

*Private Members' Business*

These opinions are based on a number of myths about crime, corrections and parole.

It is a myth that all offenders incarcerated in federal prisons are serving sentences for violent crimes—in fact, violent crime constitutes about a tenth of all criminal offences known to police. Furthermore, only a portion of violent offenders receive sentences that entail incarceration in federal institutions.

Another negative perception is the myth that almost all offenders in our federal institutions are repeaters when, in fact, over 60 per cent of federal inmates are serving their first federal term.

There is the myth that most offences are committed by parolees or inmates on mandatory supervision. In fact, less than one per cent of crimes in Canada can be blamed on these individuals. About 12 per cent of those released on full parole are revoked for committing new offences; about 19 per cent of those released on mandatory supervision commit new offences while still under supervision and, of course, not all these offences are serious or violent.

The myth that most conditional releases end in failure continues. In fact, over 99 per cent of temporary absences are completed successfully; roughly 70 per cent of all full paroles are completed successfully and more than one-half of all releases under mandatory supervision are completed successfully.

A further note on this is that about one half of the cases statistically denoted as “failures” are instances where supervisors have returned offenders to penitentiary for non-criminal, technical violations of their release conditions.

Finally, most notably when the matter of capital punishment is the topic, there is the myth that the murder rate in Canada is on the increase. In fact, a number of recent years have seen the number of homicides at its lowest since 1973, before capital punishment was abolished.

These figures suggest that, in all but the most extreme cases, a “lock'em up and throw away the key” approach to corrections is unwarranted. A more constructive correctional philosophy—as is currently held by most correctional professionals—is that society is best protected in the long run through an approach based on the following reality: The vast majority of federal inmates

are serving definite sentences and they must, by law, be released at the end of their term.

The remainder, including those serving life sentences, will all, again by law, become eligible for release at some point in their sentence. This means that most offenders will eventually return to the same communities in which they committed the offences.

Within the context of this reality, the best way to contribute to the protection of society over the long term is to motivate all offenders as fully as possible to become law-abiding citizens upon their release. However, a released offender cannot be expected to become a law-abiding citizen if throughout the sentence period he or she has been denied the opportunity of acquiring basic social skills, deprived of any autonomy and stripped of self-respect and human dignity.

To be sure, I recognize that not all offenders will respond to this approach. There will likely always be a need for maximum security institutions which rely primarily on external controls to protect society. I also recognize that under the existing system—even without the punitive measures proposed in Bill C-311—there are individuals whose crimes are so numerous or horrendous that release at any point in their sentences is unthinkable.

However, even in our highest security institution, the Correctional Service believes there should be a strong emphasis on motivating offenders to accept increased responsibility. I might say that the imposition of interminable sentences without the slightest hope of eventual relief could be seen as the surest way to deprive correctional authorities of the most important mechanism for motivating offenders.

In conclusion, our prisons are just as much a part of our community as our hospitals, our schools, our geriatric centres and our psychiatric institutions. The men and women held in our prisons and penitentiaries are all members of our society. Apart from a handful of the incarcerated, all will return to and again become part of the community. The process to facilitate and to safely maintain this reintegration is comprehensive and taken very seriously by those administering it.

It has been my intention to demonstrate that the system now in place is capable of adequate responses to today's correctional problems. The will and the expertise are at hand to administer correctional legislation for the public good.