

# CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE ON CANADA'S FEDERAL PENITENTIARY SYSTEM

## A Little Less Conversation, A Lot More Action *Jarrood Shook*

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### OPENING UP A CONVERSATION

In our conclusion to Volume 26, Number 1&2 – *Dialogue on Canada's Federal Penitentiary System and the Need for Penal Reform* – we at the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP)* left off with the following hope:

... that our readers, and in particular Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada Jody Wilson-Raybould who was mandated to review criminal justice, laws, policies and practices enacted during the 2006-2015 period under the previous government, will take seriously the voices of prisoners (Shook and McInnis, 2017, p. 300).

To encourage this process, the 19 October 2017 launch of the *JPP* included a press release summarizing the recommendations for penitentiary reform made by those who participated in the dialogue. Copies of the journal (Shook *et al.*, 2017a), the press release, along with an article summarising the project (Shook and McInnis, 2017), and information about where the journal can now be accessed online (see [www.jpp.org](http://www.jpp.org)) were also sent directly to Prime Minister Trudeau, Minister of Justice and Attorney General Jody Wilson Raybould, Minister of Public Safety Ralph Goodale, former CSC Commissioner Don Head, Members of Parliament on the Standing Committee on Public Safety & National Security, as well as the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. These materials were also provided to members of the Senate Committee on Human Rights, the Office of the Correctional Investigator, the research offices of CSC and Public Safety Canada's, major media outlets, and a network of university colleagues whom we requested that they consider incorporating the special issue into their course content and required course reading lists. Promoting the dialogue in this way (also see Piché, 2015), created space for a variety of important newsmaking and policy conversations related

to the content and recommendations in the special issue. At the time, we were hopeful that these conversations would lead to action on the part of the federal government.

## NEWSMAKING CONVERSATIONS

In the days following the launch, we began receiving very positive feedback. Based upon our open access journal statistics it was clear that across Canada, in every region of the country where our contributors were writing from, people were paying attention and, as we had hoped, were “taking seriously the voices of prisoners” (Shook and McInnis, 2017 p. 300). At the same time, we also began fielding a number of media requests for interviews from local, regional, and national media outlets including radio, print, and electronic media. Our first interview was with *Lawyers Daily* an online periodical that “provides Canadian legal news, analysis and current awareness for lawyers and legal professionals who need a real-time view on the shifting legal landscape” (Jerome, 2017). The voices of Stephanie Deschene (2017), Rachel Fayter and Sherry Payne (2017), Michael Leblanc (2017), David Threinen (2017), and Joe Convict (2017) figured prominently in this article. The piece also incorporated the perspective of Michael Rosenberg, a partner at McCarthy Tétrault LLP in Toronto who represented the Canadian Civil Liberties Association in *CCLA v. Canada (Attorney General) 2017 ONSC 4191*, “a charter challenge regarding the use of solitary confinement in prison” (Jerome, 2017). Tétrault, who stated, “including the voices of prisoners in discussion around penal reform puts a face to the impact that policies have”, also had this to say regarding the latest issue of the *JPP*:

This journal is remarkable in that it presents direct communications from prisoners. And it speaks to their experience with great particularity. Perhaps more particularity than is captured in some of the existing literature. It’s so important to understand the experiences of prisoners, not because they’re the only voice in prison reform, obviously there are many stakeholders in this process, but because they are an important constituent and one that, beyond the Office of the Correctional Investigator, have very few means of communicating their grievances outside of the formal grievance system that exists within prisons. They have very few means of communicating grievances with the outside world and participating in a dialogue on necessary reforms (ibid).

The *Halifax Examiner* also published an article which privileged the contributions of our writers Rachel Fayter and Sherry Payne (2017), calling the latest issue of the *JPP* “crucial reading for anyone who wants to understand the conditions inside our prisons, but more than that, it is important reading that disrupts the idea of prisoners as “criminals” and nothing more, not capable of contributing meaningfully” (Jones, 2017). We were also privileged to be invited for radio interviews with Stark Raven CO-OP radio 100.5 FM on the west coast (Stark Raven, 2017), CKCU 93.1FM OPIRG Roots Radio out of Carleton University (OPIRG Roots Radio, 2017), and CFRC 101.9FM Prison Radio (CPR), which is broadcast out of Queen’s University (CFRC Prison Radio, 2018).

While we were satisfied to know that the issue was reaching new audiences and being given local and regional attention, we were at the same time hopeful that some of the major media outlets that we had been in touch with would pick up the story to increase our reach nationally. To this end, we were pleased when approached by the CBC for an interview with Winnipeg journalist Kelly Malone. CBC News Online has a large readership and this is an important audience if we are to “disrupt the idea of prisoners as “criminals” and nothing more” (Jones, 2017). The CBC article focused in on the writing of Stephanie Deschene (2017) and the lack of compassion shown following her giving birth while in prison, William Allan Beaulieu (2017) whose analysis drew attention to the toxic culture which was fostered in the penal system under the Harper government, and Anonymous Prisoner 19 (2017) from Drumheller Institution who described the collateral impact of punishment on families of the incarcerated. The article also highlighted the perspective of *JPP* managing co-editors Justin Piché and Kevin Walby. Justin Piché noted that the “journal will help academics, policy-makers and others across the country to realize that no one should be beyond hope and no one is disposable”, while Kevin Walby highlighted the fact that prisoners “have knowledge that needs to be shared with the general public and criminal justice policy makers” and there is a “glimmer of hope” that the federal and provincial governments are paying attention (Malone, 2017).

## **POLICY CONVERSATIONS**

Following the release of the special issue, representatives of the journal met with policy advisors to the Minister of Public Safety and Minister of Justice on

24 November 2017. While initially optimistic that we were being granted an opportunity to be heard, we left the office with a healthy degree of skepticism about this government's commitment to the type of change that prisoners were calling for in the latest issue of the *JPP* – “Sunny Ways”, it appeared, may not be in the forecast for change, as political optics seemed to dominate the discussions, rather than the merits and substance around policy change.

Following this meeting, the editors decided to co-author an op-ed which we circulated to various media outlets and was ultimately picked up by Rabble.ca (see Shook *et al.*, 2017b). This article entitled “Federal Prisoners Still Wait for Meaningful Reform after Two Years of ‘Sunny Ways’” called out the current government for talking a good game about penal reform, as indicated by their promised review of the criminal justice system and the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights study on the federal penitentiary system. We also noted that their (in)action spoke louder than their words, as the Correctional Service of Canada continues to come under fire from the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI) and make headlines for malpractice. Once again, we drew attention to the main recommendations of federal prisoners who contributed to the latest issue of the *JPP* and called upon the federal government to “enact these reasonable calls for change, while diminishing this country's reliance on incarceration and working towards justice that heals wounds instead of creating new ones” (Shook *et al.*, 2017b).

As the issue began to circulate amongst those involved at the policy level, we also began receiving invitations to speak about the recommendations of contributors. One such opportunity included an invitation to give a guest lecture on special topics in criminology to a fourth-year criminology class at Carleton University. The latest issue of the *JPP* and recommendations for reform put forward by contributors was well received by students and clearly valued as an important source of knowledge by those who may very well go on to fill roles in the administration of the Canadian criminal justice system. This author was also invited to give a presentation at an all-staff meeting for the OCI and was able to hand deliver a copy of the latest issue to the recently appointed Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger.

Another invitation was extended by Public Safety Canada to attend their “Lunch and Learn” session, which was attended by policy analysts from the department and CSC, and the newest policy and legislative advisor to the Minister of Public Safety. The following week, this author was also invited to give the opening address to the National Association Active in Criminal

Justice (NAACJ) / Public Safety Canada (PSC) Joint Policy Forum attended by 21 stakeholder organizations in the Canadian criminal justice community including John Howard Society Canada, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction, St. Leonard's Society of Canada and other non-profit organizations. The policy forum ended with a panel discussion moderated by Executive Director of John Howard Society Canada, Catherine Latimer, and included Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger. This author also had a seat on the panel and the latest issue of the *JPP* figured prominently in the discussion, particularly the contributions related to the aging prison population, a subject that has recently gained the attention of the OCI who have adopted a decarceration stance towards prisoners aged 50 and over calling for increased use of compassionate release for those with terminal illness (Harris, 2018).

A few months ago co-managing-editor of the *JPP*, Justin Piché, was invited to meet with the new policy and legislative advisor to the Minister of Public Safety to discuss content and recommendations in the latest issue. On the table for discussion was the 30 percent food and accommodation charge levied by the former conservative government and the elimination of incentive pay for CORCAN workers. This author was also originally scheduled to attend, however, in light of being an applicant in the recent negative court decision in *Guérin et al. v. the Attorney General of Canada*, it was indicated that the government would not be willing to meet with this author pending the outcome of an appeal which was launched at the time the meeting was being organized.

As indicated in the judgement and reason for decision that was issued in late January, it was the position of the court that they were "...not sitting to consider the wisdom of the policy decisions made by the government" (Guérin *et al.*, 2018). According to the courts, prisoners have no "constitutional rights to payment", the restrictions on pay do not "meet the constitutional requirement to qualify as cruel and unusual treatment", nor is there justification that principles of fundamental justice have been violated under section 7 (*ibid*). Moreover, according to the court, the "arguments based on labour law cannot succeed" because there is not an "employer-employee relationship" within the meaning of the applicable laws" (*ibid*).

Despite the negative outcome in the court and the judge's reluctance to consider the "wisdom" of the policy decision made by the previous government, the prison pay cuts issue is one that has also received its share of media attention in recent months and in particular following the negative

decision in federal court. In August 2016, the *National Post* featured an article which looked at the pay cuts in the context of CORCAN industries and its overall cost to tax-payers, problematizing the extent to which it actually offers a rehabilitative opportunity to prisoners whose labour is exploited in the process of their work in manufacturing, textiles, and other industries (Brownell, 2017). Several media outlets picked up the story to report on the decision, yet there was very little attention granted to the substantive issues of the case (CBC, 2018a; *iPolitics*, 2018).

Wanting to push the issue and drive the policy conversation forward based upon the perspective of *JPP* contributors, this author reached out to several media outlets and was ultimately invited by the CBC radio program *All In A Day* to attend the studio in Ottawa and get into the heart of the matter (CBC, 2018b). This opportunity created space to re-open the pay cuts issue and communicate to the public the harmful impacts of that decision, as informed by contributors of the latest issue who highlighted it as one of the policies in most serious need of redress (Fayter and Payne, 2017; Leblanc, 2017; Bell, 2017; Small, 2017; Shook and McInnis, 2017). It was also an opportunity to draw attention to the federal government's lack of action, despite their rhetoric around reform. In fact, it was this interview that led to the above-noted meeting with the policy and legislative advisor to the Minister of Public Safety, a meeting which, as indicated above, this author was disinvited from due to a pending appeal in federal court. One positive outcome of the interview was a 31 January 2018 feature article on CBC's online news platform, which was circulated widely and spoke clearly to the impacts of this policy on prisoners and their family members in the community (CBC, 2018b). Fed up with the lack of response and action on the part of the government, this writer penned an op-ed that was published in the *Ottawa Citizen* on 1 February 2018, once again calling on the Trudeau government to re-think how it pays prisoners in light of its professed commitment to "Sunny Ways" and mandate letter to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada Jody Wilson-Raybould to review "the changes in our criminal justice system and sentencing reforms over the past decade" (Shook, 2018).

### **A LITTLE LESS CONVERSATION, A LOT MORE ACTION**

As can be gleaned from the previous sections, there have been significant conversations about penal reform stemming from the contributions of

federal prisoners made in the last issue of the *JPP*. However, to date there has been very little action that will have a significant impact on life across CSC institutions.

Budget 2018 did, however, include an additional \$5.6 million a year dedicated to mental health supports over and above the \$20.4 million commitment made in 2017. It is hard to argue that these are not positive developments, particularly in light of the fact that these funds will be “targeted towards providing enhanced mental health supports for women in federal correctional facilities across Canada” (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2018). It would seem to be the case that the government is putting some of its money where its mouth is, however, as contributors to the dialogue have made clear, “prisons are not ideal environments for those suffering from mental illness and that prison can exacerbate their symptoms” (Shook and McInnis, 2017, p. 285). If the government was truly interested in enhancing mental health support for women, they might take seriously the voices of Rachel Fayter and Sherry Payne (2017, p. 28) who call for the CSC to “return to hiring external social workers on contract to work with women in distress and those living with mental health issues, rather than CSC-employed psychologists”. They note:

The focus of CSC Psychology is on women with serious diagnosed mental health issues (e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar, borderline personality disorder). Counselling sessions are supposed to be confidential, unless we are a risk to ourselves or others, or are jeopardizing the security of the institution. However, since psychologists are employed CSC staff, women do not feel comfortable sharing their feelings and struggles based on the fear that what they say will end up in their paperwork. Their case management team could be notified of anything they say, which would affect security ratings, temporary absences and parole. If a woman expresses that she may hurt herself she is quickly placed in segregation, stripped of her clothing, placed in a canvas “baby-doll dress” and strapped to a table until the institution believes she is able to keep herself safe. GVI does not have the capacity to care for women with severe mental health issues. The lack of appropriate mental health care leads to verbal and physical altercations in living units, women feeling misunderstood, exacerbated mental health issues, distrust, self-harm, and even death (ibid).

Even the modest increase in resources does nothing to address the fact that prisons are not hospitals, despite the fact that many prisoners are patients.

Budget 2018 also included funds to re-open prison farms, which is also symbolically and materially a positive development. Again, however, although the rhetorical aims of government are positive – to provide federal prisoners “with training opportunities to acquire new skills, while preparing for employment and successful reintegration and rehabilitation into the community” – should the \$4.3 million the government has earmarked for the re-opening of the farms run by CORCAN (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2018) not be accompanied with a reversal of the 2013 decision to eliminate the \$2.20 per hour incentive pay for CORCAN workers and the additional 30 percent food and accommodation tax on prisoners pay, the promise of this venture may prove difficult to realize in practice. According to *JPP* contributors, the changes to the prisoner pay structure are a “big deal” as it “helped parents send money home to their families, pay phone bills to keep in touch with their loved ones” and “gave a prisoner a sense of satisfaction while they were working all day” (A.C.C.L., 2017, p. 165). Even with the re-opening of the prison farms, if the government’s stance towards “accountability” is to maintain the status quo, there will be very little incentive for prisoners to fill these employment positions as “it sends the message that one is being exploited” (Shook, 2015, p. 53), which will be at odds with the governments rhetoric around “preparing for employment and successful re-integration and rehabilitation into the community” (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2018).

Despite the lackluster response we have witnessed from the federal government on these and other matters, the dialogue on Canada’s federal penitentiary system and the need for change continues, as do our efforts to facilitate prisoner writing on confinement and punishment (Piché *et al.*, 2014).

## **CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE ON CANADA’S FEDERAL PENITENTIARY SYSTEM**

While our original mail out and call for submissions in the spring of 2017 was initially flagged and intercepted by the CSC pending further clarification on the project and whether or not it constituted a “traditional academic research endeavor involving data collection through quantitative and qualitative instruments, which needed to go through CSC’s research



protocol”, after a formal meeting with a *JPP* editorial team member, the former ultimately agreed that our project did not fall within those parameters and that “prisoners had the right to free expression”, which we applauded (Piché and Walby, 2017, p. 3). Notwithstanding, CSC’s Research Branch made contact with the *JPP* nearly one year later to inquire whether or not we had sent another call for submissions as one of CSC’s regions had contacted them to discuss an invitation which had been sent by the *JPP* to prisoners seeking input about their experiences. We responded by noting that this was in fact the original 2017 invitation and not a new one, although the journal considers new submissions at any time. What this episode conveyed to us is that at least one institution in one of CSC’s operational regions held our call for submissions for nearly a year, which highlights that even when some within the federal penitentiary system state their support for more openness and transparency behind the walls, others prefer opacity.

Perhaps this explains why following the publication of Volume 26, Number 1 & 2 we continued to receive letters from prisoners at various security levels in different regions of the country. As you will note in the following dispatches from federal prisoners, the need for change in Canada’s federal penitentiary system is as dire now as it was when we sent out the call for submissions in the spring of 2017. Although not among the submissions published in this volume, an author writing on behalf of the Inmate Wellness Committee at Saskatchewan Penitentiary drew our attention to the harmful impacts of policies, practices and laws brought about under the former Conservative government. For them, “the repeal of the faint hope clause or section 745 was of the most concern”. The writer reminded us that the faint-hope clause was originally introduced by the current Prime Minister’s father, Pierre Trudeau, as a compromise when the death penalty in Canada was abolished and the mandatory sentence for first-degree murder was set at 25 years. This policy gave prisoners the “faint-hope” that with good behaviour and a commitment to rehabilitation they would have a prospect of release at 15 years of their sentence. Canadians might not be aware that changes brought about as part of the Harper government’s ‘tough on crime’ agenda now allow judges to dole-out concurrent sentences that have greatly extended parole ineligibility for some well beyond what they could reasonably expect to live. This legislative change effectively introduced in Canada what is described in the United States as the “other death penalty” or life without the possibility of parole (Hartman, 2009).

Even when prisoners can see a light at the end of the tunnel, they continue to draw our attention to the impact of parole and conditional release conditions, which are not “clearly linked to prisoner’s offence(s) and often set them up for trivial, non-criminal breaches that return individuals to federal penitentiaries at a considerable cost to taxpayers” (Journal of Prisoners on Prisons, 2017). Past *JPP* contributor Ronald Small (2017), wrote to us following the launch of the last issue to describe his experiences on day parole. Two of his parole conditions were breached when he was found to be (a) “driving a car” and (b) “not reporting a friendship”. He noted that at “68 years old and with failing health”, as well as being designated as a dangerous offender, he was informed by his case management team that he will have to “be incarcerated for at least 3 ½ years and most likely longer” before he will be released again. Given Mr. Small’s age and state of health, he is not optimistic about his future, which in his own words “looks very bleak”.

Someone like Ronald Small is left with little recourse once in the clutches of the system, save for filing an internal grievance, making an appeal of the decision to the Parole Board of Canada or bringing the case to the federal court for a request of judicial review. Each of these mechanisms require both time and resources. Very few prisoners have access to the latter.

A lack of legal resources within institutions is the focus of Nellie Parr’s article in this issue. Writing from Fraser Valley Institution (FVI), she demonstrates how the woefully under-resourced penitentiary libraries make justice inaccessible for many federal prisoners. Focusing on FVI specifically, she recounts how a previous librarian who provided “access to case law and legal materials” was let go and how the new librarian works very few hours, which has made legal research an even more cumbersome and difficult task. Parr asks readers, “where is the justice in this?”

In such an environment, it should come as little surprise that access to mental health care for federal prisoners remains a priority for the incarcerated. One such prisoner, a writer from Mountain Institution, sent a letter to us noting that the deficit in mental health resources that exists in the community and in federal penitentiaries has led to many individuals being “left out in the cold, literally”. Citing his own experience, he noted that homelessness, poverty, and mental health issues remain pre-cursors to incarceration, making “our prison system” a “storage facility for many mentally ill individuals”. Yet once inside, the prison as catchall for social problems continues to perpetuate the very issues it claims to treat, even

when an individual is “trying to get help with a diagnosed disorder” and “function as emotionally healthy individuals and move forward in this mode when they are released back into society”.

The “erosion of rehabilitation”, described above, is a theme picked-up on by a writer from Mission Institution, an Indigenous prisoner who is serving a life sentence and awaiting deportation to the United States. In this writer’s words, CSC “has destroyed the word rehabilitation”. Having served time in “New York, New Jersey, Florida and California”, this writer attests that “the system is failing the public and the locking them up attitude is causing more harm than good”. Being told that his “past is never going to change and that no matter what” his “good behaviour in prison...does not matter”, despite having done “many programs in the past 20 years”, this writer asks the following questions: “why demand that I take the programs? Is it more for their benefit (i.e. CSC) than mine?”

Such thoughts are echoed by 1417 who wrote to us from Riverbend institution, describing programming in federal penitentiaries as a “means to an end; a game played by prisoners and CSC”, rather than an authentic path towards dealing with addiction and mental/emotional trauma. While “they” (CSC) “get to point at all these programs they have in place” the environment in which they are delivered is “like giving swimming lessons in a hurricane”. On occasion, the deprivations experienced in CSC institutions can lead to violence. In the case of a recent disturbance at Saskatchewan Penitentiary where one prisoner was killed and others were injured, CSC (2018) responded by noting that most prisoners involved were enrolled in programs at the time of the incident, implying that they had fulfilled their end of the ‘correctional’ bargain and that prisoners themselves were to blame for what transpired. However, the crux of the matter was that institutional management had failed to respond to prisoners’ concerns about poor quality food, working conditions and other issues raised (OCI, 2017). For Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger, what transpired at Saskatchewan Penitentiary shows that, “prison riots are not random or inevitable events; they are most likely to occur when a certain threshold of defiance and desperation is reached among a group of prisoners who take matters into their own hands to violently force change or express a long-standing grievance” (ibid, p. 31). In a challenge to CSC’s self-congratulatory and self-serving rhetoric around rehabilitation, 1417 draws our attention to the fact that there is “little structural support” for those participating in such

programs, which in his own situation is evidenced by an episode where he was finally “able to get in to see the psychologist”, but only “after 3 requests and 10 weeks”. Moving forward, 1417 recommends that the federal government “stop punishing people for addictions and mental illness”, quit “putting people in jail unless the crime involves violence”, and “consider excarceration strategies”.

David Threinen, writing of the long-term effects of incarceration on the elderly, concludes the dialogue by describing a blind-spot in the research on the long-term effects of punishment and imprisonment. He asks scholars to revise the conceptualisation of “post-traumatic stress-disorder” and apply it differently to “those [prisoners] who have served thirty or more years and are sixty-five years of age or older and are still in prison or a prison setting” referring to “continued traumatic stress disorder” or “CTSD”. David Threinen likens the prison environment to one of “warfare” where violence is the norm and elderly prisoners are not only subject to this violence throughout their incarceration, but particularly vulnerable to being a victim of it. While the author recognises that CSC uses cognitive behavioural therapy, like 1417, he questions whether such programs fulfill their potential when delivered in an inherently violent prison setting – one where older prisoners are “getting beaten up, sexually assaulted, bullied, and intimidated by younger prisoners or in some case the prison guards themselves”. In an effort to avoid such violence, he describes how “far too many seniors just stay in their cells and become hermits, all to avoid what they may see or be subjected to in the yard or the gym”. Quizzically, David Threinen asks, “why the CSC seems to be failing in their response to elderly prisoners?” In answer to his own question, he states that “the answer is very simple. If they did, it would render their programs useless. They would have to acknowledge that they are a big part of the problem”. Tendering a possible solution, David Threinen suggests a good start would be for CSC to admit this problem, and “create an environment that the seniors can feel safe in”. As he describes, “there are right now hundreds of seniors in prison who will never be released”. Like the recently appointed Correctional Investigator, he does “not think it is right or humane to make them live out their lives in constant fear”.

In the latest submission to the on-going dialogue on changes that need to be made to Canada’s federal penitentiary system so long as it exists, we find countless narratives which either implicitly or explicitly illustrate the

harms of punishment, harms we had hoped would be reduced by the current federal government following their promised review of changes brought about between 2006-2015. Instead, the action that we have seen from the government is piece-meal at best and largely rhetorical.

In March 2018, the Department of Justice released *What We heard: Transforming Canada's Criminal Justice System*, a report on provincial and territorial stakeholder conversations (Justice Canada, 2018). After a year and a half of "careful and open dialogue", the Government of Canada has come to the conclusion that "vulnerable people are most affected by the system" (ibid, p. 3). Echoing the most commonly cited issues identified by prisoners who contributed to the *JPP* dialogue, participants in the provincial and territorial portion of the consultation felt that "Canada's criminal justice system is too quick to criminalise the symptoms of vulnerable and marginalised populations" particularly when addiction and mental health issues are at play (ibid, p. 6). Those consulted "called for an approach that tries to solve problems instead of looking at facts and guilt", and suggested that the government institutes large-scale revisions to the Criminal Code of Canada, including sentencing practices like mandatory minimums and conditions of release (Justice Canada, 2018). They also called for a renewed focus on rehabilitation inside institutions and upon return to the community, as well as other changes including a restructuring of the pardon system (ibid, pp. 8-10).

While we can applaud the Department of Justice for honouring its commitment to reviewing laws, policies, and practices enacted during the 2006-2015 period by engaging in a large-scale consultation with provincial and territorial, as well as other stakeholders, we remain unimpressed with the federal government's position that "systemic change cannot be completed in one mandate" as they promise to now shift their focus "from one of review to one of transformation of the criminal justice system" (ibid, pp. 3-4). After getting a first majority mandate in 2011, it took the Harper government well less than a year in power to introduce changes that would completely overhaul the Canadian criminal (in)justice system through the so-called *Safe Streets and Communities Act* (2012). The liberal government of Prime Minister Trudeau has mostly thus far engaged in a lot of conversation to confirm what prisoners like those who have contributed to this dialogue and other experts have been saying for years. We need a little less conversation and a lot more action. The hope that we left off with

in the last issue is fading. It is time that we begin “diminishing this country’s reliance on incarceration and working towards justice that heals wounds instead of creating new ones” (Shook *et al.*, 2017). Until then, the dialogue continues.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Jarrod Shook* completed an honour’s degree in sociology at Laurentian University and is currently completing an honour’s degree in criminology at the University of Ottawa. Jarrod authored several articles in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* while serving a federal sentence in Collins Bay Institution (Kingston, Ontario, Canada) and upon release joined the publication’s editorial team where he was lead editor of Volume 26, Number

1&2 – a “Dialogue Canada’s Federal Penitentiary System and the Need for Penal Reform”. As a member of the Carceral Cultures Research Initiative ([www.carceralcultures.ca](http://www.carceralcultures.ca)), he recently co-authored an article with Justin Piché and Kevin Walby entitled “Getting ‘Beyond the Fence’: Interrogating the Backstage Production, Marketing and Evaluation of CSC’s Virtual Tour”, which appeared in Volume 7 of the *Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research*. Jarrod has been awarded the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and has been accepted into the master’s program in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Winnipeg where he plans to study starting in January 2019.