

Stockholm Is Talking About

A Unique Prison

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L.A. Times Service

Stockholm

THIS PLACE is like a hotel compared to the States," said Fernando Sanchez, a 20-year-old Marine Corps deserter from San Francisco.

He was talking about Oesteraker, Sweden's most modern prison, about 30 miles from Stockholm.

Sanchez, a paunchy, friendly type serving time for larceny, knows whereof he speaks: he was in California's Soledad Prison, he said.

"You get discrimination here like everywhere against brown skins," he says. "But we have more freedom. I got my own cell. The guards are friendly. You don't have to kill yourself working just to get cigarette money."

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OESTERAKER symbolizes Sweden's approach to penology — that prisons are places for rehabilitation, not punishment. Being locked in is punishment enough, the Swedes say.

Thus 16 of the country's 21 institutions (they don't like to call them prisons) are open. Oesteraker is one of five closed, and is maximum security.

Its 21-foot concrete walls which curve in at the top are supposed to be escape proof. But they aren't very closely watched. A prisoner escaped in broad daylight recently using a



ladder dropped over by accomplices from outside.

But most prisoners fail to see any reason for such impressive efforts to get out. "Why escape?" asked inmate Anders B. Anderson. "If I wanted to leave I'd just have to wait until my next furlough," he said. In fact, 9 per cent of those on furlough last year failed to return on time, if at all.

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FURLOUGHS are part of the Swedish way of prison life, as are conjugal visits to prisons where the inmates and their wives (or girl friends) enjoy privacy for a few hours twice a month.

The point in all this is not to isolate the prisoner as an antisocial misfit but rather to main-

tain his contacts with life outside, a life to which he must eventually return. This thinking is increasingly applied as a man reaches the end of his sentence.

Added to it is group therapy in which prisoners discuss their problems and fears of the outside, and visit with ex-convicts who have made the transformation.

In Sweden, pensioners also have uncensored mail privileges.

But prison remains prison, no matter how enlightened the management. Last year prisoners went on a hunger strike to win new privileges, including the right to organize.

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IN THE END, they won the right to free elections to send their own representatives to consultative councils in every prison — councils which are half-prisoner, half-officialdom.

"What happened here was unique in prison history," said Bo Martinsson, director general of prisons.

Another result was the "storforum," a monthly meeting where prisoners and staff get together on a voluntary basis to discuss problems and grievances.

"The gulf between the guards and the prisoners is disappearing here," said Catholic chaplain Jan Schmidt.

The size problem in the United States staggers prison officials here, where the largest institution has 430 inmates.