danne-mora, N.Y.

Mr. Burns said the inmates had written that they were "physically abused, beaten — in effect a reign of terror exists inside." He said that state policemen trained rifles on prisoners and threatened their lives. Mr. Burns said this situation was "our most immediate concern."

Meanwhile, Warren Gardner, a spokesman for the Governor, said that a Brooklyn armory would not be used to display six bodies, said to be those of Attica inmates, because Brooklyn ministers preferred to use a church.

But the Rev. Sandy Ray, pastor of the Cornerstone Baptist Church, where the funeral will be held today at 1 P.M., according to present plans, said that the armory would have been preferred.

The men for whom the mass funeral in Brooklyn was to take place were Thomas Hicks, who was serving seven years for robbery; John Barnes, serving five years for robbery, and Emanuel Johnson, five to eight years for robbery, all of Brooklyn; Rafael Vasquez of the Bronx, three years for attempted assault, and Harold Thomas.