

RESPONSE

Continuing the Dialogue on the Canadian Carceral State

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WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING AND WHO ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

This special issue of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* is the fourth installment in our “Dialogue on The Canadian Carceral State” – a vital thread in the ongoing insurrection of subjugated knowledge (Foucault, 1976) being led by Canadian prisoners. For over 30 years, the *JPP* has been a base from which, in the tradition of the penal press and prison writing (see Gaucher, 2002), prisoners themselves have leveraged their discursive power in collaboration with the academic community to communicate to a broader public (Piché *et al.*, 2014). As the writing of those who deployed their knowledge to this special issue exposes, the relation of forces that we find inscribed in ‘social’ institutions like the prison are effectively what Foucault (1976) described as another “form of unspoken warfare” (p. 16). Contributors to this collection are resisting the “war continued by other means” (Foucault, 1980 p. 90) that is being carried out against the criminalized and punished in the name of ‘justice’.

In the face of Foucault’s (1976, p. 16) rather grim prognosis that “the end result can only be the outcome of war”, which is to say a “contest of strength”, I remain optimistic that the strength of prisoners’ own writing and the arsenal of their own analyses can be the force that will, in the words of Joanne Mayhew (1988), “help halt the disastrous trend toward building more fortresses of fear, which”, as she had predicted, have “become in the 21st century this generations monuments to failure”. However, we have over two centuries of failed efforts at ‘reform’ behind us, which provides plenty of reason to be cynical.

The language of warfare might appear to be too strong in characterizing these relations of power/force which we find masquerading as ‘civil’, ‘humane’, and ‘just’ responses that CSC claims to “change lives and protect Canadians” (CSC, 2019) in the wake of criminalized acts. However, as the writers of the *JPP* past – and presently with this issue – reveal the intentionality behind punishment inflicted by government must be read in reference to the results (OCI, 2017, 2018); a strategically violent attack

inflicted upon both the body and soul (Foucault, 1977) of the individual (Scranton and McCulloch, 2009) and community (Lopez-Aguado, 2016).

In this moment of war, the writing and analysis of current and former prisoners must be brought into play (Foucault, 1977). The subjugated knowledge and expertise of prisoners, subaltern as it is, and located all too low on the hierarchy of who can know and what can be known (Foucault, 1976) must be deployed in the “insurrection” of thought and practice (Foucault, 1977) and mobilized as we struggle against, resist, and ideally abolish the moving targets of the carceral state (Piché and Larsen, 2010). *JPP* authors, many of them formerly or presently imprisoned know the Canadian carceral state and its intrusive technologies of power intimately. If, in the words of the late prison abolitionist Claire Culhane, we understand the prison fight as “the best fight in town” (Elliot, 2006) we must clarify both *what* we are fighting – the violence of the penal system and its capitalist roots (Culhane, 1999) – as well as *who* we are fighting with/for – those criminalized and subject to the violence of incarceration.

(IN)JUSTICE AND THE VIOLENCE BOUND UP WITH ITS PRACTICE

As noted in the introduction to this issue, this dialogue initially emerged out of the *Justice System Review* (Justice Canada, 2018), which tasked the former Liberal Minister of Justice with reviewing changes to the penal system during the Harper era to “ensure that we are increasing the safety of our communities, getting value for our money, addressing gaps, and ensuring that current provisions are aligned with the objectives of the criminal justice system” (ibid, p. 3). As the review had the potential to impact the daily lives of incarcerated people, we felt that prisoners’ participation was essential. In response to this we initiated a *Dialogue on the Canadian Penitentiary System* (Shook *et al.*, 2017), which we have since expanded into an ongoing *Dialogue on the Canadian Carceral State* (Piché and Walby, 2019). In the first installment of this dialogue we heard that federally incarcerated people were hopeful that the incoming Liberal government would reduce the use and pains of imprisonment, and amend or abolish many of the Harper era changes that produced more unlivable conditions in Canadian penitentiaries (Shook and McInnis, 2017). To say that we were disappointed with these results is an understatement.

In the opening pages of this issue we remember and pay our solemn respects to Josephine Pelletier, a contributor to the first issue of our dialogue. Josephine was an Indigenous woman who bravely brought her voice to bear and resist against the levers of power which ended her life in a disgraceful display of the Canadian carceral states monopoly on violence when she was tragically gunned down by the police (Birrel, 2018). Josephine's audacious indictment of Prime Minister Trudeau and the Government of Canada's 'promise' to Indigenous people (Pelletier, 2017) is an unacceptable reminder of what happens when inaction persists. In a disturbing plea for change, Josephine's writing viscerally communicated to *JPP* readers how it felt to be a "walking target on the streets and in every jail" that she had been in, as well as all the ways in which "discrimination and violence" impact "people like me" (ibid, p. 35) – the socially constructed *other*. Yet Josephine Pelletier also impelled her audience to read beyond the normalizing gaze of society and demanded that she also be seen as the multifaceted human that she was: "an Indigenous person, a woman, a mother, a citizen, a daughter, a prisoner, a sister, a friend" (ibid). Perhaps if the wider society and those who hold the levers of political power would have heeded this indictment, she might still be with us today.

Josephine Pelletier's preventable, untimely, and tragic death is an unforgivable example of the injustice that is bound up in the contest of strength between her and the state's 'legitimate' use of violence, yet another reprehensible inscription in the "monument to failure" (Mayhew, 1988) that is the Canadian carceral state. In remembering Josephine and honouring her contribution to Volume 26(1&2) of the *JPP*, it is time we take a second look at her bold critique of the Harper-led conservative government whom she took to task for the "punishment agenda" (Parkes, 2014) she and others endured under successive conservative governments from 2006-2015. Josephine called upon then newly elected Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to put his policy promises (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015) where his political practice is, instructing him to, "follow through on his promise to Indigenous peoples to seek out and do something about the root cause of this problematic factor that is killing my people every-day in and outside of prisons" (Pelletier, 2016, p. 36). Like the Canadian (in)justice system, these promises remain *broken*.

THE VIOLENT ARM OF THE STATE AND OTHER TECHNIQUES OF NEUTRALIZATION

If we are to pay respect to Josephine Pelletier and other casualties of this war that is being waged against the criminalized and punished we must not forget that the ‘criminal justice’ system is the most violent arm of the state wielded against its own citizens despite its obvious manifestation of dysfunction. It is for this reason that many of us are no longer very enthusiastic about the boundless supply and conveyor belt of inquiries (e.g. Arbour, 1996), reports (TFFSW, 1990) and recommendations (Independent Review of Ontario Corrections, 2017), which come across the assembly line of state responses whenever penal hegemony is threatened (Mathiesen, 1990) by the obscured, yet obvious failures of the prison (Foucault, 1977). After centuries of reformism, the novelty of officialdom has worn off. It is clear that these institutional responses can only be read as the official techniques of neutralization (Mathiesen, 1980). These political maneuvers deployed by the state and its army of social control agents are offensive tactics to neutralize external criticism and absorb/prevent any serious attempts to interrupt state efforts at “(re)producing the prison idea” (Piché, 2014). Upholding and rationalizing the further use of incarceration, the ‘prison idea’ is typically reproduced through three state tendencies: 1) state opacity, which prevents access to state records; 2) justifications, which are put forth by state officials to further rationalize the use of imprisonment; and 3) ambiguous statements, meant to underplay the impacts of their plans.

Whether to explore the contours of a prison riot (OCI, 2018), death(s) in custody (Scranton, 1986), human rights violations (Independent Review of Ontario Corrections, 2017), self-harm and suicidality (Arbour, 1990), debasing conditions of confinement (OCI, 2017), violence by or against guards and prisoners (OCI, 2018), or representation/racial-enclosure and discrimination of minority groups (Public Safety Canada, 1993), these documents are the surviving records of the prison’s monumental failure (Mayhew, 1988). Yet they are understood by a broader public, and even by many academics and policy advocates as an assurance of meaningful and necessary reform. What most often occurs, as analyzed by Mathiesen (1980), is that these administrative responses to the problem of prison tend towards extinguishing the outrage which is appropriately directed at

the levers of power who are responsible for maintaining such a debased institution, effectively diverting threats to penal hegemony.

THE EVER-EVOLVING PROBLEM OF *PRAXIS*: WHAT WE *THINK* AND WHAT WE *DO*

For those who have engaged in a close reading of the dialogue series thus far, a subtle yet significant discursive shift is likely perceptible. What began in our first installment of the dialogue in *JPP* Volume 26(1&2) and the more optimistically titled “Dialogue on Canada’s Federal Penitentiary System and the Need for Penal Reform” was revised in *JPP* 27(1) to become the “Dialogue on Canada’s Federal Penitentiary System”, and as of *JPP* 28(1) has now been retitled the “Dialogue on the Canadian Carceral State”. This semantic shift is reflective of an already present, but ever-growing cynicism held on the part of *JPP* dialogue contributors with respect to the outcomes of the Liberal’s promised review of “criminal justice laws, policies, and practices that were enacted during the 2006-2015 period” (Shook and McInnis, 2017, p. 269; Trudeau, 2015). It is also shaped by the perspective provided by *JPP* contributors who have drawn our attention to and remind us that the carceral logics and tactics that we locate within the prison are at once dispersed well throughout the social body, in spaces that we might fail to place within the scope of our resistance, like where immigration is concerned (Benslimane and Moffette, 2019).

More personally, this discursive amendment reflects an ongoing process of revision in my own thinking and a product of the intellectual/philosophical scaffolding that has been afforded to me across the course of my editorial work with the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, as well as the academic mentorship I have received as an undergraduate student of criminology and researcher. As both a prisoner and student/researcher of criminology, I find it increasingly difficult to resolve the contradiction that exists between the “adversely privileged” (Shook, 2013) knowledge that I have acquired through my education in CSC’s curriculum of discipline and punishment (Foucault, 1977) with the material and symbolic practices that I have engaged in to reform the prison. The problem of praxis reveals itself in the disharmony between what I *think* and what I *do*. I say this with my own “hard-earned” experience, both as an eight year old child entering the prison to visit my late father during the course of his near decade of incarceration

and now as an adult at the age of 34, having relinquished nearly 15 years of my own adult life to the prison's death-grip on my heart and mind. To this base of knowledge, I must also add the collective observations, insight, and analysis of *JPP* writers, past and present, who have undoubtedly influenced my thinking around criminalization and punishment, the carceral state, and what is to be done (Shook, 2018).

As I make progress in my academic journey and engage with new scholars and ideas in academia, my theoretical and analytic commitments have also shifted. In my first contribution to the *JPP*, I had carried out an independent qualitative study of double bunking in federal 'corrections' (Shook, 2013). Having experienced 23 hours a day locked inside a room the size of a bathroom with another man at the former Millhaven Maximum Security Assessment Unit (MAU) and a more tempered version of the same practice at Collins Bay Medium Security Institution (CBI), I had believed, naïvely, that if a strong enough case could be formulated to show how harmful this practice was that it could easily be changed. I was of the erroneous belief that surely the Government of Canada could not ignore the official criticism and recommendations being made by the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI, 2015), nor that of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (Ferguson, 2013), or the position of a wide contingent of critical scholars in the academy (Reiter, 2015). Idealistic as I was at the time, I truly thought that all it would take was a coherent argument and reasonable appeal made with the appropriate references to support my claims (including the qualitative data I collected from the twenty prisoners I surveyed) to those who held the levers of political power and this practice would be reformed, if not abolished. I was patently wrong, as federally incarcerated persons continue to be double bunked despite the large body of evidence identifying the practice as harmful (Reiter, 2015).

I was also wrong in my analysis of the situation when the Conservative government began deducting a 30% food and accommodation tax (Anonymous Prisoners – Mission Institution, 2016) from the already meager wages that prisoners were receiving for the work that they carry out in prisons that contributes to the operation and maintenance of the prison (Convict, 2016). This policy was maintained even as prisoners across Canada engaged in a three-week work-strike (Brosnahan, 2013). I was wrong to think that as enthusiasm for the work-strike seemed to fade that it would be wise to invest myself (and also persuade others to engage) in a

lengthy process of administrative (internal grievances) and legal challenges that would regrettably siphon much of the residual enthusiasm and support for direct action on the part of prisoners. These efforts ultimately took nearly five years to be heard in court (CBC, 2018), only to read in the judges dismissive reasons for decision of our action that the “court is not sitting to consider the wisdom of the policy decisions made by the government”. We recently took this decision to the federal court of appeal where it was once again rejected on the grounds that prison labour is considered a “programme”, hence a justification for such low pay, affirming the lower court decision that prisoners are not entitled to the designation of being in an “employee-employer” relationship with CSC.

The point I am trying to make is that I have gathered enough knowledge and wherewithal to confidently say that I am now in agreement with the thought of Mathiesen (1980) and others who hold the position that reports, inquiries, recommendations, and all strategies that appear to address the harms inherent in incarceration without addressing where the true problem lies (imprisonment) are not only misplaced, but misguided. Such practices ultimately legitimate state authority, by appearing to ‘address’ harms that are in fact being reproduced through exercises in penal reform, thus investing the very power being contested with consent to continue carrying out carceral “business as usual” (Cohen, 1985, p. 39).

As confined people cannot wait for prisons to be abolished to see the deplorable conditions of confinement that they live within addressed, a tension therefore lies between reforms which reduce the harms inherent in incarceration and the goal of the eventual abolition of the carceral system. To reconcile this tension, which has been described by some scholars as the conflict between abolition and reform (Ben-Moshe, 2014), I find it useful to employ Mathiesen (1980)’s notion of “non-reformist reforms”. Here, Mathiesen argues that the criteria by which we ought to measure the results of our efforts, particularly if they are reformist, is that they be “of the negative kind”, which is to say that they have the effect of “negating the basic structure of the prison” (Mathiesen, 1990, p. 82), rather than consolidating its power to punish any further.

Needless to say, unpacking Mathiesen’s theoretical framework is beyond the scope of this *Response*, however, the crux of the matter is that we must continuously evaluate our efforts to challenge the material

and symbolic foundation of the prison by determining with some degree of confidence in advance, that we are “tearing that structure down rather than consolidating it” (ibid). In identifying such reforms, which reduce the harms of incarceration while reducing the reach of the system we may ask ourselves: Does this reform reduce the scope of the carceral system? Does the reform reject the notion that prison is an acceptable response to social conflicts and harms? Does the reform involve divesting in carceral initiatives, while reinvesting in community-based responses? If so, such responses are considered non-reformist reforms. Examples of such initiatives include prison population reduction reforms, right to organize reforms, community-based transformative justice initiatives, and diversion and decarceration measures that do not reproduce carceral logics and practices themselves.

With this in mind, I would also argue that we should not allow our cynicism to justify apathy, nor dissuade us from acting strategically to influence the political processes that shape the laws, policies, and practices that govern the lives of the criminalized and punished. We cannot waste opportunities to create space for changes that have the capacity to result in immediate improvements in the living and working conditions of those who are currently incarcerated. Placing more power in the hands of prisoners to resist and/or challenge penal hegemony as we chip away at the idea of imprisonment as a natural response to the complex harms that are currently criminalized and punished is always a win. As written elsewhere (see Shook, 2018), although not all prisoners analyze their concrete experiences of punishment in reference to the more abstracted and theoretical claims of an abolitionist philosophical framework and stance as argued in the introduction of this paper, prisoners’ first-hand experiences and analysis are integral to the movement (see Gaucher in Piché *et al.*, 2019, p. 309).

What we have then, are two principles that ought to validate our efforts, these being 1) intentioned structural negation of the prison (Mathiesen, 2015) that is 2) driven by the knowledge and expertise of the criminalized and punished (Mayhew, 1988). In the context of this special issue of the *JPP*, with a new government in place we have before us an opportunity to affirm these commitments and carry on the discussion which commenced as the “Dialogue on Canada’s Federal Penitentiary System and the Need for Penal Reform” and has now evolved into the “Dialogue on the Canadian Carceral State”.

THE MONOTONOUS CRITIQUE OF THE PRISON

In expanding the scope of the dialogue we can take one small step towards reconciling the optimism that initially guided our efforts to influence the political processes that shape(d) the creation of penal laws, policies, and practices with the cynicism that has emerged in response to the Liberal promise of “sunny ways” that did not even peek through the dark cloud and stormy weather that contributors to *JPP* Volume 26(1&2) had hoped it would. I am reminded here of the cautious optimism expressed by *JPP* author Daniel W. Threinen (2017, p. 74) who has/had good reason to remain circumspect with these efforts:

What really perturbs me about initiatives such as this collection is that a lot is said, but very little seems to come of it. You can publish in whatever journal you wish, but politicians do not read journals. I personally have been in this penitentiary system for 40 plus years without release and have engaged in several “studies” of various types concerning incarceration. I have yet to see any of them bare any fruit. But having said that and being the optimist that I am, I must go by the adage, “nothing ventured, nothing gained”.

It remains to be seen whether anything has been “gained” with the venture of our efforts. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Liberal government has brought before Parliament several bills, which pertain to the penal system (see Speight *et al.*, this issue). As discussed in the introduction to this special issue, the Trudeau Liberals also consulted ‘widely’ with stakeholders as they purport(ed) to transform the penal system after a decade of a Harper-led Conservative punishment agenda deepened the affirmation of punishment in the name of denunciation, deterrence, and incapacitation (Parkes, 2014). Further, the Senate Committee on Human Rights in Prison also continues its study of the federal prison system (Senate Canada, 2018), releasing its interim report in February 2019. Yet once again, as this special issue of the *JPP* demonstrates (along with past installments of this dialogue), the promises of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have left federally incarcerated people seeking a little less conversation and a lot more action (Shook, 2018).

Despite the Liberal's efforts to make meaningful change to the penal system through the *Justice System Review* (Justice, 2018), promises of evidence-based policy in their 2015 election platform (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015) and proposed 'innovations' to the prison system in CSC annual plans (Correctional Services Canada, 2019) were tired at best and disingenuous to say the least. Once again, the "monotonous critique of the prison" (Foucault, 1977, p. 268) has manifested itself as the political plaything of yet another government which would prefer to shelter itself against the banality of criticism from its opposition, privileging political optics over its promised platform (Shook, 2018). I borrow once again the discursive tools of Foucault in identifying the Liberal government, as "monotonous" in their critique. The droning and colourless interim results of the Senate's latest study on the human rights of federal prisoners have revealed that:

...access to health care is inadequate, admission to gradual and structured release is insufficient, correctional programming is deficient, conditions of confinement are poor, access to remedial measures is lacking and quality and quantity of food is severely sub-standard (Senate of Canada, 2018, pp. 8-9).

It would appear to be the case that the *scandalous truth* of how "CSC policies often discriminate against Indigeneity, race, gender, disability, mental health, ethnicity, religion, age, language, sexual orientation and gender identity" have also come to the surface in their study (ibid, p. 9), as did the fact that "those who are women, Indigenous, Black and racialized, have difficulty accessing culturally relevant rehabilitative programming". Given the historical record on government-led "fact finding missions", the fact is, that these interim findings, as well as those the Senate Committee hopes to gather as it prepares its final report – which includes obtaining "more information on marginalised and vulnerable groups, international standards, solitary confinement, access to justice as well as rehabilitation and reintegration" (ibid) – will more than likely go no further towards ending the Canadian carceral fiasco than the documents currently being stored by Library and Archives Canada.

A RESILIENT FIASCO: THE HISTORICAL RECORD REPEATS ITSELF

The foundation for the Senate’s special committee on the human rights of prisoners is laid by its recognition that CSC “has been criticized in numerous public reports for failing to uphold the human rights of federally-sentenced persons” (ibid, p. 11). The sheer volume and regularity with which these more contemporary public reports are produced – like those promulgated annually by the Office of the Correctional Investigator (e.g. OCI, 2017, 2018) – is such that they have become cliché as scholarly reference points and even their less mundane systematic investigations (Zinger, 2016), case studies (Zinger, 2017) and strategic planning exercises (OCI, 2019) they never cease to say the same thing – the prison is a failure according to its own purposes (Mathiesen, 2015).

The resilient fiasco (Mathiesen, 1990) that is the prison is also made obvious by the historical record of official criticism that has been concentrated upon the Canadian penal system and is now about as long (or longer) than the consecutive life sentences being handed out by the courts in the aftermath of the former Conservative government’s decision to Americanize Canadian sentencing practices (Zinger, 2016), with increased budgets for the penal system, prison expansion, and an overall increase in the reliance on incarceration as a catchall response to social conflicts and harms. This “deep history” of Canadian prisons is described by Jackson and Stewart (2009, p. 161) as one “that deserves careful consideration”. Not to detract from Jackson and Stewart (2009), but the “succession of royal commissions”, as well as “commissions of inquiry” and “government task forces” that are contained within the historical record merely re-iterate *ad nauseum* the “monotonous critique” described above (Sayer, 1994). Such “historical perspectives” date back to the now decommissioned Kingston Penitentiary (KP) prior to confederation (Jackson and Stewart, 2009, p. 12). Thirteen miserable years after it opened, an 1848 “commission to investigate certain complaints” at KP was ordered “with a view to making constructive recommendations concerning that institution” (Archambault, 1938, p. 1). This was followed with an 1876 commission which was appointed by a then decade young nation state to “report on prison labour and the remuneration of officers in Canadian penal institutions” (ibid). In 1913, another commission was struck to “investigate, and report upon the

conduct and administration of penitentiaries, and particularly the conduct of officers of Kingston Penitentiary” (ibid). Just seven years after that commission a committee was “appointed by the Minister of Justice, under the Penitentiary Act, to consider and advise in regard to a general revision of the penitentiary regulations” (ibid). The 1913 commission and 1920 committee would ultimately serve as the foundation to the more widely acknowledged and colloquially designated “Archambault Report” (1938), which was officially titled the *Royal Commission Report on Penal Reform in Canada* and is commonly understood among the progressive wing of the ‘justice’ system as a key document towards prison reform in Canada.

With nauseating semblance to the scope of the on-going Senate Study on the Human Rights of Federally-Sentenced Persons, the 1938 Archambault report was mandated to “inquire into and report upon” such matters as the “treatment of convicted persons in the penitentiaries”, “classification of offenders”, “organization of penal departments”, “treatment to be accorded to the different classes of offenders”, “reformatory and rehabilitative treatment”, “employment of prisoners”, “prison labour”, “remuneration”, “the study of international standard minimum rules”, and the “conditional release of prisoners” (Archambault, 1938, p. v). To qualify the exhausted and cynical stance which I have adopted with respect to the “interim results” of the most recent “fact finding mission”, let us return again to the sagacious interim discoveries of Senate Committee described above as a result of its investigation thus far, which included 22 meetings and 92 witnesses, “including formerly incarcerated persons, federal correctional officials, Agents of Parliament, Indigenous organizations, academics, lawyers, civil society and union representatives”, as well as 15 visits to federal penitentiaries in Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada (Senate Committee, 2019, p. 11). The familiar findings of the committee, described in the previous section, should have us all asking when such exercises identifying carceral problems will translate into sustained efforts to find non-carceral solutions so that another future becomes possible, rather than a future that resembles the past in many ways.

A LOT MORE ACTION?

In a past issue of this dialogue (Shook, 2018), I challenged the former Justice Minister’s claim that “systemic change cannot be completed in one

mandate” (Justice Canada, 2018, p. 3), citing the substantial changes to the penal system pushed through during the Harper-Conservative government’s first term. As I reviewed the Liberal’s 2019 election platform I searched for the “transformative” reforms to the penal system promised by the Ministry in the *Justice System Review*, but unfortunately, they were nowhere to be found. It appears that, despite the hope that a Liberal government would “take seriously the voices of prisoners” (Shook, 2018, p. 70), few concrete changes have been promised to the conditions which dictate their daily lives. In fact, contributors to this issue made many of the same recommendations that those in the first issue of our dialogue put forth, demonstrating the Liberal government’s inaction on delivering the “real change” they had promised to people behind bars (Trudeau, 2015). Looking ‘forward’ to the current minority government, perhaps the Liberals will collaborate with Members of Parliament from the NDP, Green Party, and Bloc Québécois to reduce the use and pains of imprisonment to the degree possible. In the meantime, the war by other means (Foucault, 1976) rages on in the Canadian Carceral state.

Over the course of this paper, I have sought to illuminate the abject failure of Senate reports, Royal Commissions, and task forces to grasp the root of where the key problem of the carceral system lies – punitive responses to social conflicts and harms. In light of the perpetual onslaught of reports demonstrating the federal government’s failure to ‘deliver real change’ or to ‘discover’ anything other than the conditions prisoners themselves have identified for decades, it is apparent that the previous Liberal government has failed to take seriously the voices of prisoners. Although this is a reason for some to be disappointed, distressed, and dissatisfied, the strength of prisoner writing and the arsenal of their analysis affirms that another alternative future is possible and remains worth fighting for. In imagining other (de-carceral) futures, the move away from a punitive system must involve the voices and leadership of those who have experienced the violence of incarceration. Prisoners in current and past issues of this dialogue have produced a list of reasonable recommendations that clear the path for such a future including the restoration of accelerated parole review, access to community provided mental health services, expanded gradual release opportunities, reduced use of conditional release conditions unrelated to the charges a person was sentenced for, and the decreased use of imprisonment in response to social conflicts and harms. These non-reformist reforms called for by those held

in Canadian prisons would allow for the attrition – which is to say gradual reduction – of the use and pains of imprisonment until sites of confinement cease to exist.

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