

PRISONERS' STRUGGLES

Agenda: Broken Corrections

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I am a prisoner in the care of Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) and have been incarcerated for around a quarter century. I have to ask all government parties, when is corrections going to be a priority on the country's agenda? In the past many years, it has become apparent that the federal penitentiary system is broken and it is time to fix it.

What is CSC and whom does it adhere to? Is it the public? Is it the weak and disadvantaged? What is it meant for and how are its goals achieved? I have the privilege of saying to the public that CSC is a broken branch of the government and is no longer a public service. It has blossomed into an entity run like a business by the culprits responsible for your taxes being changed into a commodity.

What is CSC's purpose? Is it rehabilitation? Is it incapacitation? Can anyone determine what the functions of corrections are? If so, it is time for all political parties to look into what it is and how the tax dollars of the Canadian people are being spent. Is the public ready to hear the truth about whose pockets are being filled?

As a prisoner, I need to first off relay to the general public is that rehabilitation is not offered here in Correctional Services of Canada, specifically in Mission Institution as a whole, including both medium and minimum facilities. Rehabilitation is something that a prisoner has to pursue on their own accord and grasp on their own terms.

Let me introduce myself. I am a Native American prisoner sentenced to a term of 20 years-to-life for second degree murder. I have no sex offences and no drug offences. I am an American citizen awaiting deportation to the United States.

I have completed every program that I was allowed to take. I say that because I cannot take the sex offender program as I am not a sex offender. I did apply to do the drug program but that only lasted a day because it was discovered that I was not into the drug scene and was not involved in a drug related incident. I was removed because it was not required for me to take such a program. I wanted to take the program just to learn something, but I was denied. I have never been drunk in my life and that is, thankfully, to the environment in which I grew up. I have taken many courses and gained

many learning tools to help occupy my mind to learn and grow as a person. I have also learned that somewhere in a sentence, I had to grow up and take responsibility for my crime and do something about it.

What did I do? It took a while, but I finally grew up and realized that I can sit pouting, simmer in anger, and wallow in my own self-pity, or I can put aside that negative mindset and do something productive with my time. Let me just say, I am no angel, and I have a past in the United States. Upon completion of my sentence, I was/am supposed to be deported to California, as I have a warrant out for parole violation there.

In my years in prison, I have completed my correctional plan, did the Integrated Correctional Program Model (ICPM) maintenance three times and was told I needed some improvement (life lesson). I also completed many other programs and university courses. I am self-taught in the craft of plumbing since no one was around to teach me so I took it upon myself to read and learn it anyway because it is something I enjoy. I was told that I never learned anything. Does this writer seem to be unintelligent to you? Life living needs some improvement every day in our society.

I have been in Mission medium facility for almost a decade and I have noticed something more and more: no one is getting released and no one is really moving on to minimum or really anywhere for that matter. The programs that are offered are also not helping in anyway, except that it is money allotted to use on a reason to cover someone's ass.

The Parole Board of Canada and the parole system more broadly is broken. It is set up for one thing only and that is failure. A prisoner should not be sent back to prison because of how they dress or if they are having a bad hair day, or for just not looking right in the eyes of a parole officer. Unless the person is committing a crime, they should not be sent back. It is one thing to be drunk or something like that, but it is another to just be a few minutes late to a halfway house because someone said something that is untrue. There has to be something in place to protect the individual as a person with their act together.

It is increasingly difficult to get jobs nowadays. For the establishment to keep violating criminalized people and sending them back to prison because it can is not at all reflective of an institute that is rehabilitative in nature. Rather, it is punitive in nature and to show I know what I am talking about, if anyone can do a survey on CSC, you will notice that from roughly

September/October every year, the incarcerated/returned are at a higher rate as it is funding time, and the release rate is high during the months of April/May once the annual budget is approved.

CSC fills the beds in the fall, particularly before they must submit the budget for the following March, as they get funding for filling all the beds with prisoners. Parole violators are the simplest to incarcerate and easier to justify as there is no official oversight body that really looks in that direction. No one is watching.

The following spring prisoners are then released and all that money meant to fulfill its duties of accommodating the prisoners is allocated somewhere else, as there is now no one in the beds. Staff members can instead have a new desk or computer in their office or nice chairs. Either way, the funding is spent on something for a staff member to enjoy, while prisoners are left to survive on their own.

The meal system is the same. The cook-chill program was invented for someone to find a way to embezzle money from the public and give prisoners the least amount of nourishing sustenance possible. In doing so, it has become obvious that what was meant to be a money saving business turned into a lucrative money maker for corporations in the culinary business. The meals are now the least tasteful that they have ever been. The cook-chill program took a good quality learning opportunity from those whom would have benefitted from actually learning the culinary arts. Just because a prisoners may not be learning in the actual classroom does not mean they are not allowed to or unable to learn a trade by taking it upon themselves to study and learn the craft. It provided a chance to take up their own initiative and make themselves feel like they had accomplished something on their own.

I am not bashing CSC. I am just stating factual issues that have been ignored for far too long. It is time for the Canadian government to step up and make the necessary changes. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's roadmap is still the compass directing our road today when it comes to corrections and I believe it is the wrong road for our industrialized society of today to follow.

What is rehabilitation? What is required of a prisoner to be declared in that status of recovery? There is no such status as rehabilitation is not a recognized function of corrections, as those released by either the Parole Board of Canada or on statutory release are more likely to be returned to

prison, as this system has created a revolving commodity. Corrections is no longer a viable institution of corrective measures and has grown into a branch of the Canadian government whose jurisdiction is in justification.

From my vantage point, it is not about releasing prisoners who are the most likely to never return. It is about identifying who we think we can release, assured that they will return and thus keep the business going. How we can justify their return and allow our employees to be driving the best cars or having the best equipment in our arsenal, thus not encouraging prisoners to be productive members of a community near you. We want them returned.

This is not an assumption. This is factual data and needs to be looked into by the community watchdogs, as CSC more often than not does not listen to the Office of the Correctional Investigator. I actually believe some of the investigators themselves like the fact that they get a free paid trip to beautiful British Columbia. They are not actual watchdogs as they get their piece of the pie too. In my years of incarceration, I have seen that no one knows what is happening inside the prisons they are running, no one knows what the other department is doing, and certainly no one is accountable within the institutions funded by the Canadian government.

Today, CSC is a broken branch of the Government of Canada that cannot be fixed and needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. Please keep in mind again that, although it may seem like I am bashing the CSC, this is not my intention. I am not the most literate prisoner, but I do have the mentality of a convict. My honour is my word, about which I am being truthful.

Attacking a prisoner with mentally abusive behaviour is not the way correctional services of today is supposed to be functioning. As a prisoner, I am supposed to recognize why I am here, repent, and grow into a law abiding individual who upholds community morals and ideologies. This is not something I was taught. It was something I took from my own personal beliefs to bring about a proper change within myself and did something to see to it that I grew up within the parameters of what is expected.

I am 60 years old now. I am an old man with nothing to look forward to in my future but death – that is how I feel and it is a reality that I have to accept. I have done more than expected in order to not only repent for having taken a life, but I also opened doors to allow me to prevent others from doing the same kind of damage I have done.

The world has changed, the prisoners have changed, and CSC has waned into complete ignorance of what should be today in yesterday's society.

I have done my own research into accountability and mentally abusive behaviour. I came to realize that my captors are supposed to emulate positive behaviour and teach prisoners how to return into communities as responsible adult individuals, and boy, is society not in for a surprise.

These kids have come into the system and they have no idea of what it is they are supposed to learn, considering that is all they talk about is feelings in programs, but they also need to learn skills in order to be productive members of today's society. The only thing they are learning is to bully and take for their own survival, and it has blossomed out into communities near you. We are not talking about repentant individuals, rather we are talking about the individuals who take programs because just it is what they need to get out, so they can get their next fix, brag about why they were incarcerated or whom they victimized.

CSC has failed to come to terms that society today has expanded its expectations of what it is expected to achieve in its facilities. They have ignored those whom have demonstrated in actuality the changes that I am sure most of Canadian society would love to see for incarcerated individuals.

What have today's prisoners learned in today's prisons? I have seen rehabilitation go ass backwards. I seem to stay out of trouble. Please remember, I am in a prison. Treat it like a war zone with a kill or be killed attitude. Sometimes, even at my age, every few years I have to step up and fight some stupid kid, as they seem to think they can bully me or someone of either a small stature or of old age. It seems to be that those who are an average age of 30 years or younger behave this way more often, while those who are of 50 years plus are the least problematic.

If a prisoner is doing good or staying out of trouble, they are treated as if they must be up to no good, and are punished more so than say a guy caught with a needle in his arm and a cellphone. Corrections has taught prisoners such as myself that no matter what actually happened, if a staff member says you did something, whether or not it is actually true, it becomes truth. It is not about guilt or innocence, it is about probability. It is often assumed that prisoners are always the ones trying to manipulate or fabricate, but it happens more so amongst the staff of Correctional Services of Canada. Somehow, opinions turn into facts and there is nothing a prisoner can do to contest the fabrications, because fiction has become fact in the eyes of Correctional Service of Canada. They tell us to be accountable for our actions and, when you are, you are neither sincere enough or do not show enough empathy or remorse. However, sadly, some of us were just taught to

hold those feelings deep inside, as we too were once a victim of some priest or counsellor. To hold that against us is another story all together.

I am Native American. I too was taken from my home in the United States. I too was in our own form of residential schools. I too was abused and forgotten and thrown away to the wolves. I too was taught many things that I am told is wrong in today's society, yet I am a product of what my government wanted me to be.

I was taken from my home at five years old. My mother tried to kill herself and I was placed in a home for kids in Skillman, New Jersey while my mother was across the street in the mental hospital. We were allowed a supervised visit once a week. My mother and I ate the same food, as it was trucked over from the mental hospital to the home for kids.

I was beaten and molested many times by either a priest or counsellor. I need someone to keep in mind that corrections said I was a problem child, that I was being bad. This is stated in the reports and my reply is how much trouble could I have possibly been at the tender age of five years old. I just lost my whole family, including my beloved mother, in one scoop and it was apparently my fault, as a child, that I was emotionally torn apart and had no idea what was going on or what had really happened.

I am to blame, they say. How shameful of CSC to write such a report and use it to retain me further in their system. I say to you, Joe Public, I only became criminal because I was forced to learn to rely on my survival instinct and use it to protect myself.

I am told by the Parole Board of Canada that the empathy and emotions expressed in my explanations are an insufficient farce. Apparently, I did not show enough empathy or emotions. I remember two priests punishing me for some reason when I was 10 years old, forcing me to pluck thorn bushes with my bare hands. I only remember the pain and my bloody hands, but I endured and shed no tears. It was just before that incident that I decided I would no longer show them any emotion. I would not give them the satisfaction.

For a period of time just before the thorn bush experience, I was being molested at least once a week by a counsellor. I reported it to someone and all they did was call in the counsellor who, of course, denied it. The molesting not only continued, but became more frequent.

Am I sorry if I am a bit bitter and learned how to withhold any feelings or emotions? Am I wrong, a liar, and at fault? I was in a visit with an ex-wife once, and a guard was walking in the direction of our table. Even though I really was not doing anything wrong or illegal, I felt guilty just because I

had been conditioned to feel that way. My wife pointed out the look on my face, and I felt so ashamed and defeated. Bitterness is not who I am. What I have done is I matured and grown up. I follow the culture and hold it close to my heart – it is because of my culture that I am still here today. There were many times in the past that I wanted to just fade away and die.

I have been in Mission medium for over nine years and I have been approached twice by new institutional parole officers saying, “Oh, we have to try to get you to minimum security”. They come back a few days later only to say, “Sorry, there is nothing we can do for you”.

I actually applied for access to Medical Assistance in Dying. CSC has dangled a carrot in front of me for a quarter century, and I am mentally and emotionally exhausted. During my last parole hearing, I told the Parole Board of Canada that if there is no hope for me and I am never getting out of prison, I would respect it so much more if someone would tell me upfront. At the end of my hearing, after the recorder was turned off, one member told me I can read between the lines to answer my question. That is when I actually gave up trying to get out, and now I accept and pray for my death to happen sooner rather than later.

I have put in for a transfer to Beaver Creek medium (Fenbrook) and I am accepted. I am still, however, looking at considering medically assisted dying in the future. My only purpose, as I write these words, is to die in prison and, as such, I now believe the only dignity I have left is in choosing when and how I will die in here.

So, for those who never wonder what happens on the inside with regard to CSC, I can tell you that it has further destroyed every emotion I ever tried to experience. CSC penitentiaries are residential schools, just hidden by a different name, but operating with same purpose and perpetuating the same discrimination and violent actions against people. It has been established that those of us at Mission Institution were hit hardest by the COVID-19 outbreak and the pandemic continues to be running this place. Almost two years later, we are still feeling the effect. I have mentioned, I am Native American and I am also a Pipe Carrier.

On 5 May 2020, my cell door was opened and the Indigenous Liaison Officer stood in the doorway to say, “Sorry, Mr. Hammond, your sister passed away”, and then closed the door. It happened so fast that it took me a few minutes to grasp what he had said. So I had to bang on my door and,

when he returned, I had to ask “which sister”. He did not know. It took me four days to find out which sister of mine had passed away and that she had died due to COVID-19 in New Jersey. We were in complete isolation ourselves and had been since 2 April 2020. There are still modifications to operations in effect to this day. Anyway, I figured since I am a Pipe Carrier and isolated, there should be no reason for me not to conduct a pipe ceremony in my cell.

I had placed many requests beforehand. I was told that now was not the time to do a pipe ceremony and no one wanted to give me tobacco. It was a full year later that I conducted such a ceremony. I filed a civil suit because I was denied access to the spiritual practices of my culture, and yet the Catholic Chaplain can take his followers into the chapel by cohort.

What has transpired in the past has left me spiritually broken until this very day. The only hope I had was with a lawyer, Julia Riddle, and she allowed me to be human again and helped in preparing a lawsuit, but today it is a waiting game. So, to say I have no emotions or empathy, or that I am not human, why allow me to live if you only expect me to die?

It is a fact that CSC is broken. Does this writer seem unbalanced or untrue? I am just a human being, treated without any dignity or extended any empathy. I am an incarcerated commodity. Slavery was supposed to have been outlawed, but prisons are instead a hidden residential school for those who the government wants to hide. CSC gets paid for hiding what its actual purpose is. They are pulling authoritarian stunts and getting away with it.

Look, I can ramble and I could point fingers, but I take responsibility for my actions. I take responsibility for taking a life. I take responsibility for hurting many families and my community as a whole. I offer my life and accept why CSC will not allow me to be accountable. What does it matter? I give my life and it is over.

Rehabilitation is a figment of our imagination that no longer has a place in the process of corrections. Corrections is broken and a complete failure. It is no longer a viable branch of the Government of Canada. It is time to rebuild it from the ground up and take a stance, as former prisoners are coming to communities near you in the future and a number of them have nothing but confusion on their minds.

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