

a particular group of people and say to them, "The law falls upon you so heavily; the law demands that so many of your people go to jail that we have found it necessary to take extraordinary steps to ensure that there should be representation on the Parole Board of someone from the general grouping of people we call native Indians in order that full and proper consideration be given to applications by native people who happen to be in penitentiaries or provincial jails over which the National Parole Board has jurisdiction."

I have some statistics here with application to federal penitentiaries in western Canada. I do not know whether those who compiled them were talking only in terms of native Indian people registered in band lists, or whether they were talking in terms of both registered band Indians and non-status or Metis people. I am inclined to think the former. But the statistical analysis of the numbers of people in federal prisons in western Canada indicates that the range of native peoples in relation to total inmate population is around 25 to 30 per cent. In some of the provincial jails the percentage is much higher—up to 80 per cent, I have heard, in some areas.

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People of Indian origin in jail do not receive the same kind of equitable consideration in the matter of parole applications as the non-Indian population. Not too long ago a survey was conducted in the Matsqui institution, a federal prison in British Columbia. On the question of day parole—that is to say, inmates released for one day over an extended period of time—although I do not have the figures immediately available to me, they are in my office, the native Indian people who applied for day parole received parole to a much lesser extent per ratio of population than the non-Indian people in Matsqui. In other words, if you were white and applied for day parole, your chances were good; if you were Indian, the chances were good that you would be turned down. The same statistics apply to temporary absences from that institution; the white inmate population got the advantages, the favourable consideration, whereas the number of successful native Indian applicants was much less per capita.

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): That is in your province?

Mr. Howard: Yes, in Matsqui institution in the Fraser Valley. I am talking about a particular survey made over a period of time. In so far as paroles were concerned as distinct from day paroles, the same situation prevailed; the white inmate population, or non-Indian population, at Matsqui received better consideration and treatment than the Indian inmates.

I do not know what the case is at Prince Albert, where the inmate population in the Saskatchewan penitentiary is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 40 to 50 per cent, but I am inclined to think that the same situation prevails because it is the same Parole Board that deals with parole applications and with day parole applications, and I cannot see why they would favour one group in one institution and not favour the same group in another. There is a universal application of the parole criteria.

Parole Act

Some of the reasons given for this, apart from what I consider to be a general lack of understanding on the part of penitentiary administrators and Parole Board officials of native Indian feelings, their home life and culture, in their assessment of the rehabilitative possibilities of Indians I think are fairly scant. But there are other factors that the Parole Board take into consideration. One is home environment. If a person applies for parole, they find out what is the situation at the home he will go to if paroled. I do not mean his family home but, rather, his home community. What are the possibilities there for parole supervision?

For example, the Parole Board discovers that if a native person goes home to the reserve, most times it is in a remote area where the opportunity for parole supervision is much less than it is in an urban setting. If he goes home to an urban setting, the chances are that he was never permitted to get fully into the community in the first place but existed only on the fringe of it. Therefore, his chances, so the Parole Board consider, of making a success of his parole are less and thus he does not get equal consideration in the granting of parole from that point of view either.

Employment is another factor the Parole Board examines. We all know—at least I hope we all know, though I sometimes wonder when listening to the debate in this House whether there is a full appreciation of this—that the native Indian person in society is the low man on the list when it comes to employment. Within the native Indian population there is a high percentage of unemployed. Within the native Indian population individuals have the least chance of finding a job, and I am sure this is a consideration the Parole Board weighs. Thus, the chances of a native in jail getting equitable consideration for parole, apart from the fact that the Parole Board and some officials may be completely ignorant of what it is like to be a native Indian, are far less than the chances of the non-Indian.

In society generally there is not too full an appreciation of the cultural, economic and social position of the native Indian in this land. It is just a simple fact of life that there are large groups of people in Canada who know absolutely nothing about the native Indian and do not want to. His position in society is disregarded, ignored. By many he is considered the invisible man. In jail, apart from the custodial staff I think the same thing applies; there is not any great desire to look upon this person as having any greater or lesser difficulty than anybody else, when in fact he has.

Outside of society there are a number of native people—this applies, I think, to any group that has been treated in the way the native person has been treated—who feel left out of things. They feel denigrated. They feel put down. They feel their position has no appreciation on the part of the great bulk of Canadian society. They feel they have been discriminated against deliberately and consciously, though not so much now as in years past, in terms of education, employment possibilities and the simple, uncomplicated respect that one human being should have for another. They feel rejection or, at the very best, non-acceptance by society.

When the native person comes to town—I think this situation can be duplicated in Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina,