

Call to Action

Paul Drennan

PROTECTIVE CUSTODY AND CENSORSHIP

This is a protective custody unit for CSC employees. I had not noticed this until I read the *Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston* (Arbour, 1996). It has since been censored and removed from the prison's library, along with other titles like *Con Game* (Harris, 2003), that mentions this institution's staff members by name.

We have a husband and wife team here, who after killing a prisoner in Quebec, were transferred to this institution to continue working for CSC after avoiding incarceration in Quebec. The steward of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO) was the guard that, in front of a male ERT team with a camera, used a knife to cut the clothes off a female P4W prisoner. To their credit, they continue to work here (with our respect). Many of the Prison For Women (P4W) middle management responsible for the poor decisions which lead to the events at P4W were promoted and work here. The family member of an officer who committed an on-the-job suicide, has a guaranteed job here and is never sanctioned for poor decision making. These damaged staff, and more, have a safe haven of employment at what used to be known as PI or Pittsburgh Institution, along with about 175 sex offenders that are difficult to place elsewhere.

Since even staff of the Office of the Correctional Investigator agree that we do not have a meaningful grievance system (OCI, 2018), we have almost no recourse. There have also been changes to the on-site grocery store refusing to comply with the National Menu (CSC, 2019a), arbitrary censorship of reading materials through their removal from the library, female staff restricting items received in the mail, and cancelling computer privileges for those who write expressing negative opinions about a parole officer or other staff by name.

EMPLOYEES

While at Collins Bay there were guards who would make comments like, "we don't want the Blacks getting too much control". At PI the comments are simpler, such as "I just hate having to deal with fucking prisoners" (a programs manager). When someone harbours attitudes like these, they are best kept as private beliefs and certainly not shared in the presence of

prisoners. I have found that there are more ‘desmiostooges’ (i.e. more or less prisoner haters) at PI than any other prison I have stayed in.

VISITS AND CORRESPONDENCE (V&C)

Authorized visitors can participate in video visitation using a webcam and an internet connection (CSC, 2019b). The video visiting station has a picture on the screen that is less than 3 by 4 inches. No one on the V&C staff seems to have training to correct this. The professionals, who are paid to do this type of work, are not involved and unable to help, especially since all visits are Friday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays.

RESTRICTED ACCESS

Even through Access to Information requests we still face barriers to getting information about institutions. Our grocery store is rarely stocked well. It is hard to plan meals when several items cannot be purchased on main grocery day. Without background information about the prison’s budget, it is difficult to make meaningful complaints or suggestions. This is the third prison I have lived in and the first one where I cannot buy basic food items. How do other prisons succeed where we fail? Are there any minimums in Canada on the central feeding program? Are those institutions stand-alone, satellites of or integral to a medium, or part of a multi-level? If we knew where we stood economically, we would have a stronger base to support our arguments to make internal changes and improve our grocery delivery system.

EDUCATION

CSC uses a work around to avoid giving us a high school education. Using the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) (Ministry of Education, 2001) each course is summarised in a handout of 5 to 10 pages, which the prisoner reads and then writes a test. If they fail, they just re-read the material and are tested again, and again, and again, until they pass. They then go on to the next course and finally graduate. The tragic part is these prisoners are not given, but robbed of, an education. Student diplomas are issued by the Province of Ontario, blindly trusting information from the prison. Back on the range it becomes obvious that they can only read and

write at a basic level. They need a calculator for simple math. They ask for help with canteen lists and need a trusted friend to read and translate their paperwork. We have given up trying to get parole officers to write in plain language. They find it necessary to insert multiple double-negatives in one sentence instead of saying “Yes”. They convert proper nouns to verbs as in, “I’ll purolate it to you”. Prison schools are unable to educate prisoners so they may not comprehend the reports written about them.

There are students who request and receive the more difficult courses, especially in English and Mathematics. I admire these men for making the system give them a good education. Yet the prison system fails to ensure each prisoner gets the best education possible. The PLAR is one cause, but another issue is that Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing is not done in prisons.

PAY SYSTEM

Prisoners have “program assignments”, not jobs (Guérin c. Canada) and are paid for their participation. The media use the \$6.90 per day figure quite often, but it is not quite accurate. The following table is a detailed summary of pay and deductions:

Pay Level Rate x 10 Workdays (6 hour per day)

Before Deductions

F Level = \$1.00 x 10 = \$10.00

E Level = \$2.50 x 10 = \$25.00

D Level = \$5.80 x 10 = \$58.00

B Level = \$6.35 x 10 = \$63.50

A Level = \$6.90 x 10 = \$69.00

After Deductions of 30% Where 8% is Deducted for the “Prisoner Telephone System Administration” and 22% is Deducted for “Food and Accommodation”

E Level = \$1.00 x 10 = \$10.00 – 8% (\$.80) & 22% (\$2.20) = \$7.00

D Level = \$2.50 x 10 = \$25.00 – 8% (\$2.00) & 22% (\$5.50) = \$17.50

C Level = \$5.80 x 10 = \$58.00 – 8% (\$4.64) & 22% (\$12.76) = \$40.60

B Level = \$6.35 x 10 = \$63.50 – 8% (\$5.08) & 22% (\$13.97) = \$44.45

A Level = $\$6.90 \times 10 = \$69.00 - 8\% (\$5.52) \& 22\% (\$15.18) = \$48.30$

***Net Pay After 10% Transfer to Savings and
\$8.00 to Prisoner Welfare Fund (IWF)***

E Level = $\$7.00 - 10\% (\$.70) \& \text{IWF } (\$8.00) = \0.00

D Level = $\$17.50 - 10\% (\$1.75) \& \text{IWF } (\$8.00) = \7.75

C Level = $\$40.60 - 10\% (\$4.60) \& \text{IWF } (\$8.00) = \28.00

B Level = $\$44.45 - 10\% (\$4.45) \& \text{IWF } (\$8.00) = \32.00

A Level = $\$48.30 - 10\% (\$4.83) \& \text{IWF } (\$8.00) = \35.47

Actual Rate of Pay Per Day

E Level = \$0.00 per day

D Level = \$.78 per day

C Level = \$2.80 per day

B Level = \$3.20 per day

A Level = \$3.55 per day

***Actual Rate of Pay Per Hour (where applicable)
for a 6-hour Work Day***

E Level = NA

D Level = NA

C Level = \$0.47 per hour

B Level = \$0.53 per hour

A Level = \$0.59 per hour

To give you an example of how difficult the changes to the pay structure have made life for prisoners who are in need of these funds as part of their rehabilitation and to meet basic needs, Lifers must perform Parole Board of Canada (PBC) ordered community passes (UTAs) before Day Parole (CSC, 2007). We need to pay for a taxi from the prison to the bus/train terminal, fare to the destination city, expenses during the pass (sometimes including buying food) and return costs. A 72-hour UTA from Kingston to Toronto would typically cost \$200, about 11 weeks pay at Level A, discounting any other expenses like clothing costs, postage, and telephone calls. With even minimal expenditures, a Lifer would have to save for more than one year to fulfill the standard set of three 72-hour passes over six months. This leaves no money for release. If it is a more distant destination city, such as

Windsor, a package of three 72-hour UTAs could run \$1,500, which almost three years savings (\$20.00 per pay) at Level A pay. With phone costs this consumes most of the pay not saved for UTAs.

CONCLUSION

We are prepared to return to society by guards and staff, some of whom hate prisoners. They arbitrarily censor and prevent us from accessing information, frustrate our attempts to better our circumstances, provide a sub-standard education, and make the cost of gaining a release unattainable for some Lifers. It does seem some days that their daily goal is to find some way to squash our hope for a better future. Although not discussed in detail, repairing our often-meaningless grievance system would also be a good first step to help us enact change.

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