

PAROLE AND NATIVE OFFENDERS

Approximately eight per cent of the total penitentiary population is composed of native people. They comprise as much as one-quarter of the population of some federal institutions in Western Canada.¹ The number of natives in provincial institutions is also known to be very large.² Considering the ratio of native people to total population, the native population in correctional institutions is disproportionately high. But the sources of the native offender's problems reach well beyond parole or the criminal justice system. They originate in the economic, social and cultural conditions of native people. We concur with the "Native Viewpoint" expressed in the brief on behalf of the inmates of Drumheller Institution that there is "no doubt that any final answer to the problem of Native offenders must await a solution to the general social and economic conditions under which the Native people live."³

In its brief to the Committee, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians submitted that:

...the Indian parolee was obliged to tailor his parole plan in order to meet supervision requirements regardless of whether or not his preference lay in returning to the reserve. With a move to the city often came a burden of general cultural adjustment, the stigma of being a criminal coupled with the pressures of prejudice and discrimination experienced because of his Indianness, and the culturally based problems in communication between himself and his non-Indian parole supervisor.⁴

We believe that the preference expressed by the native offender regarding his destination upon release on parole should be respected within reasonable limits. To ask those from relatively isolated rural areas to fulfill their parole conditions in cities because supervision is more readily available risks their further alienation. Although there is a greater availability of resources, both educational and occupational, in urban areas, these should not necessarily determine whether native offenders should serve their parole time in such centres unless they have expressed a desire to move to the city and have initiated a correctional plan which may be completed in the city. Similarly, the urbanized native offender should not be forced to return to a rural area simply because it was his "home".

The system proposed in this Report may contend more adequately with some of the problems of native offenders because our concept of a correctional plan for each inmate is designed to ensure greater consideration for individual cases. It is possible, at present, for release plans to be formulated only at the time the offender applies for parole.

The correctional plan proposal, with direct participation of more native workers, would be valuable in determining realistic alternatives for native offenders. At present, there are a small number of native workers in the correctional field. The Commissioner of Penitentiaries, in his presentation to the Committee, on March 8, 1972, stated that the Penitentiary Service at that time employed eleven native staff members.⁵ The National Parole Service as of March 6, 1973, had, according to the testimony of the Vice-Chairman of the National Parole Board, "four or five" native workers.⁶ Provincial systems also have some native staff workers. For example, of approximately ninety supervisors in the