

Dorchester Institution

Anonymous Prisoner 5

I am grateful, along with a substantial portion of the prisoners of Dorchester Penitentiary (Medium Sector), for your journal's interest in prison issues. Having read the transcripts of the most recent Senate hearings concerning human rights in Canadian prisoners (1 February 2017 and 8 February), as well as having watched Correctional Service Canada (CSC) Commissioner Don Head giving testimony at other Senate committees, I feel compelled to contribute my knowledge concerning the institutional experience through whatever means necessary.

Initially, I am impressed the Senate Committee included Ms. Alia Pierini and Mr. Lawrence DaSilva as hearing witnesses. I find it incredible how, even after release, former prisoners maintain the communicative idiosyncrasies of prison. Reading the transcripts, it is like hearing the talk of the men around me right now. This, I submit, is indisputable evidence there is no complete release from prison – its scars are often subtle and permanent. While I am thankful for their testimony, I am concerned there may be an omission developed from limited prisoner testimony and I am encouraged the Senate Committee is planning on visiting various institutions across Canada. There are many types of prisoners – Indigenous, Black, women, short-timers and Lifers – and other sub-groups of prisoners within and beyond these categories. There does exist particular commonalities between all types of prisoners too. However, experiences vary greatly.

One of the prisoners mentioned in the Senate hearing witness statements was Matthew Hines. We called him “Chubbs”. He was a brother, a cousin, a friend and a neighbour to many of us who still reside here in Dorchester (Medium) Penitentiary. Matthew had had his parole suspended when he was murdered. He was living with mental health concerns, which were not well-addressed in his years of incarceration, translating into breakdown during his release. No real gradual reintegration back into society occurred with Chubbs. He was sent back to prison, as a suspended parolee with only months left on his sentence. Matthew Hines was, in the opinion of many prisoners (including myself), murdered by CSC, which is an offence punishable by job termination or a good talking to. We heard the sounds he made as he was beaten outside our cells door. We listened to the pleas. We watched our brother taken to the hole for the last time where he was callously put to death. We watched the blood being cleaned up long before any investigation was launched. We listened to the talking points given to the media regarding this incident for a year while his own family was fed lies.

With regard to Matthew Hines' story, the testimony of Jason Godin of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO) was troubling to me, most particularly as Senator Ataullahjan questioned him about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I am a reasonable person and can understand how good people who work in prisons can be radically affected by seeing a man hanging from a rope in a cell or seeing two men sticking each other with homemade knives. I can imagine how it feels to go to work and wonder if today is the day where something horrible happens to myself or someone else I care about. These people Mr. Godin represents go home at the end of the day and have a chance to decompress – they have a choice to return to work or go elsewhere. They also have better access to counselling than prisoners. When people who go to work in Canadian prisons are leaving sick, what outcome is expected of marginalized individuals who live in a prison for years without reprieve? Federally incarcerated people who have offended, who are reminded daily of an action as though it is the totality of their being or defining moment of their lives – people labelled 'offenders', for example, as opposed to people who have committed an offence – are expected to rehabilitate and reintegrate into a society they may not have adequate skills or resources to succeed within in the first place. These people do not go home at the end of a twelve-hour day. Every moment of their lives is dedicated to these issues causing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in prison staff. There is no such thing as safe and humane custody in a prison, and anyone who says otherwise is making money for saying so.

Matthew Hines' story, unfortunately, is not a single event. It was not the first and it most certainly will not be the last. Dorchester Penitentiary has incidents like this periodically. The last incident occurred with a prisoner who was falsely accused of smuggling in drugs or weapons into the facility, and after numerous regular frisk searches and x-rays, CSC along with a doctor took it upon themselves, under force and duress, to probe his anal cavity. Before that incident, it was keeping a man in a dry cell until he pulled back the foreskin of his penis while another man watched, badgering him through the process. CSC refused to consider how this man had been sexually abused by an older man as a child and how such event was absolutely traumatizing. Another event of staff molesting prisoners happened when the institution refused to acknowledge reports of its occurrence until it happened directly in front of them. The doctor and his crew still work in Dorchester. Imagine living in a place where you have to see, let alone give respect to, the man who stuck his finger in your bum? The molesting staff member still works

in Dorchester. How about how the fella who traumatized the other man – relocated, perhaps given administrative leave at the most? Rapes, murders, assaults – covered-up behind thirty-foot high cement walls.

There was no trauma counselling given to prisoners regarding these incidents. Trauma counselling was available to the staff members who murdered Chubbs, as well as the staff members who watched and assisted a doctor stick his finger in a man's bum. Human rights? Mental health? These ideals, at best, are talking points to justify salaries and employment. How can this be said when prisoners are experiencing abuse like this?

The inefficacy of prisons, along with the statistical and empirical evidence proving it, has been known to the Canadian Government and parliamentarians, Senators included, for decades. Consider the irony in touting human rights, while using segregation and punishment to achieve justice. Instead of applying science and humanity, which often are not politically endearing when it comes voting time, we as a nation use the practice of imprisonment which has been around for hundreds of years. How many technologies, particularly relating to human behaviour and health do we continue to use which are this old? Disregarding the age of the practice, where is the proof that it accomplishes what it sets out to do with respect to rehabilitation?

Substantial concern has been recently given to mental health, especially as it relates to the federal penitentiary system. There is substantial testimony regarding how CSC is addressing mental health concerns in the Senate's current study on human rights in corrections. Just as in the latter half of the 20th century in Kingston Penitentiary, it took people dying or being radically abused before Canadians stepped up to address the issues plaguing our prisons. Ashley Smith, Matthew Hines and many others have paid the price, as have their families and friends for this indifference. Canada is not a human rights respecting nation behind its prison walls, despite the talking points of CSC officials. What is written on paper as CSC policy is not the reality of implementation on the ground! I and my peers live the daily experience of these disconnected policy makers. Where is the independent oversight in prison with teeth? The Office of the Correctional Investigator makes recommendations without any requirement for them to be implemented.

At what point in Canadian history did we develop evidence showing that the state is able to police itself? Indigenous women are being driven out into the boonies, sexually harassed and abused by police officers in Quebec. Officers manufacturing testimony and perjuring themselves after they

murder a Polish immigrant with a Taser. These are things which occur in the open. Can you imagine what happens behind 30-foot high penitentiary walls where there exists no oversight mechanism with teeth? What happens when the policy and agenda are decided upon and moved by the very institution which implements it? Let me remind you: Matthew Hines, Ashley Smith, etc. CSC has not tempered its capacity to harm, nor formed the realistic insight to manage their own policy or direction. Yet they are one of the few organizations which deal with Canada's most marginalized people and somehow are allowed to manage themselves without authoritative check.

I am grateful for the Canadian health system, as I understand it. Doctors are trained for years in universities to ensure they understand the human body. They know about how medications and surgeries impact the human body, as well as how social conditions affect the healing process. Doctors do not generally use injections of mercury anymore to cure diseases as they did back in the 1800s because science has demonstrated it does not work.¹ Doctors now get their marching orders from an independent body, the College of Doctors and Physicians, rather than from some authority who decides practices solely based on politics or economic imperatives. As best as possible, respecting the dignity of every person involved, Canada has developed a health care system which is not based on ideology. If there is any direction taken by the government that does not include this concept with respect to the penal system, any consideration of human rights by anyone is a waste of money and time.

“Protection of society” is ambiguous phraseology. It suits the right-leaning ‘get tough on crime’ and the left-leaning ‘get smart on crime’ crowds. It is politically genius, but what does it do for a prisoner? That we are still having to debate human rights and mental health concerns today is indicative of the system's perpetual failure to correct itself.

There are precedents in Canadian history for entire system failures, most notably Residential Schools. It is generally accepted knowledge that Residential Schools were a complete failure. Back when these institutions were used it was about protecting society from a different demon: the ‘Savage’. Again, since that time, we have discovered the problems – perceived to stem from Indigenous cultures and peoples – were actually produced from Canada's colonial institutions involved in assimilation. Canadian paternalistic, egotistical views were forced upon Indigenous peoples and as such, much was destroyed. The problem Canada thought it had was not even a problem and the resolution of this problem was the

actual destructive force! Now, after seeing what institutionalization can and does do, we still rely on institutionalization to protect our society. We, as a nation, have learned nothing from our past. Clearly, truth and reconciliation takes time.

There are substantial issues which relate directly to the purpose of the Senate Committee on Human Rights. Recognizing that every individual incarcerated in Canadian federal penitentiaries is a person that struggling with their mental health, whether because of circumstances prior to their incarceration and/or resulting from it, is the beginning of a real discussion. Lock and key rehabilitation is not working.

The prisoners of Dorchester Penitentiary Medium Sector would like to discuss what penitentiary life is like. We believe you will see Canada's worst implementation of policy: the actual chicken-cooping of human beings (*sans melodrama*). We can demonstrate how the economy takes precedence over mental health and rehabilitation, how *Quiet Rage* (Zimbardo and Musen, 1992) is prevalent in today's prisons, and how what is written on paper or what you are being told by the Keepers is not accurate. We invite you to hear the accounts of murders, rapes, assaults and harassment perpetrated by your government, to see how an institution implements policy for their own preservation as opposed to the preservation of a just, safe and peaceful society, or to see how minority population prisoners are systemically discriminated against.

Standing together in solidarity (see *Appendix*) is the salutation you left us with in your correspondence. Perhaps there was a time when solidarity was a reality. As for standing, those days, too, are long gone. I am grateful for this opportunity to shed light on the issues prisoners face.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Today, the problems are solved by sterilization and aseptic conditions. Penicillin appeared in the 1940s and chlorothiazide in 1957 and new effective agents have taken over in the treatment of diseases with mercurial. Please see Norn, Svend, Henrik Permin, Edith Kruse, and Poul R. Kruse (2008) "Mercury – A Major Agent in the History of Medicine and Alchemy", *Dansk medicinhistorisk arbog*, 36: 21-40

REFERENCES

Zimbardo, Philip and Ken Musen (1992) *Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment*.