

Where is the Accountability?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Derek Mills is Cree from Waterhen Lake First Nation, Treaty 6, in the area now known as Saskatchewan, Canada.

WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON

I have come to realize that the general Canadian public has no real idea about just how blind they keep us in prison. I am not some noble person, but I do work on myself and try to better my life. Although, trying to improve my life circumstances is actually what got me in prison to begin with.

It seems these days in prison they judge rehabilitation on how much you curry favour with correctional guards and parole officers. I have completed my correctional plan twice over, but I am still told that I am not motivated to complete my correctional plan and continue to be designated as maximum security. I first completed all of the non-Aboriginal programs and then all of the same programs in an Aboriginal theme. My parole officers tell me that I am not using the program skills. I have done everything they asked of me and yet I am still in maximum security.

If I file a grievance, they are ignored, and I am told to bring the matters to court. It is hard and expensive hiring a lawyer on \$5.75 per day, and that is my pay before the deductions for room and board. We work at least 5-6 hours and receive about 70 cents an hour. In addition to this, it is mostly people in prison who keep the system going by cooking, cleaning, and doing the maintenance and textile work among other forms of labour. The little pay and prison labour saves the government money that is then spent on more security and wages for staff. Prison is the new Indian Agent and this is an Indian industry.

The prison system works just the same as the child welfare system that took me from my family and band at the age three where I experienced every sort of abuse. The prison system is just the same as the Indian Agent that took my parents. There needs to be an in-depth look into the system and its systemic colonialism and ongoing racism – a racism that is hidden behind a veil of hating “criminals”.

Do not believe what you hear about the gangs and how it is much more difficult for the guards to manage. Before the so-called “Indian gangs” the

only few to stand up against the guards were the Indigenous prisoners who fought for basic human and spiritual rights. The so-called gang epidemic was the result of dividing us and pitting us against each other, where bonding was the only option for protection and giving the new Indian Agent unfettered control. Divide and conquer is a common colonial tactic. Some gangs were even formed under the roof of Corrections as a result.

I have written letters to groups, universities, colleges, lawyers and professors for over 20 years trying to get help or someone to look at my case. On the streets since I was about 14 years old, I was stealing to survive. At first, it was to survive as a runaway sleeping under bridges and building stairwells, but then it became a way of life and a means to support a drug habit and to just live. I am not proud, but I had few choices.

They keep us blind in here and if you have no one outside, you have nothing. I know the system well. The real system, not the propaganda system that is on paper – and I know what is really going on.