

## **Towards Redress and Rehabilitation in Canada's Federal Penitentiary System** *Desperately Seeking A Chance*

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The problems that we face as prisoners in the clutches of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) are vast and they are not just isolated to the prison. These problems spill out into society because most prisoners will eventually be released and will move back to their communities. Minister Blair may have too much on his plate since his office runs not only federal prisons, but CSIS, the RCMP, and a few other departments and agencies that most Canadians have probably never even heard of. If a Minister had only prisons to worry about on his plate, perhaps all these major problems can finally be fixed. What follows is an outline of the issues which I feel are in most serious need of redress given the current state of affairs when it comes to federal corrections.

1. We need an Office of the Correctional Investigator that has teeth (see Shook *et al*, 2017). This position must come with certain powers to intervene. As it is right now, all the OCI can do is document *Charter* violations and make recommendations as to why the system should stop violating people's rights.
2. We as a people must repeal all of the oppressive measures taken by the Harper regime (Prince, 2015) and replace them with more transparent, democratic, and humane ways. At the very, very least, return to the way things were before Stephen Harper's 'tough on crime' agenda (ibid).
3. We must stop looking to the United States for answers. They also lack the vision of progressive human rights that we do.
4. We must end the "other death penalty" (Hartman, 2013) in Canada (i.e. life sentences, including with consecutive periods of parole ineligibility). These are all simply obscuring and euphemistic ways of describing what is a much crueler form of sentencing people to death. This new form of death penalty must stop!
5. We as a country that claims to believe in rehabilitation must vastly improve prisoners' food, pay, education, training and opportunities for when they are released back into the public.

What do you think I will do for money if I am in prison for violent armed robberies and I am released after more than decade with no savings, no

training, no job opportunities, no new skills and just \$80.00 from my savings account, the shirt on my back, and the knowledge that nobody at CSC has helped me with anything? A better future is possible.

## REFERENCES

- Hartman, Kenneth (2013) *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough: An Anthology Published by the Other Death Penalty Project*, Lancaster: The Steering Committee Press.
- Prince, Michael J. (2015) "Prime Minister as Moral Crusader: Stephen Harper's Punitive Turn in Social Policy-making", *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 71: 53-69.
- Shook, Jarrod, Bridget McInnis, Justin Piché and Kevin Walby (eds.) (2017) Special Issue: Dialogue on the Canadian Penitentiary System and the Need for Penal Reform, *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, 26(1&2): 1-302.

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