

'We Will All Become Prisoners'

By RONALD REAGAN

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—On Aug. 21, six men died in an escape attempt at California's San Quentin Prison. The echo of gunfire had scarcely faded from the scene of the tragedy before the revolutionary propagandists were on the job, attempting to create new folk heroes.

They proclaimed to the world that one of the slain was "a political prisoner" who was to be mourned because he was "a victim of the oppressive, corrupt system."

Four days later demonstrators gathered outside the prison walls to express their outrage at what had happened within and to mourn the dead—one of the dead.

He was not one of the three guards who had been held as hostages and slain, nor was he one of the two inmates who were murdered because they refused to join the escape.

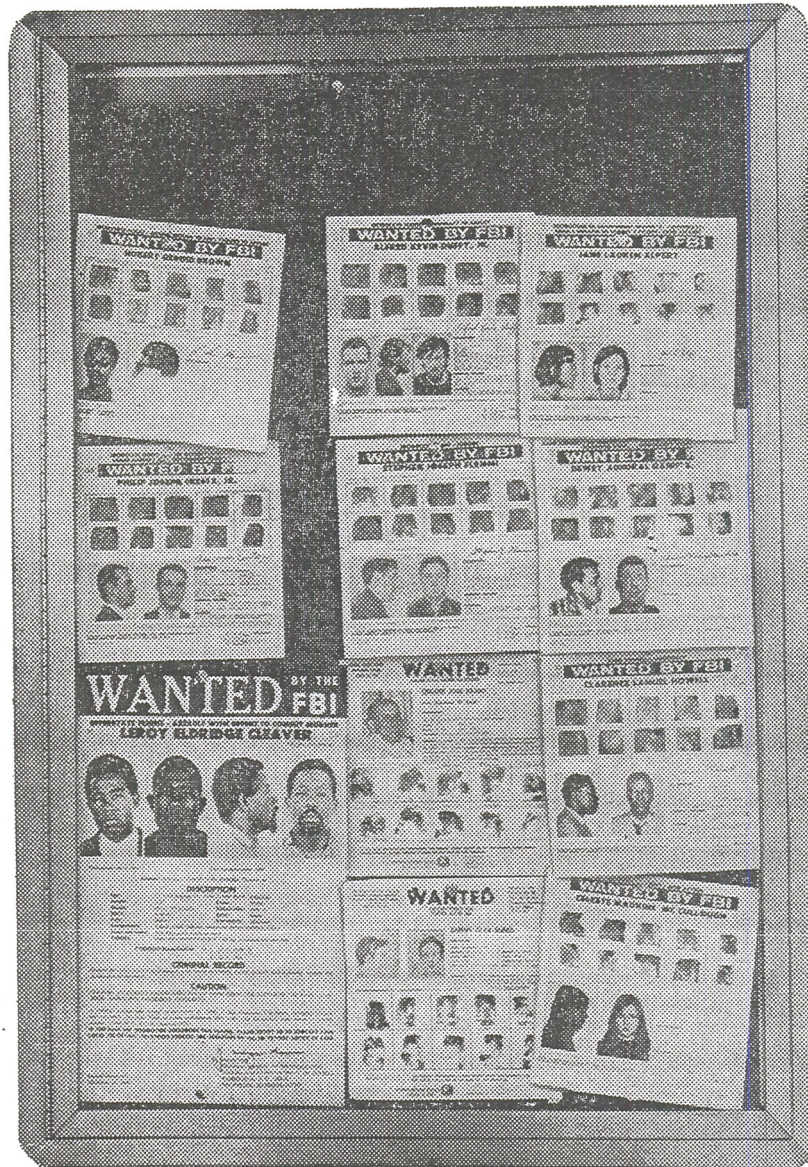
The demonstrators had come to mourn their martyr—the convict whose acts triggered the bloody series of events. And they had come to demand the overthrow of the system that placed him behind bars as a "political prisoner."

These tragic events are not unique to California. We have seen them repeated across the nation. Whenever a peace officer is killed, we never hear any words of remorse from the avowed revolutionaries; few tears are shed for those who would uphold the law.

Instead there are insults, invective and often threats of further violence. If this were confined merely to the small group of avowed fanatics who glorify violence, it would be disturbing enough.

But some prominent figures in the news media and others who should know better joined the chorus of radicals and suggested that the San Quentin tragedy was not the result of a violent few, but could somehow also be blamed on society's imperfections, on sociological problems that afflict our country, on the victims themselves, on anything but criminal action.

By a strange twist of logic, rapists, murderers, robbers and narcotics pushers are being portrayed as folk heroes, who somehow have been incarcerated



Mantegna

"We cannot and will not accept the idea that the law can be broken with impunity by those who shout political slogans."

Who would they have been imprisoned?

for their political beliefs.

We are asked to believe that a man who rapes a girl or slays a grocery clerk in an armed robbery, or beats up an old woman on the street or sells narcotics to children, is more to be pitied than censured.

He must not be held accountable for his crimes, because society is guilty—the girl who was raped, the grocery clerk who was murdered, the old woman who was beaten and the children who are hooked on drugs are the guilty, along with everyone who upholds the laws and believes in our

system of justice, or so we are told.

If this odd philosophy of permissiveness were carried to the obvious extreme, it not only would destroy respect for the law, but also the ability of the society to establish and enforce the civilized code of conduct that forbids a man from killing or harming his neighbor.

It should be equally obvious that those who foster racial tensions and incite class warfare have moved into the prisons and are attempting to exploit inmates because they failed to en-

list the working men and women of the world to their cause and they are failing to enlist our youth.

It is ironic that convicted criminals should be the beneficiaries of revolutionary rhetoric in light of Lenin's opinion that "all weakness, all hesitation and all sentimentality in this field would be a great crime against socialism."

It is especially ironic to those who have studied our state's penal system which has established a pattern for other states and nations to follow.

During the past decade in California we have accomplished a 35 per cent reduction in recidivism; we have the nation's largest program of family visits; we have hundreds of convicts leaving their prisons on three-day passes; we have more than 1,600 prisoners participating in work furloughs and our prison population is less today than it was in 1962.

Our corrections system offers educational programs that range from literacy training to junior-college level subjects; we teach 43 trades; we conduct counseling and therapy programs and we have made a concentrated effort to enlist minority citizens as correctional officers and as counselors in our rehabilitation programs.

Our approach to the problem of men in prison is in sharp contrast to the course suggested by Lenin and his followers. We believe that a man who has strayed but is determined to find his way back into society as a useful, productive citizen is deserving of society's help.

But we cannot and will not accept the idea that the law can be broken with impunity by those who shout political slogans.

There can be no compromise with those who hold so little regard for human life that they would maim or kill unarmed captives.

Every time there is a kidnapping, every time there is a riot and it becomes necessary to use force to restore order, decisions must be made that involve risk to hostages or to the innocent who may be caught in the cross-fire of a confrontation.

In California, we will not compromise with rioting prisoners. Our correction officers know this and the inmates themselves know this.

And I believe that it is an outrageous distortion of values that some now question the necessity and even the morality of those who had the courage to act decisively at Attica.

They do no service to the law-enforcement officers charged with the responsibility of protecting the innocent and they do no service to the prisoners, who wittingly or unwittingly are used by the revolutionary fanatics.

Rhetoric to the contrary, a criminal who holds a knife to the throat of a captive is not an ambassador with diplomatic immunity.

Unless we recognize this, if we accept the falsehood that violence, terror and contempt for the moral values of our society are acceptable methods of seeking the redress of grievances, then we will all become prisoners.

Ronald Reagan is Governor of California.