

*Private Members' Business*

those most directly concerned with the program, the prisoners and ex-prisoners.

In 1989, a special study funded by the Secretary of State was undertaken by the John Howard Society. The researcher involved with the society was Kimberley Pate and her report was filed in August, 1989. This report reviews thoroughly the adequacy of the literacy programs in our prisons and I rely heavily on that for the comments and criticisms that I have.

In addition, as critic for the Solicitor General for the New Democratic Party, I have received probably a thousand letters from prisoners in our institutions. The recurring theme in these letters is the inadequacy of the programs in prisons. I hope this debate will focus some attention on the problem and perhaps start some action on it.

The first problem is that the program is compulsory. Prisoners are forced to take it if, after a test, they are demonstrated to be "functionally illiterate". The compulsory element of the Correctional Service of Canada program was trashed by the conference in 1987, yet it continues to this day. The element of compulsion flies in the face of every pedagogical understanding currently at hand. It simply does not and cannot work. The John Howard Society report of 1989 confirms that.

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Let me refer the House to some of the comments made by inmates who were interviewed in that study. One said:

It is really stupid, you know. They (the CSC policy developers and program ministers) cannot really believe the old saying about how you can take a horse to water and it will finally drink once it gets thirsty. Forcing people who are already embarrassed and have been taught to keep all your weaknesses hidden in places like this, in jail, to then sit in the beginning classes where everyone can see you are dummy—man, that is just plain stupid. The only reason most of us say we want to learn stuff is to play the game and get out. We waste everyone else's time, for them who really want to learn. Know what I mean? Maybe if they stop forcing the issue we might really go on our own.

The second problem is that in developing the program there was no consultation with the users of the program. It is hard to imagine, but it is true. There was no discussion with prisoners or inmates about the nature of

the program. There is no ongoing effort to evaluate with them what kind of program should be undertaken.

Third, the program resources have been stolen from other educational programs, contrary to the clear commitment of the Solicitor General at the time the program was instituted. Instead of taking the program from research, travel, consultants, where they said they would, they have taken it from the other educational programs in the institutions.

That reduces those programs to a new level of inadequacy and removes the incentive for proceeding into the higher levels that really count in the final analysis, getting a job once the inmates are out.

Another problem is that the testing on this program is completely inadequate. The test program was developed over 20 years ago in California. It is denounced in every review of the literacy program, and as I understand it, the Correctional Service of Canada has already conceded that the testing program is inadequate. I want to hear today that there in fact has been a change.

Although it is an unwritten rule, there are targets or quotas established for the institutions in order that the Correctional Service of Canada can look good when asked questions in Parliament about this program. There are a number of problems with those targets. First, they are easy to manipulate. Even more important and more significant is that the targets encourage the staff to work with the students who are up to a grade 6 to grade 8 level. That means they are ignoring the students at the lower levels, the students who most require the kind of help that an effective literacy program can be.

Let me refer again to the Pate study, page 16:

If this is indeed the case then the ironic result of the CSC ABE initiative may be that proportionately less time may now be being devoted to working with this group than was the case prior to Kelleher's program announcement in 1987.

The tutoring, according to the study, is inadequate and is not trusted by the participants.

The program is simply not reaching the targeted prison population. At least half of the prison population who need the program are not taking any program at all, notwithstanding the compulsory nature.

Finally, there is no follow-up. Once the prisoners leave prison no facility is provided through the Correctional Service program in which they can maintain,