

Danish Training Chief Examines "The British Way"

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THE AIM OF the Council of Europe Training Seminar at Wakefield was to provide an opportunity for senior administrators and others working in the correctional field in a number of European countries to gain first-hand knowledge of the British penal system, by means of a course of lectures and discussions, interspersed with visits to a representative selection of establishments.

The seminar, however, had a scope beyond that. The participants were all concerned with training of staff in their respective countries, the lectures and visits had, to a great extent, a bearing on training problems and last, but not least, the frame of the seminar was the Staff College, Wakefield and its personnel made contributions to the seminar as lecturers and participants in the discussions.

It was my first meeting with the English prison system and my expectations were great. England has always been ahead in prison reform. John Howard and Lionel Fox are the first and the last names

in a long line of world-known reformers. From the annual reports of the Prison Department I was informed of the heavy problems connected with overcrowding in outmoded buildings and the endeavours to solve them. England has been characterized as a land of contradictions in the prison system, for instance, the rigid discipline of the detention centres compared with the permissive regime of H.M. Prison, Grendon.

It is impossible to give full information about the rich variety of ideas and thoughts in the valuable contributions of the English lecturers. I will confine myself to some remarks on essential points. We spoke frankly during the seminar without any harmful influence on the friendly and co-operative atmosphere and I intend to do the same in these remarks and apologize beforehand if insufficient knowledge of English should make them too unpolished.

Our basic problem in the present state of penology is the confusing lack of a clear philosophy, some

kind of a firm concept of our aims. It was an ever-returning assurance in the lectures that we have changed our basis from that of punishment (retribution, deterrence) to that of rehabilitation. This is only partly true. We risk to betray ourselves and the inmates too if we take this for granted. The reaction of society is based on a disapproval of a forbidden act and the reaction is something unpleasant for the person against whom the reaction is directed. He conceives it as a punishment even if we try to disguise the fact by those equilibrium exercises in terminology in which we have achieved so great a dexterity.

Another source of confusion is the discussion between the psychological-psychiatric orientation and the sociological orientation in criminology. A lecture given by Dr. Howard Jones demonstrated how different are these two approaches. Is the ultimate cause of crime a deviant personality or the fact that some persons do not accept the norms officially approved by the ruling class but norms of another culture? It is evident that the choice of a programme of treatment must be heavily influenced by the answer to this question.

This has in its turn essential bearing on the problem of training the staff of all levels. It is easier to tell *how* we shall teach than *what* we shall teach. The organization of training and the teaching methods *are* important subjects

but not so important as the content of the training.

There are some basic points from which training can start without reaching unsafe ground. One is how to combine safe custody (when needed) with a humane treatment. This is part of the classical prison profession. It is a very complicated task and should not be overlooked in the search for a "scientific" approach. All too often we confound humanization of the punishment with treatment. Treatment itself is an ambiguous term. It can cover every way of handling a prisoner. And it can mean the most ambitious approach to a changing of the personality. We have to keep quite clear in which meaning we use it. Ping-pong is not necessarily a kind of treatment.

Admittedly, there were in the lectures of the seminar more questions than statements of the real content of "treatment". But the lecturers strove hard to point out possible ways to establish a better foundation of our work. "GROUP WORK" and "CASE WORK" were the recurrent watchwords.

CASE WORK is used in variety of activities, ranging from an activity demanding several years' training and hence only mastered by very few people to mere collecting of some initial information on the individual inmate and routine social work done by a prison officer. More in focus is the widespread use of the various forms of GROUP WORK. Manuel Lopez-Rey

talks in an article "Administrative Penology (England and Wales)"* of "penological inflation" and mentions as an example the use of group psychotherapy and group counselling. "More often than not", he says, "penological inflation, like other inflations, is an index of failure of administrative penology to solve its fundamental problems". Although I would not put it so hard, I must admit that Mr. Lopez-Rey is touching a very sore point of many modern penal systems, the British not excluded. There is an analogous point in the improvement of soil. Most of the "improvement" is in fact reconditioning of a soil, spoiled by human inconsiderateness.

I sincerely admire our English colleagues, trying so arduously to counteract the harmful influence of the Victorian prison building, shortage of staff and other inconveniences imposed on them. But I doubt whether these heroic efforts and among these, the analytically inspired group sessions, guided by modestly instructed guards will be the signpost of the new penology. The visit to the new Blundeston Prison and the highly intelligent and inspiring explanation of the basic ideas of its treatment did not entirely reveal how the British penology will proceed. In this prison the structure itself encour-

ages the dynamics of small groups leading some sort of community life in a limited, easily controlled, living unit. So far as I understood it, the whole prison functioned as one community, the prisoners swarming all over the central buildings, living quarters included, to a certain extent disturbing organised activities and in any case excluding the forming of small controlled or at least influenced groups. That things can be done otherwise (and in my opinion in a way more favourable to development of the personalities of the inmates) is demonstrated in the functioning of the women's prison, Styal, Wilmslow. I suspect that the system put in practice here will be the starting point for a new reform and, if so, I presume that much group activity in the analytical place the officer functioned as a style will be superfluous. In this group leader in a natural and practicable way. The Styal approach indicates that you in no way need modern concrete buildings (often so grey and cold) to replace the huge corridors of the 19th century prison. The demands are two fold. The units must be small and the frames must permit the creation of a comfortable atmosphere. This was achieved in Styal. None of these demands can be met in the old prisons. The abandoned camps of the military forces, so generously left to prison purposes, may be rebuilt in this way but so far, worn-out barracks and insufficient

**The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 1965, page 5.

resources of personnel (quantitatively), make them poor frames for a work aiming at rehabilitation.

In discussions it was often asked what was the real aim of group work and first of all the demonstrable effect of it. One lecturer openly admitted that the only effect so far proven was that discipline (in a modern sense) improved. Less tensions, relaxed atmosphere, more tolerable working conditions for the staff. This should not be underestimated since various therapeutic activities (if such are undertaken) could not succeed in a hostile atmosphere. But apparently a relaxed atmosphere may be consistent with a failure of rehabilitation. The non-British participants remarked that more was heard about the brilliant effects of group work on staff attitudes and staff satisfaction than about the effect on the personalities of the inmates. One answer was that all good prison reform has to start with the training of the staff, which is certainly true, but nevertheless, our final goal has something to do with the attitudes of the inmates.

In the English prison system more and more responsibility is laid upon the basic grade staff. This is a healthy and promising development. It calls upon not only more courses, local and central, but also on more advice and supervision. The senior staff will, to an increasing extent, have to assume the role of advisers and supervisors. This development makes

the need for a theoretical framework more urgent. What can the basic grade officer do in his role of a therapist and what can he not do? It must be emphasized that even the brightest guard cannot replace a trained psychologist or an assistant governor with far more extended educational background. It is true that if the ratio psychologist-inmate is 1 to 1,200 (or if the forensic ones are excluded perhaps 1 to 2,000), the psychologist cannot deal with other roles than the advisory. But this in no way means that there is no other role for a psychologist. For certain members of this esteemed profession it is certainly a more attractive role to be kept out of the burdensome face to face activity and assume a more detached role. This, however, does not change the fact that some problems of the inmates are so complicated that only a psychologist (maybe even a psychiatrist) is the appropriate person.

I just mention the initial courses for newly appointed officers. To my opinion the curriculum of these courses ought to be reconsidered from the viewpoint that everything that can be learned in the local institution should be learned there, which would give more place for the introduction of basic viewpoints in the centralized instruction. The refresher courses seem very short. This permits more officers to be trained but prevents a more profound study. In my country refresher courses have a duration of eight weeks but cannot

be arranged so frequently as in England.

The real pioneering element among the English training activities seems to be the training of the assistant governors. The development of this will be followed with great interest in all European countries. In Denmark as in many other countries of the region, full academic training (academic degree) is a minimum qualification for the governor grade. This gives a good basis for further studies, which deplorably, are entirely left to the individual members of the class. There is an urgent need to establish a regular training in penology for this group. The level of training will depend on the entrance requirements. Also here the maxim is valid: "What could be learned elsewhere should be learned there". Still, there will be subjects enough. The training for the governor grade should not only be a series of lectures from related branches (a tablespoonful of this and a teaspoonful of that), but comprise what could be called "essential penology", a subject so far modestly described but covering offensive realities.

The problem in this respect in smaller countries is that the number of candidates for such training is too small for building up schools with a sufficiently numerous and sufficiently qualified staff of teachers. There are at least two ways of solving this problem. The one is to make penology a

department in the universities so that the student can combine this study with the studies of criminology, psychology and sociology. Another is to establish training centres on a regional basis (say, for the northern part of Western Europe).

Perhaps my remarks will seem to my English colleagues and friends too critical and too little appraising the unquestionable merits of the English system. I beg to take this as a vote of confidence. I suggest that the criticism is of more interest than appraisal and ask again for forgiveness if any judgement should be hasty and insufficiently founded. I take the opportunity to thank all who contributed to this memorable experience. We were all deeply impressed by the zeal of all English colleagues whom we met. Together with them we work under the fateful motto of "less eligibility". We have to convince the public of the value of our efforts which in any case run no risk to be over-evaluated. In this endeavour we have to be careful not to over sell our products. The recovery work in the English prisons has been criticized. To the extent this work is concerned, not with metal scrap but with human beings, the criticism is out of point. This is just the core of the matter. We refuse to characterize any man as refuse. We believe in recovery. I was glad to meet this attitude, in England, as strong as I have met it anywhere.