

# Prison: From the inside

This week, the GAZETTE is publishing the second installment in a series of articles on prisons and prison reform. The author is Tracy C. Goodrich, an inmate of the Maritime Federal Penitentiary in Dorchester, New Brunswick.

by Tracy C. Goodrich

At the age of 16, Larry O. received a sentence of 45-50 years to be served in the New Jersey State Prison. Nine years later, he has become a mature young man, attempting to reflect on himself and his relationship with society.

James J. is completing his 28th year in prison. He has achieved college level educational status and has matured into an incisive writer and a brilliant penalological analyst.

For 23 straight years, Charles A. has been in prison. He has given a lot of guidance and advice to a well-known prison society.

Gilbert and Sullivan once wrote: "Let the punishment fit the crime..." but hopefully, we have matured beyond the jovial indifference of operettas. Let the sentence be applied to the man. It is almost impossible for anyone to determine how many years it will take for a man to assume a role in society. How can the inner components of a human being be ascertained by a robed judge who knows only of a man's crime and little of his heart.

Must James, Charles and Larry be in a state of continual punishment? Does their achievement, their ability to contribute to their own society, count for nothing? Can a man who looked at those years ago be the continual master of their fate?

Several questions loom large. Can any man look at any other man and determine how many years it will be before he is able to participate in our larger society? What is the alternative to sentencing which removes hope from a man's life?

How is the public considered? Has such live burials solved the crime problem? Not in the least. Arbitrary sentencing is revenge not a deterrent against crime.

The misguided youths who strike out at society are not thoughtful of sentences or prison terms. They are making contact, even if it be brutal and pointless. But society, in a calculated measure, responds by saying, "We have the social dynamics to reshape you to function in our world — but it will take 40 years before you achieve such status."

The outrageous sentencing of young men, who are usually poorly represented in court, is a scandal in our time. You will find men in prisons who have been there 15, 20 or 25 years. Yet you will meet other men with the same crime record who were released after about 2 years or who received probation in lieu of a sentence.

A personal example: Last year, in Montreal, I saw a man charged with polygamy (married to several women) and the judge dismissed the case because

neither of the three wives had filed a complaint. The same day a man was charged with bigamy (two wives) and was found guilty. He received a six-month suspended sentence.

In Moncton, a man was found guilty of bigamy and received six months in jail or \$1000 fine.

Last year, I appeared in court charged with bigamy. Neither of the supposed wives were present nor was there a complaint from either of them. I was found guilty and sentenced to one year.

It is time to wake up and realize how the courts are making a mockery of justice and destroy hope of our most vital natural resource... human beings.

We must show our willingness to re-evaluate and re-examine human attitudes and behaviour as we do machinery and computers and aircraft. After all the people are gone, little else will matter.

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I've mentioned previously society's apathy and shortcomings. One of the primary shortcomings is the attitude concerning crimes and criminals. Most people do not place these terms in their proper perspective.

Let us establish, for example, that "crime" is a relative circumstance. That is not to say that laws are without purpose. The relativity of crime goes to the very depth of complex exceptions and substitutions. What is a criminal act for a person in the 'poor' class is not quite a criminal act for a rich man.

That which constitutes a criminal act for an ex-felon is not quite a criminal act for a person who is not. Every crime is calculated in degrees, not absolutes. Therefore crime is relative.

As concerns criminals, there has usually been a great tumult concerning how best to treat a convicted felon; how to "rehabilitate" this errant social child.

The reference to a social child does not refer to a youngster. It is used to describe those individuals who do not have the values expected by mature "social adults." We do not even consider what the established and expected values are; whether or not those values are good, bad or indifferent in the sense of pure logic.

There are extremely pertinent parallels between the errant children of society (criminals) and the errant children of the individuals who make up society. How much of a revelation it would be if society would discipline its disobedient children as carefully as the individuals discipline their personal children.

Of course every criminal has his own individual parents. Some of these individual parents are remiss in their discipline, which results in many preventable problems in the child. However, as the legal procedures are formulated in Canada, once a child breaks the social law outside of his protected domain (his parents' personal property), then society steps in to take on the legal cloak of disciplining this child.

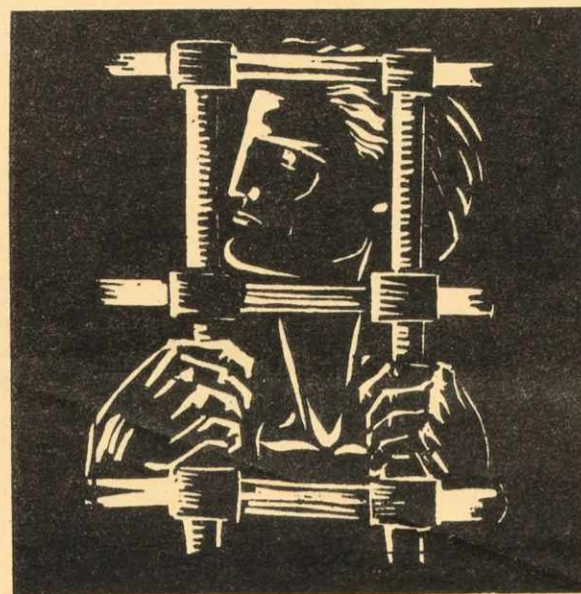
In regards to society's disciplining techniques, it is starkly apparent that society is much in want. For example, the individual personal parent would not even consider locking up their errant child in a room for five years for taking the family car without permission. Yet, this same child can take someone else's car out joy-riding and his social parents will place their child in a room (cell) for five years.

Or, graver still, an individual parent who discovered some pep pills or marijuana in his child's room would never conceive throwing that child into a jungle as punishment; yet the social parent will throw that same child into a jungle (prison) for a period of time (determined by amount discovered).

Individual parents counsel with their children. They give love and understanding and most of all, patience. In ever striving to be reasonable adults, individual parents function in an intelligent manner of good example and worthy incentive to help their children become conditioned to enjoy being all that he could and should be.

Prisons have no good example or worthy incentive; only senseless waste, atrocious retribution and corrupt criteria used to destroy individuality and responsibility. Prisons are the "homes" established by social parents for their errant social child — the well-adjusted individual's child never becomes a social child.

Are today's prisons the best environment that the



social parent can come up with? Of course not! If individual parents acted as cruelly and wantonly as the social parents, society would prosecute those individual parents for gross abuse and dereliction of parental duties — because society has laws against such treatment.

The closer truth here is that the social parent just doesn't give a damn. If a census were taken today of every individual parent in Canada, it would undoubtedly be conclusively established that none of those parents would treat their personal children as badly as the errant social children are treated en masse.

Yet all of these individual parents make up the social parent. Where is the terrible discrepancy? Why is the individual so efficient with his own children, yet so extremely deficient with his social children? The answer is that the individual has not been taught to think in terms of the social constituent that he is.

Certainly the collective individuals ARE society. But to them, individually, society is an abstract entity dynamically separate from their individual will and ideals and positive action. So each and every individual of the society just complacently ignores his social responsibility as a "parent."

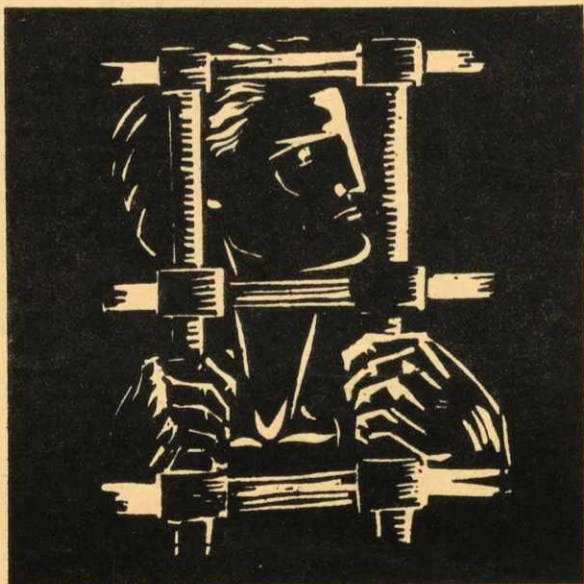
It is fundamentally reasonable to believe that kind begets kind; that atrocity begets atrocity; violence begets violence; complacency begets complacency; futility begets futility.

In the province of kind begetting kind, one must pause in profound doubt as he extends this theory across the pages of our daily lives. What will tomorrow bring when today is filled with so much hate, injustice, bigotry, racism, complacency and socially imposed futility. What will today's children beget when they are daily fed the bread of adult apathy and the wine of moral hypocrisy?

Surely it can be seen that these children have a depth beyond blind faith. The air is saturated with dissenters who claim nothing more than the power to read between the lines of political farces, to challenge the right of anyone to be hypocritical or numbly ignorant.

Society, all of the individual parents, must take a sincere interest in its progeny. Society must demand that their errant children be taught by good example and constructive incentive. Society must demand that the senseless waste of its children's lives be stopped. Society must not leave its children to irresponsible "baby-sitters" who are obsessed with tyranny and excessive and unwarranted and negative punishments.

Yes, it is sad to view the results of today's prisons. Yes, it is uncomfortable for society to experience the results of today's prisons. However the answer is not more police power, not more prisons or prisoners. The answer can be found nestled smugly in the breasts of every individual parent who goes to make up the social parent: How would you treat your own son or daughter?



## The Dalhousie Gazette

CANADA'S OLDEST  
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The Dalhousie GAZETTE, a member of Canadian University Press, is the weekly publication of the Dalhousie Student Union. The views expressed in the paper are not necessarily those of the Student Union or the university administration. We reserve the right to edit or delete copy for space or legal reasons. Deadline date is the Friday preceding publication.

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