

Foreword

During the last decade in Canada there has been an accelerating incidence in the number of convictions for crime. Between 1974 and 1978 there was an increase of more than 17 per cent in the rate of Criminal Code offences, and more than 10 per cent in the rate of crimes of violence. Nearly 138,972 violent crimes took place in Canada in 1978.¹

There has also been an alarming increase in violent juvenile delinquency. In 1974, 6,908 juveniles were apprehended by law enforcement officials for offences against the person while in 1978, 10,227 were apprehended. Even more disturbing than the absolute number of young people apprehended for acts of violence is that the rate of apprehensions increased by an even larger amount, 60.7 per cent, from 155 to 249 per 100,000 juveniles.²

Recent enlightened efforts to reform offenders and reintegrate them into society, rather than merely punish them, have not produced encouraging results. Eighty per cent of persons admitted to federal institutions have been previously convicted.³ Our prison population continues to grow in spite of improved training programs, psychiatric treatment, counselling services and more permissive granting of paroles. In April 1980, 9,324 men and women were inside federal penitentiaries.⁴ Each year more and more young offenders swell the ranks of the old convicts who have been incarcerated again and again.

Although new prisons are being built, provincial jails and federal penitentiaries are still overcrowded. Consequently, there is still inadequate segregation of different kinds of offenders in spite of the recommendations by a series of Commissions and submissions by informed criminologists. Our training schools and alternative institutions are full of children and young people, many of whom will be the adult offenders of tomorrow.⁵ In May 1980 there were 129 youths, 18 years of age and under, in federal penitentiaries.⁶ In addition, many more, possibly as many as 7,000 were incarcerated in adult provincial prisons as recently as 1977.⁷ No figures later than 1973 are available for the number of juvenile offenders who are in training schools, foster homes, or being supervised by provincial probationary services. Those in training schools however represent only a fraction of the young people in trouble with the law. Most are not placed in institutions.⁸

Crimes of violence are a source of great suffering to many individuals and their families, and pose a threat to the stability of our society. They also involve a tremendous financial burden. The cost of building and operating prisons and penitentiaries has become a serious charge on the taxpayer. The cost of operating expenses incurred in a federal institution is an average of \$25,000 a year per inmate.⁹ In 1977/78 the total cost of operating federal penitentiaries amounted to \$295,526,000.¹⁰ In 1977/78 it cost the provinces approximately \$600,000¹¹