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MAR 9 1982

This Prison Idea Worth Considering

FOR more than two years Dr. Jack D. Moore, retired Ada dentist now living in Oklahoma City, has been trying to get someone interested in a simple plan he has drafted to improve our prison system.

He has talked with legislators, judges, corrections officials and members of the governor's staff. Most agreed that he has a good idea but nobody has taken hold to start it moving. Naturally, he is frustrated by political maneuvering he has encountered.

Dr. Moore's proposal is to create a facility which will "administer common sense disciplinary punishment, and at the same time, rehabilitate offenders who choose to accept the program."

He proposes that first offenders and non-violent criminals be allowed to volunteer to participate. He visualizes a judge about to sentence such a person saying:

"I will give you an option. You can volunteer to serve your time in our rehabilitation facility and come out at the end of your sentence pre-

pared to hold down a job and live in society as a responsible citizen, or you can go to the penitentiary and come out an ex-convict. It is your choice."

The title "Oklahoma Volunteer Training Camp" is suggested for the barracks-like facilities, to be located where food could be grown and other productive work done. OVTC would be operated under strict discipline, using basic ideas from military academies such as personal grooming and obedience to rules. Inmates who did not cooperate would be sent to the penitentiary, forfeiting time at camp.

"When returned to society, they will not repeat their actions of crime, causing them to return to the penal system again and again," Dr. Moore says. "It is not so much the length of time served, but the certainty that those who break the law should be punished, and at the same time provide opportunity to choose a program of rehabilitation enabling them to become responsible, productive citizens."

Moore got his idea from reading of crowded prisons and his experi-

ence in the U.S. Army during World War II. Like millions of other young men, he left his comfortable home to live in crude, crowded barracks, with virtually no privacy, minimal living space and subject to stern discipline, required to do work assigned.

He thinks many criminals now serving time enjoy better living than American soldiers did while serving their country.

The legislature has passed an appropriation for \$20 million to build new prison facilities, but this is not expected to contain all lawbreakers sentenced as punishment for their crimes. Crowded conditions are likely to persist and early release of unrehabilitated prisoners is expected to continue. It costs more to support criminals on the streets.

Moore's proposal would not solve the problem overnight, but it could be a good start toward reducing total prison population. Dr. Moore's difficulty is that he has found nobody in official position who seems to be actively interested in making a start.