

Report on the Violent Potential of Kingston Penitentiary

Prepared by the Prison Violence Project
P.O. Box 22, Kingston, Ontario
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Rudolf Martens, Chairperson
J. Campbell, Secretary

This report was prepared by the Prison Violence Project - a research body dedicated to the elimination of violence in prisons thus affecting a reduction of violence by ex-prisoners upon release.

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P.O. Box 11, Kingston, Ontario
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and affecting a reduction of violence by ex-prisoners upon
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Historically Kingston Penitentiary has been subjected to a major riot approximately every 20 years on average. These outbreaks of violence have coincided with another 20 year cycle in Canadian Corrections; the cyclical swing from an attitude of retribution (warehousing) to rehabilitation (programs) and back again. In 1932 a riot occurred during a time of national depression and harsh government reaction towards crime. Beatings and the silent system were extremely oppressive resulting in violent reaction. In 1954 Kingston Penitentiary's population skyrocketed to over 1000 inmates, a precursor to the destruction that left the dome roof beyond repair. Most recently the notorious 1971 riot, that left two dead and many injured, occurred because of a proposed move to the super secure Millhaven that had just been built, demoralizing inmates who thought that the new prison would be even more oppressive than Kingston. Repairs of the damage from that riot are only now nearing completion, at a cost of over \$100 million. Government and university studies have shown that transience, overcrowding and a high security level are the major factors which contribute to prison violence. Kingston Penitentiary is presently experiencing all three factors to a high degree and is simply an explosion waiting to happen.

The Maximum Security setting of Kingston Penitentiary is the ideal setting for serious violence. Studies have shown that 53% of the reported assaultive incidents occurred in maximum security institutions even though only 31% of the inmate population was being held in these settings. (Porporino, 1986)

During the period of January 13 to February 1, 1994 the Kingston administration closed down Upper G, Lower G and Upper H ranges which housed 120 inmates out of a total population which stood at 496 on January 28 1994. Eighty one inmates were double bunked on January 7. By February 1, 177 inmates were double bunked in the main unit and 92 double bunked in the new C7 building, for a total of 269 double bunked inmates.

These beds are not long enough to accommodate anyone over the height of five foot ten inches. Since 37 percent of the inmates in the main unit are unemployed, they will spend the majority of their time locked in a cell that has one and a half square meters of floor space. Double bunking reduces that to three quarters of a square meter per person. The only space available is the bed itself, approximately the size of a cot. Crowding in prisons has been associated with higher rates of psychiatric commitment. (Paulus, 1978) These men are expected to survive in this environment for up to four years until the retrofit is completed. Kingston Penitentiary has the highest percentage of lifers of any prison in Canada. Over 180 are serving life or indeterminate sentences. Many of these men are young and have not yet become resigned to their fates and will not likely be willing to undergo further suffering.

The rate of double bunking has risen from 16 percent on January 7, to 53 percent on February 1. At this time 43 percent of the main unit is double bunked. Over the Christmas holidays

CSC staff added 42 double bunks. The inmates had refused to do this work and were subsequently locked down until the beds were installed. There were many tense moments over this installation period, involving threats, numerous work slow downs and strikes. Crowding sometimes causes, sometimes results from, and often simply exacerbates the impact of other conditions and practices. (Clements, 1979).

The Segregation Unit and Lower H were also supposed to be closed down for the retrofit but the dramatic increase in serious incidents, including violence, forced the administration to designate Lower H as a Segregation Unit. The goal had been to have one Segregation Unit remaining. However the violence caused by instability has resulted in the designation of three Segregation Units, including Lower A, which increased tensions further. In one night three attempted suicides occurred in segregation.

More serious than the high pressure of these small living spaces, is the disruption from cell changes. Those institutions which experienced the greatest degree of population transience also had the highest rates of violence over the period that was examined. (Porporino, 1986) Over 50 percent of the inmates changed cells in a period of three weeks. These men had lived in their previous cells for periods of up to 15 years. Of the January prison population, 20 percent had arrived within the past six months, many of whom are young and have relatively short sentences. Younger inmates are more likely to be involved in homicides, assaultive incidents and collective violence. (Sylvester, 1977; Ellis, 1974; Quinsey, 1978) These are called "new fish" and pose a serious disruption to the established range community with its hierarchies and economic structure within which they have to become established. Trade in drugs, food and other goods is a way of life within every prison community and a measure of status and power. Long established positions of order are also unsettled by challenges to the established leaders, or "wheels", by new entrepreneurs, or "shooters".

The new medium security building C7 was opened on January 7, which is modern and is far less stressful. Although it is double bunked, the cells are three and a half times bigger than in the main unit. Its new residents are predominantly quiet long timers who used to maintain stability in the main unit. An exodus of 92 stable inmates from the main unit has left it to the young "toughs".

This leaves a power vacuum which is being filled by new, more powerful cliques. Some of these cliques include the most dangerous prisoners in Canada, having exhibited their propensity for violence in the past.

Alcohol and drugs are major factors contributing to extreme prison violence. An astonishing 75 gallons of alcoholic brew has been discovered during one search. Enough alcohol to inebriate half of the population of the prison.

Cell changes also cause paranoia leading to individual attacks upon perceived enemies, regardless of reality. A dramatic

increase in home made knives, metal clubs and parts for zip guns have been found through searches in the past seven days, which is indicative of a primitive arms race between cliques and between individuals. Looking at the patterns in the general prison system, 35% of the incidents resulted from accidental, real or imagined insults combined with hypersensitivity (Bennett, 1975). This atmosphere is now prominent in Kingston.

Law, order and a stable underground economy are vital in maintaining a stable range. The law and order comes mostly from the capable inmates rather from the guards. Even fairly extreme security clampdowns may not achieve significant reductions in violence in the long run (Bidna, 1975). When the guards attempt to become the "heavies", the inmates tend to band together against the common enemy. Experienced guards understand this fact and consciously work with the range leaders. Now that the hierarchies are disrupted, the guards no longer have a focus of power and must attempt to impose order themselves on inmates with whom they may never have before dealt.

A few members of some cliques have been moved to Lower H and segregated, pending transfer to Millhaven. However the three segregation units are now full in Kingston, and Millhaven is running almost to capacity. These measures usually do not prevent violence in the long run because the inmates that were charged are only those that have been caught. Paranoid inmates are often undetectable until an incident occurs. Short-term fluctuations may be less indicative of the problem of violence than they are of variation in security and management policies (e.g., general tightening of security and increased control over inmate movement, use of segregation, and dispersal of troublemakers) (Porporino, 1986).

From the evidence of major incidents which have occurred over the past two months at Kingston Penitentiary and from past experience as recorded by the Correctional Service of Canada, Kingston is almost certainly due for a bout of serious violence. The three major ingredients to prison violence are present: transience, overcrowding and maximum security. Each of these conditions are serious by themselves, but are explosive when combined.

Rehabilitation as a priority within CSC has become virtually nonexistent. Removal of all good time for arbitrary reasons under the detention provisions of Bill C-36 is now the most common parole decision experienced by Kingston inmates. All incentives to good behaviour and rehabilitation have been removed in an attempt to appease an uninformed public, and politicians responsible for budget allocations. Their standard justification is a quote from Bill C-36, "we believe that the individual may cause death, or serious harm before the expiration of the sentence." This attitude fails to consider behaviour after the expiration of the sentence. The ex-inmate is left with no supervision, or means by which to start a new life. Kingston inmates are now concerned mainly with survival in prison by any means necessary, and violence commands a great deal of respect

here, even with the guards.

When they are finally released, they will utilize what they have been taught. Until that time someone will have to deal with the manufactured rage that is looking for an outlet. The goal of rehabilitation works to make a safer prison and a safer society.

Upon release, far too many of these inmates will continue to embrace violence as a means of dealing with life's challenges. Their incarceration offers an excellent opportunity to instruct them in alternative means of coping and dealing with conflict. Sadly, this opportunity is not being utilized by the Correction Service of Canada. This is in turn contributing to the endless cycle of recidivism and incarceration. Accessibility to, and incentives to participate in rehabilitative programs are elements fundamental to the concept of rehabilitation.

Perhaps the answer lies in re-establishing cascading with programs along with the old incentive of earning remission for good time. A devoted commitment to such programs represents a vital component in establishing a safer, less violent society.

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