

Prison

The Community's Business

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WHY PRISONS?

Few of us think of prisons as part of our community. Most of us have never seen the inside of one, nor do we associate with those who have. Indeed, the whole purpose of prisons is to keep prisoners away from the rest of us. They are, after all, bad people. And prisons are bad places. Their physical structure alone provides an easy rationalisation for not getting involved. *We are not allowed in.* The security measures necessary to isolate prisoners work both ways, and it is difficult to enter a prison from the free community.

As a result, the prison business has grown and multiplied

without supervision or evaluation, and certainly without assistance, from the community which it serves. It is probably the only multi-million dollar industry that isn't subject to some kind of external accountability. What is the prison business all about anyway? Basically, it's about punishment. The "prison" began, actually, as a holding facility for suspected offenders awaiting trial, at which time the "punishment" would be decided. Such punishment was immediate: flogging, a stint of hard labour, exile, death. Eventually the prison came to be used as the punishment itself: a length of time served in isolation from society.

In principle, the idea seemed to have merit. It was perhaps more humanitarian, and it would give the prisoner a chance to repent and change his ways. Furthermore, society would be protected from further acts, at least for the term of the sentence. Naturally, as more people were kept in prison, more prisons had to be built. Fulltime personnel had to be employed to guard them. Prisons couldn't be built on the cheap. They had to be strong and secure, lest the prisoners escaped . . . Prison was becoming expensive, and the idle men were becoming rebellious . . . Work projects emerged, first as chain gangs, then as well-equipped modern farms and mini-factories which were quickly seen as economically viable with free prisoner labor. Prisons became Big Business.

Prisons were not without their critics. Social reformists throughout history have deplored the conditions of incarceration and, with the expansion of the social sciences in this century, reforms were inevitable. Prisoners were no longer forced to work as "slave" labor, and standards were set for hygienic living conditions. (For example, the number of prisons without modern plumbing is decreasing rapidly.) In spite of these improvements, prisoners did not come out repentant and changed for the better. Rather, they frequently came out full of anger, and knowing no better means of lawful survival than when they went in. With the demand that prisons return adequate citizens to the community, we entered the phase of prison rehabilitation.

A number of progressive prison administrators have honestly tried, most notably in Scandinavia, but also in the U.K. and U.S. Prison departments have initiated intensive training and education programs, psychotherapy and behaviour modification, diversion schemes, and alternative experimental

programs in which the prisoner is allowed to continue working in the community while living in prison, or to live and work in a community setting under close supervision by prison employees. Recidivism rates have remained high.

The prison-based programs do not work because they are a contradiction in a repressive prison environment. Prison, based on a philosophy of custody and control, is still prison. There are advantages to prison programs, as we will see, but they are not in preparing prisoners for community living. I remember talking to the program director of a well-equipped business training unit in a U.S. women's prison. I was duly impressed with the sight of 20 women receiving instruction on as many word-processors. "What is your success rate?" I asked. "How many women actually leave here and get jobs?"

He seemed surprised. "If one girl out of the 20 gets a job, I'll be elated. There's a lot more to living outside than knowing how to type."

Then how did they justify the expenditure for such fine equipment? Because they were able to show that such programs actually reduced prison costs. "It costs less to control a houseful of women who are interested and occupied than the same bunch sitting around scheming to get out."

Community-based rehabilitation programs haven't worked because the community won't have a bar of them. Pre-release, post-release, or alternative facilities for prisoners are typically located, by community demand, in the warehouse district of the inner city, or well out into a country area which we never need see. This makes integration into a "normal" community lifestyle very difficult. Furthermore, when prisoners have served their time — paid their debts to society, as it were — we don't encourage them, and we certainly don't welcome them back. No one wants to give an ex-crim a job, and for sure no one wants one living next door. Yet, virtually all those who go to prison will ultimately return to us. If we want them to be different, we must help. The prisons can't do it alone.

I believe we have two bases for serious concern. The first is a humanitarian one. We are wasting people in prison. The second is more pragmatic. We are wasting money. The cost of maintaining each prisoner in Queensland for the last fiscal year was \$20,000. If we add the initial cost of constructing the prisons, the associated costs of Court procedures, maintenance of prisoners' families, and the like, the cost is upwards of

\$50,000 per prisoner. We are not getting very much for our money.

Why, then, have we continued to ignore prisons? Because, I believe, we are frightened and ill-informed. Certainly I grew up with an irrational view of prison as corrective, and a self-righteous stereotypical view of a prisoner as bad. If a person went to prison there was something wrong with *that person*. It was his or her fault. I took that for granted, and stopped there. Then I began to learn about prisons and prisoners. That learning, first in California and then in Queensland, has been tremendously important to me. My attitudes have had to change. In this chapter I would like to examine the foundations of our attitudes toward prison, and contrast our feelings with some facts. Then I will consider what can be done to improve the situation, and how the community can help.

THE STEREOTYPE OF THE PRISONER

Our stereotype of the prisoner — a "criminal" — as a bad and dangerous person is well entrenched in our thinking. It is reinforced from an early age. What mischievous child hasn't been warned about getting in trouble, about growing up "bad", and the police coming to "take you away and lock you up." Prison is the maximum threat in our system of law enforcement and behavioural management, the ultimate punishment.

We are influenced also in more subtle ways. I remember as a young child in midwestern America, our local county sheriff used to come around occasionally to visit my family, and I would listen with interest when he talked about his work. The county jail in our farming community was not extensively used. In fact, in those days following the repeal of Prohibition, I got the impression that "jailbirds" were practically synonymous with Saturday night drunks. Even so, I can still feel the way my grandmother dissociated herself, pulling me with her, away from talk about "people such as that." My stereotype of prisoners began to form: they were bad people, and they were different from me.

Such moralistic thinking, of course, leads to an attitude of self-righteousness. All my people were poor in the Depression years, but we were honest and hardworking. We did not cheat or steal just because times were hard. We obeyed the laws. We were willing to work a little harder, to bide our time, to do without. Add to this the Judeo-Christian teachings in which

most of us were reared and we feel good about our past deprivations and sacrifices. They build moral fibre. And so the stereotype takes on a further dimension. We, the law-abiding, are of better character, superior stock. All the more reason to keep clear of anything to do with prisons.

As I have said, this is not difficult to do. The high steel fences and concrete walls do not invite contact. The gun towers and the armed guards maintaining their constant surveillance along the catwalks combine to give the prison an air of foreboding, and a certain mystery. It must be very dangerous indeed inside! Many of us can remember, as children, passing the local prison much as we passed a "haunted house" or a graveyard. Thus, an element of fear is incorporated, and our stereotype is complete.

This stereotype served me well for a number of years. Then, in California in the 60's I had to reassess my attitudes. *People I knew* were going to prison, for draft evasion, for smoking marijuana, for civil disobedience. They were mainly young people, to be sure, but they were from families that were just like mine. They were not bad and they were not dangerous. I was no longer comfortable with my long unchallenged stereotype of the prisoner.

THE STEREOTYPE CHALLENGED

It was part of a Zeitgeist perhaps that one of my colleagues at University was designing a most unusual experiment at that time. Phil Zimbardo's now classic "Stanford Prison Experiment" became a significant factor in my developing new attitudes toward prison.

It was during semester break and our basement experimental rooms were being converted to simulate prison cells. There was a hushed silence between our floor and the basement, and a vague feeling of embarrassment among the staff. What was Zimbardo up to? Comments around the Psychology Department focussed on the construction going on downstairs. There was a rumour that Zimbardo had appointed some non-lettered black man as a temporary lecturer. To lecture about what, pray tell? About prisons, that's what. The man was an ex-crim. An EX-CRIM?!? And a psychopath! As news of the experiment got around, a retired prison psychiatrist telephoned the University to make sure that we knew. This man, he said, was the "worst psychopath" he had known in his 40 years of

prison service. For better or worse, this news didn't alarm me, because I had already come to know Carlo, the ex-crim. There was a distinct quality of strength about him, and I felt genuine respect as he recounted his tales of survival in California's most infamous prisons. He knew far more about life and human behaviour than appeared in our textbooks.

Carlo served as consultant in the prison experiment, describing what the experience was like while Zimbardo translated that reality into the simulated prison environment. The "subjects" were young males who had answered an ad in a local newspaper. They were assigned to the roles of "prisoner" and "guard" by the flip of a coin. None had had any actual experience of arrest or imprisonment.

The effects were astounding. Within three days, several "prisoners" broke under the strain, and as many "guards" became abusive. Carlo, acting in the role of Parole Board chairman, projected irrational verbal aggression on the experimental prisoners, as he had experienced it at his own parole hearings. Zimbardo himself, as Prison Superintendent, became so absorbed in his role that he forgot to record experimental data when rumours of an escape plot cropped up. The two-week experiment was terminated on the sixth day.

Like Professor Zimbardo, my reaction to the prison experiment was neither intellectual nor scientific. It was intensely emotional. Prison, as either concept or reality, is intensely emotional. I wanted to know more.

THE VOLUNTEER-IN-PRISON EXPERIENCE

It was in this mood that I volunteered to conduct a university-sponsored class in sociology at California's Soledad prison. I would be teaching with a young Jesuit priest to a class of 25 men to be selected by the prison staff.

I will never forget my first night there. As it turned out, the priest had not yet been cleared by Security, so I opened the class on my own. I had plenty of time during the 2½ hour drive to prepare myself for my first prison lecture. I had outlined some remarks on deviance, based on Daniel Keyes' novel "Flowers for Algernon". Would they understand me, I wondered... would I know how to talk to a roomful of criminals? Would there, I wondered, be a murderer there? I rehearsed several opening lines. "Hi, my name is..." What if they didn't like me? What if they didn't comprehend the

material? They would not, I presumed, be as bright as university students . . .

My trepidation mounted as I entered the prison grounds, parked the car, and followed the unambiguous signs that directed my path to the control building. It was 6.30 pm, long past visiting hours, and the guard was gruff. I felt like a trespasser. I introduced myself and he found my name on the Education List. A half-hour later, after a series of security checks and as many iron gates, I was escorted into the classroom. As the last heavy lock clicked behind me, I felt well and truly inside the prison.

I needn't have worried about an opening line. I got only as far as my name when a deep voice cut the air from the back of the room. "Ma'am, why are you here?" I looked back at the biggest black man I had ever seen. I knew I had to be honest. "To learn about prison," I said, "and to share some of what I know about my world. I hope you will do the same." It was apparently a satisfactory answer. The men settled back to see what I would say next.

Most of the men knew Keyes' story well, because the movie "Charlie" had been shown in the prison recently. Our discussion of deviance therefore took off easily, and was far more articulate, I felt, than those of my usual university classes. I never again worried if my prison students would understand me. Rather I wondered whether I would be able to tell them anything they didn't already know.

I was impressed with their intelligence, their polite manners, their level of interest. But they were on their best behaviour for me, you say. Of course they were on their best behaviour! That is exactly the point not to be missed — that these bad dangerous people are indeed capable of extraordinarily good behaviour, and it is that aspect of their character that we should be building up, reinforcing, encouraging.

In the ensuing weeks I learned some important lessons. I learned that not all people grow up believing that it is wrong to steal. A young black man from the Watts area of Los Angeles described his early days of pilfering, primarily in supermarkets, from the age of 6. His mother had a houseful of kids and his father had long since gone back to Texas. The welfare check just wasn't enough. "I couldn't see being hungry," he said, "with all that food around." As a teenager he used to set up traps for the tenement owners who drove their Cadillacs into the

neighborhoods once a month to collect rents. He would extort only a small sum of money from them. "I never took anything there wasn't more of," he said. He knew this behaviour was legally wrong, but he never saw it as morally wrong. He knew he was destined to do time in the joint, and he accepted that.

His was a questionable morality for me, and I admit to having a lot of trouble coming to terms with it. I struggled with it, remembering the poverty of my own youth. I realized I had never really been hungry, only hungry for things we did not then have, could not then afford. On the farm we paid no house rent, and there was always something to eat, even if it was last year's soft potatoes or rancid side meat from the salt barrel. I realized that I had been poor in a community of shared resources. No one on the Iowa farms had any money but we all shared our collective goods: milk for the family whose cow was dry, a few eggs for those with no chickens, and so on. The Watts community had no shared resources. There was nothing to share except by taking.

My self-righteousness gave way to tolerance, not for the principle of stealing as I knew it, but for the people whose circumstances required of them a compromise with established rules. My friend called it enforced sharing. Who am I to judge?

And yes, there was a murderer there. My 'first' murderer, it turned out, was the fellow I had been corresponding with, who had helped set up the class and select the 25 students. He was a trusty at the prison in year 10 of a 14-year sentence; he was well liked, had adjusted well in the prison routine. "Murderers" generally make very good prisoners. They are going to be there for a long time, and they know it. They try to make the best of their time, applying for study or training of some sort. They concentrate on rebuilding their life. This is not surprising. The surprising part is that murderers value life as much as we do, and are as shocked as we are about taking the life of another. In other words, most murderers do not *intend* to kill. Little solace for the victim and the victim's loved ones, you say. Yes, I agree. It is tragic. Untimely death is always tragic. And the murderer must live with that, too.

Thus, my second big lesson was that even murderers are not "bad" people. My self-righteousness gave way to gratitude that I had never been cast into a scenario such as theirs.

At that point I was close to becoming a do-gooder. I had met some reputedly dangerous criminals and had seen their human

side. They did not, I was convinced, belong in prison. I continued my volunteer work with missionary zeal; I meant to save souls from prison. The problem, of course, was not that simple.

WHAT ARE PRISONERS REALLY LIKE

The simplest answer to that question is that they are a group of heterogeneous individuals, just like us. A very few of them — probably no more than 1% — are dangerous indeed, and if I am not willing to label them bad, I will certainly agree that their behaviour is. These disturbed individuals will never be the community's business. They are psychiatrically unbalanced, mentally deficient, or psychologically committed to a criminal life-style. A prison of some sort is necessary for them, and they may well spend most of their lives there.

It is this small group that the media make the most of. Their bizarre twisted acts strike terror in our hearts, and with good reason. It is certainly not irrational to fear these individuals, but it is grossly irrational to allow them to become the prototype for all criminals who go to prison. By viewing all prisoners as dangerous criminals, we drastically reduce the corrective potential of the prison. The rehabilitative function is lost as custody and control is geared toward the secure containment of that truly dangerous 1% of the population.

Another 10-15% are also dangerous at the time of their crime and arrest, and they, too, belong in prison. But they will change. They will settle down and become good prisoners. They will begin to follow the human instinct for self-fulfillment and success that exists in all of us. This may take a long time in the punitive atmosphere of a prison but, if it can happen there, then it can surely happen in a properly disciplined and supportive community.

Yet the media inhibit this too. When a previously dangerous criminal is considered for release, what do the media do? Do they interview the prison officers or administration, the chaplain or welfare officer who know the prisoner's current behaviour and character? No. They dredge up the headlines from 10, 20, 30 years ago, and frighten the public with threats that this person is about to be unleashed in our midst. If we took the time to consider the facts, our common sense would tell us that the prisoner is no more exactly the same person now

than we would be. If we support the concept of imprisonment at all, then surely we must believe that criminals can change.

The remaining 85% of a typical prison population are not dangerous criminals. In Queensland, for example, approximately 85% of offenders are sentenced to terms of less than a year, suggesting relatively minor offenses. In fact, one-third of the admissions to Queensland prisons in 1984 were for the non-payment of fines! The rest of our prisoners are irresponsible and delinquent, to be sure, and their behaviour must be stopped; but I don't believe prison is the place to do that. Most of the "petty criminals" are young. They are also likely to be poorly educated, unemployed, and from disadvantaged groups. For example, from available figures it can be estimated that up to 40% of Australian prisoners are of Aboriginal descent. Comparable figures hold for Blacks in America. Surely these people need help, not punishment! What they will get in prison, of course, is a sound education in criminal techniques. The petty thief will learn to be an armed robber. How does this happen? Let's have a look at what prison is like.

THE PRISON

My first reaction to prison, as I have said, was one of apprehension. I believe this is true of anyone experiencing prison for the first time. The searches, the jangling of keys, the tension in the atmosphere — all these are alien and unnerving.

Furthermore, in contrast to the prisoners, the guards seemed hostile, defensive. They were, I suspected, basically mean. Thus I created a new stereotype for myself, and this one too served me well for a while. I felt always under scrutiny by the guards, as though they were waiting for me to do something wrong. It was clearly a them-and-us situation, and I was clearly on the side of the prisoners. I remember entertaining vague temptations to do something wrong, like smuggling in a shot of bourbon . . . nothing serious, mind you . . . just to get by with something. The obsession with security produced an almost irresistible challenge to outwit the system. I didn't, of course. In the first place, I didn't have the courage. In the second, it would have been wrong for *me*. I was a visitor in the prison, and I had agreed to the conditions underlying my visits.

Those conditions were quite simply that I would carry no contraband in or out. Contraband in this context means just

about anything: liquor, of course, but also candy, cigarettes, any sort of gift, letters, notes, any written or oral messages. The reasons for such rules are not petty. Confections or cigarettes can be easily laced with drugs, in those days primarily hashish, LSD, mescaline. All messages were censored because of the existence of radical groups organized both outside and inside the prison. Such groups were always under suspicion of plotting violence or escape, and prison authorities could not be completely sure that I wasn't one of those radicals in disguise.

Such is the nature of the prison environment. There is constant suspicion and surveillance. If I reacted to that with some resentment, prisoners will surely take it up as a challenge. They are not there by invitation, and they have agreed to nothing! Consequently, prisoners 'beat the system' in the most ingenious ways. I would learn, in the years to follow, that there is much unlawful activity in prisons, and many channels for the exchange of contraband. Complex coalitions form between all levels of prison staff and prisoners, virtually all of which are known to prisoners and guards, and may or may not be known to the administration. In any case, I committed myself early on to playing it straight. As I look back on it, I realize that the prisoners first, and then the guards, all came to see me as straight. I followed the rules. I could be trusted. That has remained my number one rule for volunteers going into prison.

Gradually I began seeing guards in their full dimension. I remember in particular a man named Cliff. He was the officer regularly assigned to the sociology class. Each week he met me at the control building and drove me around to our unit. His remarks were crude and callous (I thought), and he would watch bemusedly as I was passed through all the checkpoints of prison entry. He told me that he had volunteered to stay back for the sociology class because it meant overtime pay, and he really needed it now that his son was graduating from high school and heading for college next year. He needed the money. So how did he feel about the sociology class? He looked at me with a faint smile, and I didn't repeat the question.

I asked instead how he felt about prisoners. Ah, some of them are okay, poor bastards . . . others are real trouble-makers . . . But how did he feel about them? He was not paid to feel about them, he said. He was paid to see that none of them got hurt

and that none of them got out. In this particular overtime job, he was paid to see that I got in and got out, all without incident. He wasn't paid to feel, or, for that matter, to express an opinion.

So, as the months went on, I saw more and more clearly that prison guards, too, are part of the non-win game. Their only real responsibility is maintaining custody and control. Visitors like me are a nuisance, but I too am part of their brief. Someone in administration had said I could come in, and their job was to see that security was not violated and that I came to no harm. Guards have much in common with the prisoners, actually. They share the same space, the same boredom, many of the same tensions. Some of them are also poor bastards, working in a largely unrewarding job which has become their means of making a living. Some become trouble-makers, caught up in the conflict of the them-and-us-game which brings out the worst in them. And some take up the challenge of the situation and form coalitions. Guards, like prisoners, must adjust in their own way to the unnatural prison atmosphere for their own survival.

This of course is not the whole story. I have been exposed to only the more polite dynamics of prison life. We know that rape and murder, violence and treachery, all these things occur. So does intense loneliness, despair, suicide. To me, however, the polite dynamics alone seem sufficient to warrant our concern.

THE QUEENSLAND PROGRAM

In 1977 I came to Queensland — a new country, a new University. I looked forward to new interests. Perhaps I would give prison work a miss for a while . . . Not to be. On the drive from the Brisbane airport a massive white building just off the freeway caught my eye. It was unmistakably a prison, and the image of people behind bars brought back familiar feelings of frustration and wastefulness, and of needing to do something about that.

Eventually I began making enquiries and learned that there was virtually no programming in the Queensland system. There was some token education at Boggo Road (the main prison) and some extension courses, but education was not encouraged. In some divisions, prisoners were not allowed their own pen and paper. One of my colleagues — also an American

— said, "If you found California prisons depressing, Queensland's will drive you off the balcony."

It was a prison welfare officer who offered me hope. The welfare officers are the prisoners' advocates — in a sense, their means of contact with the outside. It was the welfare officers who arranged extension courses for those prisoners who took the initiative to seek study. This particular welfare officer offered me a "deal." He would help me set up a discussion group in one of the prisons if I would give tutorial assistance to a prisoner who was studying psychology. Fair enough. I began the tutoring program almost immediately, and wrote a proposal for a social skills class for consideration by the Prisons Department. This proposal was eventually accepted for the women's prison and the class began in early 1979.

I again felt like a nuisance. I was an intrusion in prison routine, and again a possible threat to security. I proceeded with caution. I had learned to walk on eggshells at Soledad. At the time, progress seemed painfully slow, but in retrospect I can appreciate that the Queensland system was really quite receptive. I had encouragement from at least one top administrator, and one prison superintendent actually invited me into his prison to provide education.

In any event, the program flourished. The weekly social skills class in the women's prison expanded. After a few months, I felt at a loss to provide new and interesting material and obtained permission to bring other volunteers in. Other members of the community — notably a retired nun from a local school — began tutoring women in primary and secondary study. University students filled in at tertiary level. We had help from many sources — yoga and theatre groups, Aboriginal Health, a local artist, to name only a few. Activities in the women's prison now span the full week and educational tutoring has continued uninterrupted. Arts and crafts have been introduced through the T.A.F.E. colleges, and my own University students teach typing and shorthand, guitar and piano. It has become a viable community project.

Does it do any good? I have said that prison rehabilitation is a misnomer. What, then, does the program accomplish? Last year we decided to find out. A postgraduate student, Bindi Cilento, who had been supervising the women's program since 1982, took on the task of a program evaluation. As might be predicted, the demonstrable effects of the program were short-

term effects on the women's day-to-day coping. The classes relieved boredom, provided a break from prison routine, helped some of the women to maintain better self-control, gave them something constructive to think about. The program helped relieve depression for a few, helped dissipate aggression for others. The women appreciated the outside contact, and the acquisition of new skills. Would any of this carry over to post-prison life? We have not attempted a systematic follow-up but it is encouraging to note that three of the women from the original social skills class have completed University degrees and three others are currently enrolled. I think the community interest has paid off well.

The management of programs in the larger men's prisons is more complex. Security breaches are more difficult to monitor, and thus more likely to occur. No single program can encompass an entire population. Nonetheless, a sense of cohesiveness within an individual group is achievable, and the one-to-one tutoring relationship is unaffected by prison size. Community volunteers are active in three men's prisons.

It is important to note that the single greatest need in prisons everywhere is for remedial — literacy and numeracy — teaching. It seems appalling in a society as technologically developed as ours that this should be so. Yet it is a fact that a large proportion of our bad and dangerous criminals cannot read or write.

The volunteer has a special role to play in prison. He/she is not part of the system and is thus more easily accepted by the prisoners. The volunteer (unpaid) status carries an important flexibility in the choice and duration of courses, and an independence from institutional time demands. The volunteer, as a visitor, is treated well, particularly after a sense of trust has been established.

That trust, as I learned at Soledad, is the crucial factor in prison work. One must play it straight to get anything accomplished. A prisoner told me once that only a con can be conned. "If you try to get by with something in the system," he said, "then you are fair game for anyone else to get as much as they can out of you." Thus the first rule — and the only important one, really — is to be totally honest with yourself, with the officers, and with the prisoners. They will want to know why you are there.

THE PRISON SYSTEM

In Queensland I have been able to understand the dynamics of the prison system much more intimately than would have been possible in California. I have said there is no essential difference among prisons, and I have found that to be true even in such ideologically contrasting states as California and Queensland. There is, however, a difference in the size and complexity of the governing bureaucracy.

In California, I met the warden (superintendent) only if I had an otherwise insoluble problem, and I never met the Director of Corrections (Comptroller-General) at all. In Queensland these authorities were the people I dealt with, and if a problem seemed insoluble I had access to higher authorities still. It was in this stage of my experience that I was able to put the prison picture together. I had progressed through the power hierarchy from the prisoners at the bottom, who have no power, to the officers, who have less than I thought, to the superintendents who have considerable power in day-to-day decisions, and to the Administrators who make decisions on policy and answer to the government.

At each of these stages I saw how complex the total picture is. For the prisoners, prison is not just doing time, it is *living their lives*. They don't just come into prison and sit down to be punished. They fight back. They learn what there is to be learned. They learn ways around the restrictions to beat the system. They settle in to make the best of whatever they're good at.

The officers are inexorably implicated in the drama. They live a sizable portion of their lives in prison, too, and their role is not an easy one. They must keep a reasonable degree of order, and they cannot afford to make too many enemies. They must sometimes walk on eggshells too.

The task of management and administration levels, at bottom line, is to protect the public image of the prison as doing an effective job of protecting society. I do not mean to imply that prisons department personnel are not concerned with doing a worthwhile job. Quite the contrary. There have been concerted attempts to modify prisons toward corrective, rather than punitive, functions. In every prison I have visited, and certainly not the least in Queensland, I have met sincerely dedicated people who want to make prisons more effective.

What I had seen as one big conspiracy formed for the purpose of making prisoners suffer, I now see as a complex institutional system, charged with performing an impossible task. The community sends those who aren't conforming, be they dangerous or not, to the prison for a shaping-up. The prison can indeed shape their behaviour to conform well in prison, but prison can't shape good community behaviour. The community has to be involved in that.

WHAT CAN THE COMMUNITY DO?

Get to know a prisoner. I've talked at length about what a volunteer can do, but you needn't even go that far. Dozens of prisoners receive no mail and no visits. The prison welfare officers or the chaplains will know who these prisoners are and how to put you in touch with them. Ask to see your local prison. Let the authorities know you are interested.

Support a prisoner's family. The family is often as much a victim of incarceration as the prisoner is. He/she suffers from the stigma too. The spouse may be hesitant to approach old friends lest they no longer want to associate. Children are often taunted at school. Families who travel long distances to visit a prisoner often have no place to stay. Prisoners, remember, are generally poor, so their families make a long trip to prison and back again, often without benefit of a good night's sleep or a hot meal. Thus there is always a need for transport for prison visits. Members of the community can invite the prisoner's family to dinner, take the children along to the movies, or simply extend friendship to the spouse who is more than likely having serious difficulties coping with the present and with thoughts of the future.

Some community groups already exist for the purpose: Prisoners Aid, Prison Transport Group, numerous church organizations. Get involved. Offer your services. Examine your own attitudes. Learn the facts. Read as much as you can. And when you find your attitudes softening, your own stereotypes chipping away, tell your friends. Spread the word!

In the final analysis, meaningful change will come only with such attitude change. Prisons have become a very sensitive topic, and the greatest threat to the prison business is community reaction. I have personally encountered a number of instances where a prisons department has proposed new programs of privileges and rewards for good behaviour, special conditions of release, new criteria for early parole. Usually these proposals are tested in the media, and the community reaction is panic and outrage. As I have said, the media do not help; I have seen few examples of unbiased reporting where prisons are concerned. Headlines capitalizing on our fear make very

good copy, and they attract both readers and viewers. It is therefore up to the thinking community to develop its own discriminating abilities.

- The community can make a major contribution by supporting, in the media and with local politicians, the concept of alternatives to imprisonment. At present, the principal avenue for alternatives is through the Department of Probation and Parole. I have been gratified at the extent to which judges are agreeable to utilizing alternatives which are available. Indeed, I had the wrong impression of judges, too. They do not delight in sending offenders to prison, especially the young and/or first-offenders. I have found them quite amenable to non-prison options, such as increased probationary periods based on contractual contingencies for completing training or obtaining counselling. Judges will nearly always consider a residential care option with supervision by a responsible person, if there were only such community options available.
- A very important recent option is the Community Service Orders scheme, supervised by the Department of Probation and Parole. In this plan, offenders perform work in the community in lieu of serving prison time. It makes such good sense. Work gets done, and the offender experiences the satisfaction of having done it. Most such work projects, to my knowledge, have been contracted with the elderly (who can't do it themselves), with private service agencies (who are always short on money to have things done), or with government-supported services (whose budget is also thin and/or who want to support the scheme). The community at large has not responded well to the invitation to support this very important alternative to imprisonment. Yet, as with all alternatives, and with prison itself, if we are to make any progress in curbing criminal behaviour in our community, the community simply must roll up its sleeves and get in there and help.

SELECTED READINGS

Box, S. **Power, crime and mystification**. London: Tavistock, 1983.

Box examines the types of crime most likely to lead to imprisonment. For example, white collar criminals from high level positions in business and government, members of the police, and many criminal offenders against whom do not go to prison.

Braithwaite, J. **Prisons: Education and Work**. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980.

Braithwaite reviews programs of education and training in prisons throughout the world, and gives detailed descriptions and statistics of all prisons in Australia. He found, for example, that only 10% of Australian prisoners have completed secondary school. A large proportion are from minority groups (particularly Aboriginal) and are young, poor, unemployed.

Carlen, P. **Women's Imprisonment: A study in social control**. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

Carlen examines the women's prison in Scotland in depth, emphasizing particular problems associated with imprisonment for women. The Scottish picture is not atypical of women's prisons everywhere.

Christie, N. **Limits to pain**. Columbia, N.Y.: Universitet, 1981.

Christie describes the attempts at rehabilitation in Scandinavian prisons and makes a compelling plea for alternatives to prison.

Cohen, S. & Taylor, L. **Psychological survival**. Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972.

These authors present an in-depth study of a small group of long-term maximum security prisoners, providing many insights into the character of the men and the nature of the prison environment.

King, R.D. & Morgan, R. **The future of the prison system**. Westmead, England: Gower, 1980.

This book describes a major investigation into the British penal system, with strong recommendations for reform. The authors call for the "normalization" of prisons with increased involvement of the community.

Mitford, J. **Kind and usual punishment: The prison business**. New York: Knopf, 1973.

Mitford looks at the hidden agendas in the prisons in California.

Morgan A. & Cilento, B. "Evaluation of a volunteer program in a women's prison". Report to the Australian Institute of Criminology, June 1984.

Murton, T. & Hyams, J. **Accomplices to the crime: The Arkansas Prison Scandal**. New York: Grove, 1969.

The shocking story of a corrupt prison's resistance to reform. Murton's experience was the impetus for the film "Brubaker".

Nietzsche, F. **On the genealogy of morals. Second essay**. Translated by W. Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1969.

The controversial philosopher expressed some remarkable views on punishment. This essay has been an inspiration to anyone who is trying to understand why punishment doesn't work, and how imprisonment generally makes behaviour worse.

Sykes, G. **Criminology**. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

Gresham Sykes published an early book on crime and imprisonment in which he saw crime as a social problem as early as the 1950's. This book is a valuable overview of the entire criminal justice system, including major research findings on prisons.

Vinson, A. **Wilful obstruction: The frustration of prison reform**. Sydney: Methuen, 1982.

This book is a very sad story of an able and dedicated man who attempted to improve the New South Wales prisons in 1979-81. The resistance included those who had vested interests, the media, and the community itself.

Zdenkowski, G. & Brown, D. **The prison struggle**. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1982.

Also from New South Wales, this book takes a somewhat radical perspective, though a disturbingly realistic one, on why prisons are not effective — worse yet, destructive. If the Vinson book makes you sad, this one will make you angry. Hopefully, both will motivate you to get involved in the prison problem.

Zimbaro, P.G., Banks, W.C., Haney, C. & Jaffe, D.A. "A pirandellian prison". **The New York Times Magazine**, April 8, 1973.

A report of the Stanford Prison experiment. Various accounts of the study are also available in most psychology introductory textbooks.