

SPEECH TO THE VANCOUVER INSTITUTE

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

ON

JANUARY 27, 1973

BY

T.G. STREET, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL PAROLE BOARD, OTTAWA

(Not to be released before 11:30 p.m. EST, or  
8:30 pm Pacific Time).

I am quite pleased to have this opportunity of discussing parole with you. As you are aware, parole has been receiving considerable attention of late. Sometimes I feel that we on the National Parole Board are in the position of damned if you do and damned if you don't.

But two things are very clear. First - crime is fast becoming one of the great dilemmas of our society.

And second - the public, the police, the judiciary and the press are all quite concerned about parole.

It is a sad commentary that in this century, with all the significant advances in our scientific and sociological skills, we have failed so miserably in finding a more effective solution to this ever increasing dilemma.

When you think of the tremendous cost of crime, the loss of property, the misery, the pain and suffering and the wastage of human lives, the total consequences are staggering.

For many of us, things are in the balance. We are weighing traditional liberties and methods against an increasing need to prevent crime by a variety of more suppressive methods.

Let me set the scene for the dilemma in which we find ourselves :

We are in the midst of rapid social change, and any such change, especially the one we are experiencing, can be highly disruptive to a society. Social breakdown, including crime, is one of the results of this rapid change.

We are living in what has been called the post-industrial society, where life-styles of leisure and work, and our moral values, are constantly being questioned and revised.

One might expect that with the advances of technology, ranging from high-speed computers and communications networks, to new locking devices and individual defence systems, and with the specialization of professions, we would be in a better position to solve the problem of crime.

Indeed, we now have the means to prevent more crime and to detect more criminals than ever before, but we do not seem to be able to use them. We may be better prepared but the problem has become more complex.

We are buffeted by two currents of thought:

On one side this is a profound liberalization of social values - indeed, some would consider it to be excessive permissiveness and individual freedom.

On the other side, there is a longing for harsher treatment of offenders and a crackdown on those who would eternally disturb the peace.

But, as in all things, there is no simple, easy answer as to what should or should not be done. There is no simple way - as letters to the Editor and callers to hot-line shows would have us believe.

One of the factors contributing towards crime today, may be the more permissive attitude that arises from the uncertainty brought about by social change.

Today, it seems that many old-fashioned ideas such as respect for authority, hard work, a day's pay for a day's work, pride of independence and self-respect, have now gone out of style.

Instead, we allow - and even encourage - people to accept welfare rather than work, and at the same time, to complain about the state of society and that they are not getting paid enough for doing nothing!

There is one thing that hippies say all the time and this is, "Make Love not War". Well, I have news for them, I have done them both and I agree with them.

Today, we are increasingly faced with new types of crime : drug trafficking, white collar crime, aircraft hi-jacking, urban warfare, and the cowardly mail bombings.

To a certain extent, we have adjusted our laws to keep up with social change. Law was once set down to punish offenders, no more was thought to be needed. Now, the emphasis is shifting to social control and the law allows us to rehabilitate offenders.

In other words, we have gone from punishment, to deterrence, to rehabilitation.

We realized that continuous punishment in a penal institution has had little beneficial effect, if any.

Punishment alone does not correct criminal behaviour, it does not even begin to accomplish what it is supposed to do, unless one of its aims is to make the public feel better and safer.

What is punishment for? Is it only for retribution - an eye for an eye - or is it also supposed to be remedial. And if it is, how much punishment is enough?

Will the offender leave the prison better than when he came or will he be more damaged than helped by the experience?

Is the punishment of one person to prevent others from doing the same thing fully consistent with our concept of criminal justice?

How much of a deterrent is punishment and imprisonment anyway? Do sentences given as deterrents actually work as inhibitors?

At any one time there are about 12,000 people in provincial prisons and about 8,000 inmates in our federal penitentiaries serving sentences of two years or more and during the year, a large number of offenders come and go. In the last three years about 4,200 people were sent to federal prisons.

About 80 percent of them have been in prison before. Some of them have been there quite a few times. These 20,000 people were not deterred by the threat of imprisonment.

Did imprisonment convince them never to return? Did the programs we previously offered make them into responsible citizens or even give them the desire to do so?

I think the effect of deterrence is very much exaggerated, and that the real deterrence is the certainty of apprehension and the swiftness of punishment, rather than in the punishment itself.

Although many criminologists regard punishment as barbaric, I believe that it does have its place. But it must be certain, though not necessarily severe, and it must be immediate. We must not be like the mother who tells the misbehaving child in the morning that his father will probably spank him that evening.

Punishment may be useful in that it shocks a few people so that they will not get into trouble again, but, if anything, it usually makes a person bitter if it is carried on too long. Too much punishment does not usually make an irresponsible person into a responsible one.

In addition, punishment is very expensive. The total average cost for an inmate per year in a federal institution is \$9,720. The total average cost for preparing the case for the Board and maintaining the inmate on parole

in the first year is \$1,105. In the second year the cost of supervision averages \$458.

If punishment alone is not the answer, what is?

Many offenders learned their criminal behaviour. And, if criminal behaviour can be learned, it is most likely that it can be unlearned.

And, in spite of the efforts of some very dedicated people in the past, I must say that we were not successful in getting to the root of the problem.

But, on behalf of these people, I should point out that we get the offender after everyone else has failed to help him - family, church, schools, and so on. And, we are expected to magically reform and transform him from perhaps a vicious criminal into a decent, law-abiding citizen. Well, that isn't easy.

Many of the problems are the result of an unfortunate early life, in an adequate social and economic environment.

Some offenders, of course, are disturbed and require psychiatric treatment. While others are products



of poor environment and lack of proper training.

Let us not forget that the real purpose of corrections is not merely retribution or punishment - it is a change in behaviour for long-term protection of society. Proper correctional programs, can help to teach some criminals to live properly in society, and to accept their responsibilities.

In too many cases, when we lock them up, away from society, we prevent them from learning responsibilities with the proper guidance and control that can help bring this about.

We must, of course, have control for protection - control for as long as necessary, yes, but no longer than necessary.

Wherever possible or feasible the offender should be kept in the community where he can work and support his dependents, contribute to the economy of the country and learn to become a responsible citizen. If he cannot be properly controlled in society, then he must be returned to custody for further treatment.

Indeed, let me emphasize that a confirmed criminal who continues to be a menace to society and who shows little immediate prospect for change, must be removed from society, until he can be treated and is no longer a menace.

I am not advocating that we stop imprisoning people, but instead of sentences which do little to change behaviour or attitude, I believe we must continue in the direction we are now moving to treat the offender and to try and rehabilitate him as a responsible member of society, with a proper balance of imprisonment and parole.

Parole is a means by which a prisoner who gives some indication that he intends to reform can be released from prison to serve the balance of his sentence in society, under guidance and supervision so he can learn to accept the responsibilities of citizenship. It also provides an effective motive or incentive for him to reform - to get out of prison.

In many quarters, parole is little understood and reluctantly accepted. Some people believe parole is synonymous with coddling criminals. And, when they read of one inmate out of hundreds who commits a crime while on parole, they are convinced of it.

Unfortunately, they do not often read of all the paroled inmates who succeed in becoming responsible citizens.

Parole has a dual purpose - rehabilitation of the individual and protection of society from that individual. Through guidance, it helps those who are prepared to help themselves. Through supervision, it provides protection to the public.

I might add that the protection of society has always been the paramount consideration of the Board when granting parole. In fact, the Parole Act states that the Board may grant parole "if it considers that release of the inmate on parole would not constitute an undue risk to society."

Besides a full parole, there are other types of parole, including a gradual release for adjustment in the community before release on full parole and day parole.

Contact with the community, with family, relatives and friends, is important for re-establishing the offender in the community.

The Board's program for day parole helps establish contact with the community before full parole is granted. It lasts from 15 days to a maximum of three months, to attend school,

take special training, or for other rehabilitative purposes.

There is often confusion surrounding the Board's day parole program and the penitentiaries temporary absence program in the minds of the public. The Board has nothing whatsoever to do with the temporary absence program, which is granted by the director of the prison for humanitarian or compassionate reasons.

In addition to maintaining contact with the community, day parole and temporary absence act as indicators of an inmate's readiness for full parole, and to some degree, show if he is a responsible risk.

In the last few years, we have been making greater use of day parole, increasing them from 698 in 1970, to 1,185 in 1971, and to 1,156 in 1972.

Besides this, we also have what is known as mandatory supervision, which started just a year ago. This means that anyone coming out of a penitentiary and who did not get parole, will be under mandatory supervision for his remission time in the same manner as a parolee.

If those inmates who were selected for parole need guidance, council and assistance and surveillance that

goes with parole supervision, then the inmates who did not get parole need it even more.

Mandatory Supervision ensures that all people coming out of Penitentiaries receive this control and benefit from the guidance available. It means too, that we do not release as many borderline cases on full parole.

An inmate does not just apply for parole and get it. There is a carefully planned program behind each release.

Even before the final decision is made we spend four to five months looking at a case - studying reports from the police and the courts - making investigations in the community - talking to family, relatives, friends and employers. From the Institution's classification officer, psychologist, or other staff members, we receive information about his progress and any change in attitude.

And, of course, one of our staff talks to the inmate himself.

Good conduct in prison is not the sole criterion for release. No offender is exactly like another; the type of offence, the previous family history, social situation, emotional stability, educational and vocational

skills, and the resources available in the community - all these vary.

Naturally, the Board is guided by conduct and progress in prison, but it is also guided by any comment of the police and of the judge at the time of sentencing as well as the length of the sentence.

Are his family relationships good? Does he have a chance for a job? Does he have insight into the problems that took him in prison in the first place? Are there people in his community who are willing and able to help him?

Of course, we and other agencies will give him what we can, but most important of all, is he ready and able to help himself?

We try to prepare him to re-establish himself in society. He may not recognize how difficult it is. A man who has been shut off from day-to-day life for two, five, or ten years cannot just walk out of prison and start afresh.

I mentioned earlier the cost of keeping men on

parole and in prison. Parole not only offers excellent possibilities for rehabilitation, it saves on the cost of imprisonment and helps contribute to the economy of Canada.

During June 1972, a study carried out of 2,367 parolees under direct supervision by the Board for the whole month showed that 1,828 of them, or about 77 percent, had a job.

On the average, they earned \$483 during the month. Their total earnings for June reached about \$912,000. On the basis of these earnings, they probably earned about \$11 million in 1972 and their federal and provincial income taxes would be more than \$1 million. This study only covered about 55 percent of all parolees in Canada.

Of the 206 inmates in Vancouver on parole for all of June 1972, 139 were fully employed, earning an average of \$576 a month.

In Abbotsford, 45 parolees out of 57 had jobs earning an average of \$524 a month.

In Victoria, 44 parolees out of 62 were employed at an average of \$468.

The working parolee earns money, spends money, and pays taxes like everyone else. These parolees also supported 2,200 dependents who would otherwise have been supported at public expense. His earnings are not only contributing to the economy of the country, but are definitely contributing to the success of his rehabilitation.

It is essential that ex-inmates be given a chance to work if they seem to deserve it. If they are refused just because they have been in prison, then there is no chance of them being reformed and they will probably return to crime.

Let me stress however, that we do not grant parole just to save money. Nor do we grant parole out of pity or leniency, but only if, as the Parole Act states "the inmate has derived the maximum benefit from imprisonment" and when his rehabilitation will be aided by parole, and if his release will not present an undue risk to society.

Naturally, there is very real and understandable concern about what we are doing from the public, because only our failures and not our many successes are publicized.



Nonetheless, we have learned a great deal from this public concern, but we are only human, and we are dealing with human beings, and sometimes, in spite of our efforts, we do make bad decisions, or circumstances in the community intervene to increase the risk and parole is violated. This is regrettable, and may have unfortunate consequences.

We realize too that when judges see a parole violator standing in front of the bench, they may wonder what those people at the Parole Board are doing - judges see all our failures, but not our successes.

Moreover, I would like to stress that it is only natural we should expect a certain number of failures in any human enterprise and that a program should not be faulted because there are failures, but rather if there are too many failures.

I would like to reassure you that we are very much concerned with our failures, so much so, that two years ago, when we thought that the violation rate had gone too high, we deliberately reduced the number of paroles.

After all, if we were to choose only the very best, sure-risk, candidates for a parole, we would have a fantastic success rate to show the public, but, we would not be very successful in helping to rehabilitate the

majority of inmates which is what it is all about. If one were to go through life doing nothing, then one would never do anything wrong.

In the past, the Board believed that parole was one of the best means of rehabilitation, it gradually expanded its own resources and made greater use of others so that more offenders might be helped to become responsible citizens.

To see the effects and results of the Board's attempts to help in the reformation of more offenders, let us take a look at the statistics for the years 1965, 1970, 1971 and 1972.

In 1965 we granted 1,878 full paroles, which was 27.5% of the 6,839 applications we received.

By 1970, both the applications and the paroles had increased. In that year, we granted 5,114 paroles which was 59 percent of the 8,633 applications we received.

In 1965, we had 192 parole violations, in 1970 parole violations had risen to 1,004, increasing both numerically and proportionately.

By 1970, we had reached a plateau in the number of inmates released on full parole in any one year, who seemed to be able to benefit from the present system of rehabilitation.

In 1971, there were even more applications for parole - 9,458 of them - but we only granted 52.5 percent of them, amounting to 4,965, which was 149 fewer than the year before.

There are about 5,000 people on parole at any one moment. If you start with these and add another 5,000 people during the next 12 months, you have about 10,000 chances for parole violation in any year.

Well, even with that many possibilities, the number of violations in 1971 was too much. It had jumped to 1509. We had received the message loud and clear.

And we in turn let it be known to the inmates - especially the parole violators - that we were not happy with their performance.

We have in fact said to the, "O.K., too many of you blew it, so now we are going to be more selective than we thought would be necessary."

We were more selective. The 8,763 applications in 1972 were 695 fewer than in 1971 and we only granted 41 percent of them, or 3,631.

These 3,600 paroles were 27 percent, or 1,334 fewer than we granted in 1971 and nearly 30 percent, or 1,483 fewer than in 1970.

No doubt you are interested in how parolees are doing here in Vancouver. Normally, at any one moment, there are between 360 and 400 inmates under supervision in this area.

During 1972, 30 paroles were revoked by the Board and only 54 were forfeited as a result of a conviction for an indictable offence.

This is a total of 84 who violated their paroles, compared with the 243 who finished their paroles successfully during the year, and the 369 who were still on parole December 31st.

Besides reducing the number of paroles because of the higher violation rate, we are using more of our resources to identify cases that should not be paroled, but we are also improving our analysis of the outcome of parole

to reduce past miscalculations.

There is a greater emphasis on police reporting and trying to establish relations with the police.

We also have closer scrutiny of violent offenders and parole violators, and we changed our rules so that a larger number of Board Members are involved in decisions on parole violators, violent offenders and drug offenders.

The task of the Board is a considerable one, but let us not forget what a task - what an effort, rehabilitation may be for the individual parolee.

Let me stress as strongly as I can, if we do not give the parolee a chance, there is almost no way that he can rehabilitate himself. I do not guarantee 100 percent success, but if we do succeed, we will have the satisfaction of helping someone to become a good citizen.

Good citizenship is created, even in the most fortunate of us. How much longer and how much harder it is to create a good citizen from a bad one? And it takes a good citizen to create a good citizen. So, I say, crime is everyone's business.

If I have given you the impression of being too zealous an advocate of offenders' needs, let me place these thoughts in perspective.

I do not think the rights of offenders can be stressed over those of the public. I do not consider all offenders as poor, misunderstood people or even martyrs. Not every vulture is a poor, maladjusted nightingale.

Society must be protected against crime. Citizens must be able to feel reasonably secure from personal attack, theft, or destruction of their property. Protection must be paramount but I do think protection of the public and rehabilitation must go hand in hand, for in the long run, reformation is the best protection.

There are no easy answers or definite directions. We face a number of dilemmas centering on the balance between our traditional liberties and humane actions, and the increasing need to protect ourselves against criminals.

We are faced with the need for immediate total short-term protection of the public through removal of the offender from society.

We are also faced with the need for long-term

protection, and this must involve the offender in society to be successful.

For short-term protection, imprisonment fills the bill quite handily. But, in the long run, imprisonment alone does not protect society or reform the criminal.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have tried to give you an outline of the parole system and its place in rehabilitation of offenders.

In conclusion, let me stress again that there should be proper control and adequate treatment of offenders and this should take place in the community as much as possible.

Those offenders who seem likely to be reformed should be released on parole. We should help those who want to help themselves.

If they cannot be successfully controlled or treated in the community during rehabilitation, then they must be returned to prison. If they appear to be incorrigible then they should be kept in prison indefinitely. As long as they are dangerous, they should be kept out of society.

There is no doubt that there are such dangerous

criminals in our society and we will have to continue looking at ways to protect ourselves against them.

But, I hope you will agree that the majority of offenders can be helped by intelligent and humane programs to change from alienated, anti-social individuals to a responsible law-abiding one.

I think we have some way to go yet, we need your understanding, your support, and your co-operation in reaching that goal. And I thank you for the opportunity to tell you about it.

T.G. Street

Chairman, National Parole Board

Speech to the Vancouver Institute

27th January, 1973