

Opening Up Attica

Public scrutiny of conditions at Attica has been blocked by the intransigence of public officials, which only compounds the tragedy of the inmate riot in which 43 persons lost their lives.

In the aftermath of the uprising, two separate courts have now confirmed the "barbarous abuse" of prisoners by guards. A single, carefully controlled interview by members of the press with several of the inmates revealed an understandable terror based on fears of reprisal.

The calculated policy of news suppression and public exclusion was underlined when a Congressional inquiry into prison conditions throughout the nation was prevented this week from hearing a representative of the prison population of Attica. It heard, instead, only from state officials, including the prison warden, and from Representative Herman Badillo, who properly decried the failure of the state to implement overdue prison reforms.

It has been almost three months since the rioting erupted at Attica; it has been more than two months since an impartial citizens panel was named to determine the facts surrounding the riot and its suppression by gunfire. This panel has yet to hold its first public hearing. The confusion created by conflicting official versions of the rioting persists. The absence of fact has encouraged the presence of rumor.

The citizens of the state deserve better than this, both those who are behind the bars and those who are not.