

Attica Warden Seeks Delay in News Interviews

By JAMES F. CLARITY

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BUFFALO, Oct. 7—The superintendent of the Attica Correctional Facility said today that he did not want to admit newsmen to the prison to interview inmates for at least one more month.

The superintendent, Vincent R. Mancusi, suggested at a hearing in Federal Court that allowing reporters into the prison sooner could result in "inflammatory" stories that might affect the state of "controlled hostility" he said had existed at Attica since the four-day uprising there was crushed Sept. 13.

Five newsmen testified that they had been denied entry to the prison for interviews with inmates since the uprising, which led to the deaths of 32 prisoners and 10 hostages.

Mr. Mancusi and the newsmen testified before Judge John T. Curtin in a suit seeking to force the state to open the prison immediately for interviews. The suit alleges that the constitutional right of freedom of the press is being violated by the exclusion of newsmen.

Judge Curtin reserved decision on the case.

"A month from now," Mr. Mancusi said, "I would hope there would be a more stable atmosphere" at the prison. As for resuming interviews, he said: "It would not be prudent to fix a date less than one month away."

Asked why a month was needed, the superintendent said that extensive repairs of damage done during the rebellion would take months to complete and that many of the guards at Attica were assigned to

maintenance work, rather than custody of the 1,200 inmates. Mr. Mancusi also said he feared that the constitutional rights of prisoners might be damaged by interviews, but he did not say how this might occur.

When Judge Curtin asked how news interviews would "affect the climate" in the prison, Mr. Mancusi replied: "I feel certain types of news stories can have an inflammatory—can have a devastating—effect on the climate, can provide a difference of opinion."

Two Sides of Story

The judge asked Mr. Mancusi if he thought "it would be helpful once in a while if inmates could read interviews" of other inmates and noted that newsmen had testified that this would "give at least two sides" to the prison story.

"An inmate," Mr. Mancusi said, "can hardly say anything, make any remarks, anything favorable, because then he would be a marked man in the facility."

Nat Hentoff, who writes a column *Reviewing the Press* for *The Village Voice*, said that because reporters were not allowed to interview inmates "nothing like any credible story is coming through" on the Attica uprising. Such interviews, he said, are "essential" to the news media.

The other newsmen who testified were Robert Schakne of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Fred Ferretti of *The New York Times*, Clarence Edwards of *The Amsterdam News*, Edward Hershey of *Newsday* and James Willwerth of *Time* magazine.