

## On Getting Out of Jail in Canada

[NEW PAROLE PRACTICES ARE THE MOST SWEEPING CHANGES BEING MADE IN CANADA'S PRISON SYSTEM]

Canada has some 22,000 prisoners in Federal and Provincial penitentiaries. About one million Canadians have criminal records. At the moment over 7,000 are on parole.

Some Canadians long felt that the system was too harsh, the sentences too long, the paroles too few.

In the words of the Windsor Star, "the emphasis . . . was overly punitive and this country was one of the most backward in the Western world in its parole practices."

In recent years — particularly in the last two — much has changed.

A determined effort has been made to humanize the institutions — prisoners may now write uncensored letters out, including letters of complaint to newspapers and Members of Parliament; drab uniforms have been replaced by reasonably modish clothes individually chosen; and, most impressively, prisoners at pilot projects are working at regular jobs, making regular wages. At William Head in British Columbia prisoners doing construction work on a new penitentiary building will receive \$1.75 an hour, pay for their own room and board, pay taxes, buy articles at the prison canteen and bank the balance.

The most sweeping, and controversial reforms, however, have involved the release of prisoners on parole. Last fall and spring Canadians across the land read with interest and often with heat of two specific cases, one involving the full paroles

of five young men who had kidnapped a Toronto woman for ransom and the granting of a fifty-hour "temporary absence" to a Montreal man convicted of murdering his wife.

The subject of parole is complex.

The reformation began in 1959 when the National Parole Board was formed and given "absolute discretion" over the granting of paroles. The Board was and is autonomous. Its philosophy has been expressed by its chairman, T. George Street, Q.C.: "There are far too many persons sentenced to prison in Canada who could be better dealt with in the community."

The Board's nine members, working out of Ottawa, travel in pairs and personally interview each parole applicant. It is now an awesome task, some 17,000 cases are heard yearly.

The rate of release has been accelerating for a decade and the overall results are impressive. The reformation of prisoners has proved difficult always. Most prisoners are recidivists — men and women who have been convicted and sentenced before and who will almost surely be convicted and sentenced again. A man on parole is still serving his sentence. The theory behind parole involves reformation only. A man who serves his full sentence and is then returned to society abruptly, without resources, is very likely to commit a crime. A man on parole is still under close supervision — in Canada he must report to his parole supervisor weekly and to the police once

*Left, Parole Board Members Claude Bouchard and George Tremblay interview a prisoner at Le Clerc Institution. Right, a parole officer meets with a parolee for a counseling chat at a bus terminal restaurant.*

