

A background paper, prepared recently for the Economic Council of Canada, discussed the availability of data to measure the effectiveness of criminal justice agencies. It concluded that judicial statistics in Canada "are diffuse and not particularly helpful for evaluating decisions. . ." It suggested that "the numbers are collected for the sheer joy of collecting rather than because they serve any useful purpose. . ."<sup>9</sup> On parole data, the remarks were equally unflattering: "For the great majority of Canadian citizens, these data are meaningless numbers."<sup>10</sup> To make the data meaningful to all those who need them is complex and difficult but it is a task that must be undertaken immediately. The parole system we propose will only operate efficiently if usable data are made available quickly.

### Purposes of Data Collection

It is generally recognized that collecting data has a threefold purpose: administration, research and public accounting. Administrative statistics are needed because planning and organizing delivery of services cannot be done without accurate and relevant data. Costs of programs must not continue to be measured by inaccurate yardsticks or by guessing. Research on parole makes similar demands. There is nothing that discourages research more quickly than inaccurate data.

While we recognize the importance of the two foregoing purposes of data collection, our prime interest is in data collection for public accounting. We find that the published information is less than satisfactory. It does not accurately describe the various parole programs established by law and, insofar as their objectives are defined, does not assist in determining to what extent these are met. In fact, we found very little evidence that objectives were even defined.

To establish objectives for social programs where unpredictable human behaviour is involved and where social groups often push in different or opposite directions is not easy. It requires wisdom of the first order. Objectives of the present parole program are usually formulated in terms of rehabilitation of the offender and protection of society.<sup>11</sup> How are these abstract expressions translated into measurable terms? We found no evidence that indicators of rehabilitation or protection were defined. Is the number of parole denials a measure of rehabilitation or protection? Is the number of parole releases an indicator of rehabilitation? Would a high number of parole terminations by revocation and forfeiture indicate the level of protection? These questions and many more merely point to the major task which has not been attempted — defining objectives in quantifiable terms. Public accounting of a parole program cannot be done properly before objectives are set and measured.

Defining objectives in measurable terms for the system we propose will not be easier. The definition must take into account our basic premises, criteria for eligibility, rules for decision-making and the importance we attach to supervision. These have to be translated into quantifiable terms at the very beginning. A delay of several years will make the task impossible because the data will not have been collected from the start to answer the questions that will be asked. The right questions must be asked now in order that a proper evaluation of the program in later years is not hindered by inadequate information.