

Prisons in Denmark

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THE STUDY TOUR of Danish prisons organised in May 1961 by the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency included members of the Prison Service,* magistrates, doctors, probation officers, representatives from approved schools, after-care and others actively engaged in work with offenders.

Members of the party had an excellent opportunity to become acquainted with one another during the two days sailing from Tilbury to Copenhagen on board the new Soviet ship *Mikhail Kalinin*. The ship is a very graceful vessel of 5,000 tons, painted overall in gleaming white except for a red band on the funnel decorated with a hammer and sickle. In spite of rumours, there was no caviar and the food was plain with boiled fish appearing at most meals.

In Copenhagen Mr. Hans Tetens, Director-General of Prison Administration, welcomed the party and from him we learned that Denmark (a country of 100 inhabited islands with a population of four and a half

millions, a quarter of whom live in Copenhagen) has a prison population of 3,200, including 600 men awaiting trial and forty-five women. This population is now fairly static and considerably smaller than the 6,000 prisoners who were in custody in the immediate post-war years. Nearly one half of the men serving sentences of over four months spend at least part of their sentence in an open prison. Most establishments are a third below capacity and there is no shortage of prison officers in spite of full employment. Most establishments have one officer to three inmates but in some which we visited the ratio was nearer one to one. The standing of the Prison Service in the community seemed higher than at home and it was evident that there are generous funds to draw on.

Our first visit was to the State prison at Vridsløselille built on the radial system in 1859 and the 'Wandsworth of Denmark'. With a capacity of 350 and daily roll of 250 men, mostly recidivists serving long sentences, is the largest prison in the country. The staff of 172

* The Prison Service group included a governor, medical officer, psychologist, psychiatric social worker, borstal matron, a discipline principal officer and a hospital principal officer.

comprises Governor and Deputy Governor, both lawyers (members of the governing grade are all university graduates), chaplain, steward, psychologist, welfare officer, full time headmaster, with three teachers, twenty-three clerical staff, two chief engineers and thirty workshop foremen. There is one chief officer, six principal officers and 100 prison officers, who work on a three shift system. The prisoners are employed in a brush shop, tailor's shop, shoemakers' and a foundry. This prison, like all the others visited, is in excellent decorative condition. All internal brickwork has been plastered and painted and the buildings are very clean, there being unlimited cleaning materials available. Some reconstruction work was being carried out in one of the wings. Solid concrete floors are replacing the galleried landings. Each landing is then divided into two separate cell units. This modification is being carried out in all the older cellular prisons, and where it has been carried out it is obvious that there are great advantages in having more space. Men can be closely supervised and section officers can know their men well. The prisoners work a forty-two hour week and earn an average of £1 per week. Some earn more than £2 per week. Each man keeps one third of his earnings for current use, one third is saved for him until he is released and one third is retained to contribute to the cost of his imprisonment. Assaults on staff and fighting among inmates are very rare. For serious breaches of discipline the Governor can

order a man to be confined to his cell for up to three months and for minor infringements he may be fined. There is no dietary punishment. There is a constant patrol of the boundary wall which is armed at night.

Under Danish law there are special provisions for certain types of offenders such as alcoholics, sexual offenders, psychopaths and persistent offenders. Alcoholics may have their sentence suspended on condition that they remain in a treatment centre until cured or they may be committed to prison where they receive psychotherapy and antabuse treatment. Dangerous sexual offenders can be ordered by courts to be castrated but so far no offender has been compulsorily castrated. Psychopathic offenders, described in the Penal code as 'persons whose permanent condition is one of defective development or impairment or disturbance of mental faculty including mental abnormality', may be sentenced to a completely indeterminate sentence called 'psychopathic detention' or a determinate sentence (between six months and three years) called 'psychopathic imprisonment'. The sentence which an offender receives depends on the seriousness of the crime, the degree of instability and criminal responsibility. The decision to release the offender is made by the court, not the prison authorities. In 1959 just over 400 men were undergoing detention in the two special centres for psychopaths at Herstedvester and Horsens.

Herstedvester, which is just outside Copenhagen, was established in 1953 and under its Medical Director, Dr. Georg Sturup, has achieved a world-wide reputation as a treatment centre. It was disappointing that Dr. Sturup was in America on a lecture tour at the time of our visit, but Dr. Jacoby, the Deputy Medical Director, gave a very detailed account of the work of the institution and conducted us round. The staff consists of five psychiatrists, one general medical practitioner, three psychologists, four teachers, six social workers, sixty prison officers, twenty workshop foremen and fifteen clerical staff. There is accommodation for 180 men housed in three cell blocks of sixty men each, these being divided into self-contained units of fifteen men. There is an open section on a farm two and a half miles away for twenty men and a semi-open section sixty miles away for forty men. Before the war, sex offenders were in the majority of those in psychopathic detention but now seventy per cent are property offenders with men convicted of arson, fraud and sex crimes making up the remainder.

The main treatment methods used are group and individual therapy and drugs, including hormone treatment for sex offenders and hallucinogenic treatment (l.s.d.) which has the effect of calming some violent patients. Voluntary castration may be recommended for sex offenders whose crimes involve violence and for certain persistent offenders who might otherwise spend a very long

time in detention. Although castration is voluntary, there is a strong inducement in the fact that many men who have been castrated have been released within two years of the operation. Most of those who have not consented have had to remain in custody for very long periods, one man even spending twenty-six years in detention. Before the operation, permission has to be obtained from the Ministry of Justice who take advice from the Medico-Legal Council on each case. A married man must obtain the consent of his wife and he must have a medical recommendation for the operation. About thirty such operations are carried out annually. Follow-up studies have shown that, in the past twenty-five years, only five out of 200 men have committed further sex crimes, none of which was serious. About ten per cent have committed other offences, while fifty per cent of those who were not castrated committed further offences, including serious sex offences. Our hosts were used to criticism from foreigners about these methods and their ethics. A party of Russian criminologists who had recently visited the centre described castration as barbarous, a comment which the Danes regarded as ironical! Dr. Sturup has stated that there are no appreciable physical after-effects of castration. The commonest after-effect consists of attacks of sweating which disappear in the course of time. The skin often becomes smoother and finer in texture and body hair including beard diminishes, although the

hair on the scalp becomes stronger and incipient baldness can be halted or even improved. Only in a few cases are the changes such that the man in the street could detect any difference. It has been stressed that these measures form part of the medical treatment in which the only consideration is the promise of a normal, healthy life; it is not a security measure imposed by society on persons who are sexually dangerous.

The other psychopathic detention centre, at Horsens in Jutland, is the oldest of Denmark's security prisons. Extensive structural alterations have been carried out to adapt it to the requirements of a modern therapeutic centre and it is less austere than Herstedvester. Although the two establishments have the same function, it seemed that at Horsens greater emphasis is placed on group therapy and probably less on physical treatment. Dr. Sachs, the Medical Director, expressed his dislike of the term 'psychopathic' and explained that detailed examination of such people had shown them to be chronic neurotics whose neurosis had developed under very stressful conditions during childhood and adult life. The aim at Horsens is to establish an atmosphere of welcome, help and encouragement. Dr. Sachs explained that because of feelings of failure, rejection, scepticism and inability to trust anyone are so deep-rooted, treatment is possible only by more intensive means than is usual; for this reason it is essential that each inmate has access to individual treat-

ment as well as group therapy. Those directly responsible for treatment, the psychiatrists and psychologists, must belong to the establishment and be completely integrated into the regime. Members of the discipline staff meet the psychiatrists and psychologists to discuss individual cases and they attend group discussions where the topics include treatment methods and problems of control and discipline. In Dr. Sachs' view, crime prevention could be improved by more intensive after-care including the provision of clinics where men from the psychopathic centres could continue their treatment, which at present ends with their discharge.

In this connection it was unfortunate that we were unable to visit, as planned, the much discussed Forensic Psychiatric Clinic directed by Dr. Max Schmidt. At this clinic, with a very large professional staff, exhaustive pre-trial examinations are carried out. There has been criticism that these enquiries are of such a nature as to make subsequent treatment difficult. Attached to the clinic is a hostel where men on a suspended sentence who are at work during the day can receive treatment during the evening. Most of the men at this hostel are alcoholics.

Persistent offenders may be given one of two forms of indeterminate sentence, workhouse or preventive detention. The former sentence approximates to corrective training and the latter is similar to its British counterpart. The P.D. sentence is from four to

twenty years. In practice men normally serve seven years. A prison board similar in composition to the Third Stage Advisory Board decides when a man may be released. There are twenty-two preventive detainees in custody, all of whom are serving their sentence in security prisons, including a number at the psychopathic centres.

Eligibility for workhouse is similar to the requirements for corrective training but it can also be given when an offence is committed under the influence of drink, even if the offender has no previous convictions. The sentence is from one to five years. In practice most men serve three years although an increasing number are being released after two years, a trend which is expected to continue.

Workhouse is served at Sonder Omme in the midst of 2,000 acres of barren heathland where land reclamation is the main work for the inmates. The capacity is for 816 men but the roll in May 1961 was 180 with a staff of 130. There are three sections, closed, semi-open and open. On arrival all men spend six months in the closed induction centre and, if their behaviour and industry are satisfactory, then they move to the semi-open section and finally to the open section. There is a special section for younger men. Home leave is granted after eighteen months and after nine months men can walk beyond the boundary and meet visitors in the local village. Men sentenced to workhouse are

rather older than corrective trainees, with ages ranging from 21 to 60, the 30-34 age group being by far the largest. The majority are thieves but a large minority are alcoholics who undergo treatment during their sentence. While many work on land reclamation, others are employed on the farm with its pigs and magnificent herds of cattle. There is also a large joiner's shop where very fine furniture is produced. The average earnings on piece rates are 27s.0d. per week. About fifteen per cent abscond annually but few are at large for long. The reconviction rate is similar to that for C.T.s but when the large number of alcoholics, who must be bad risks, is taken into account, the result is probably better. There are obvious advantages in having degrees of security in a single establishment dealing with a recidivist population. It is the view of the Governor, Mr. Neilsen, that this progressive system would be aided if there were a hostel in a neighbouring town for use in the final stage of the sentence, but as yet there is no prison hostel in Denmark.

We had a further meeting with Mr. Neilsen, who has visited many British prisons and borstals, when he read a paper on the development and use of open establishments. He doubted whether any inmate should spend more than two years in an open prison, or under training, because the effects of institutionalisation and the onset of apathy after such a period made these treatments less effective. Mr. Neilsen disapproved of dormitories

which he felt likely to encourage indiscipline and establish gangs and cliques among the inmates. It is the policy in Denmark to put every prisoner in a single room. He would prefer to see open establishments much nearer to large towns because staff and inmates alike suffered from being an isolated community.

The open prison at Norre Snede showed us what can be achieved by an intensive treatment programme (the term 'treatment' is used in Denmark where we use 'training'). At Norre Snede young men in their early twenties who have comparatively slight criminal records are imprisoned. There are fifty inmates and almost as many staff. All the men are serving sentences of less than two years and the average is seven months. The effort of the whole staff is directed towards exerting an educative influence in every sphere of activity. Here, more than at any other prison visited, it was apparent that the whole staff was involved in the treatment programme of the prison. The role of each member of the staff has been clearly considered, and is understood by the members, and we were told that the confusion and uncertainty which can arise when 'everyone wants to get into the act' has been largely overcome.

In the first three weeks after reception, new entrants attend the 'primary school' for the whole of each morning. Classes are taken by eight senior staff members, including the chief officer, who lecture

on various aspects of the structure of society and on prison life. There are refresher courses in Danish and arithmetic as well as physical education. In the same period the psychologist interviews each man and circulates a report to every member of the staff concerned with each man. Some inmates are seen regularly by the psychologist but those who require some intensive psychological treatment are transferred to the psychopathic centres. Each man is seen by the Welfare Officer. There is no P.A.Y.E. in Denmark so that most inmates are in arrears with taxes and they also have H.P. and other debts to be sorted out. Most of their homes are visited to find out the family's attitude and circumstances. This is undertaken by members of the prison staff, including discipline officers. The men often introduce their family to individual members of the staff when they visit the prison. There are regular staff meetings at which each inmate's case is reviewed every two months. The inmates work a forty-four hour week (longer in the summer) on the 180 acre farm, on the twelve acre market garden and in the joiner's shop. Steady employment in productive work is regarded as important in the re-education of men who have mostly been erratic in the past. The fact that the whole establishment makes an annual profit of £750 is an achievement which is good for the morale of all. Almost every man has a job and accommodation to go to on release. Of the 122 young recidivists released in 1953, sixty-five per cent had not

been known to have had a further conviction five years later.

The last visit was to the Youth Prison at Soby Sogaard which is the equivalent of an English borstal, an influence freely acknowledged. The similarities were more obvious than the differences. The chief difference is the absence of house-masters in whose place are four graduate teachers, each of whom is in charge of a section of fifteen lads. The Governor is a lawyer and his Deputy is an educational psychologist. The lads earn about 18s. 2d. a week and when a lad has saved £3 he may go on a week's holiday. A specially industrious, well-behaved boy may earn up to five such holidays a year. The average time spent in the institution is fourteen months. After-care is arranged by the borstal itself and generous funds are available. About seventy-five per cent are not reconvicted in the five years following their release.

In comparison with his British opposite number the Danish discharged prisoner is very well provided for. He takes out with him one third of his total earnings, kept for him during his imprisonment. In addition the after-care authorities have at their disposal ten times the funds available to the societies here. There is full employment and an ex-prisoner does not meet with quite the same antagonism as here. Each man is under close supervision for the unexpired part of his sentence. In addition to a small

number of trained probation officers there are 600 part-time supervisors, most of whom look after one man each. These come as volunteers from all sections of the community and some prison officers undertake supervision on a voluntary basis. It was said that the improved prison treatment methods, compulsory after-care and the wide-spread use of the suspended sentence had helped to keep the crime rate steady in Denmark, which alone in Western Europe has had no recent increase.

In Denmark we found much that we admired in the twelve institutions and establishments which we visited, including staffing which is generous by any standards, the intensive treatment of inmates in small units and their employment on useful work for a full working week, compulsory supervision on release and no general increase in the prison population. On the lighter side I shall remember a typical Danish cell, overheated, with numerous vigorous pot plants, attractive modern furniture and no chamber pot.

No account of the tour would be complete without mentioning the wonderful hospitality we received. We were entertained at the prisons with excellent meals which always include very tasty 'smorrebrod' (open sandwiches). Our hosts answered our questions very patiently in good English and we were able to reply to the toasts in the one word of Danish that we did know 'Skol'.