

## CALIFORNIA'S INSIDIOUS SOCIAL CANCER: PRISONS

### CANCEROUS SYMPTOMS

On 21 March 2009 parolee Lavelle Mixon left a murderous wake of 4 dead Oakland, CA police officers, before he was killed by police. Other parolees of infamy are: Richard Davis who kidnapped, assaulted and murdered Polly Klass; Philip Garrido who kidnapped and held Jaycee Dugard as a sexual slave for 18 years before being discovered; Chelsea's Law is the product of a parolee kidnapping, assaulting, and murdering Chelsea. Media headlines chronicle endless abominable acts and behaviors of malignant parolees.

In response to these headlines we witness the regular and predictable political theatre of politicians pounding their drums and in chorus demanding "We have to step up our watch over parolees!" and "Tougher sentencing!". HELLO! Do these guardians of the public trust have their heads buried so deep they are blind to the yellow flags: these parole failures are products of the prison system! Just maybe the watch "step up" should be over the system that produced these devils? Attacking and focusing on the symptoms might get a few votes, but will cure nothing. The reality is California's behemoth prison system is producing a 70% failure rate on their promulgation of "CORRECTIONS and REHABILITATION". How much blood has to be shed, what toll of human misery has to be paid, and how many billions of dollars have to be wasted, before our leaders stand up and demand accountability. Critical analysis of the prison system may very well reveal all of the blood is not confined solely to the hands of parole failures. The shocking reality is California taxpayers are benefactors to a system that makes bad men worse and good men bad.

An intelligent business person would never continue to operate and pour more money into factories that have a 70% failure rate, yet California's 33 prison factories continue to operate with impunity. California has the highest paid prison guards in the world, with the largest operating state prison budget, but no one is asking "Where is the return on our investment?". Is there no politician that can ask the hard questions? "Step up our watch over parolees" and "Tougher sentencing" is not going to solve the problem, it only addresses the symptoms of this cancer. Nothing good comes from marinating men in hate for long periods of time.

In an article authored by United States Senator Jim Webb (D., VA), "Why We Must Fix Our Prisons", Senator Webb writes, "Our failure to address this problem has caused the nation's prisons to burst their seams with a massive overcrowding, even as our neighborhoods have become more dangerous. We are wasting billions of dollars and diminishing millions of lives."

The United States Supreme Court recognized California's overcrowding as a constitutional violation and ordered reduction of the prison population. So, rather than seize this moment to establish a renaissance in rehabilitation, California plays a three-card monte with prisoners, storing them out of state and shifting storage to county jails. This action advertised as progressive momentum in "rehabilitation" is, in fact, nothing more than calling a toad by another name, county jails are still human repositories, where few counties are exercising true reform in rehabilitation. Surprisingly no one is connecting the dots that this three-card monte took the state's correction/rehabilitation budget for 2011/12 from Ten Billion Dollars, to Sixteen Billion Dollars, since the legislators allocated Six Billion Dollars to the counties. In addition, through AB900, hundreds of millions of dollars in expensive bond money is being let to counties for jail cell construction. Solving criminality with more prison cells is like curing AIDS with more hospital beds.

### TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Bringing forth a problem imposes an ethical and moral responsibility of offering a solution. Therefore the following basic and preliminary recommendations are offered and explained.

#### FULL DISCLOSURE AND TRANSPARENCY

Since California has the largest prison budget, largest prison population, highest paid prison guards and greatest failure in rehabilitation, the nation's eyes should rightfully be on California's current crisis and expected leadership in reform.

1. For true reform to take place California's prisons must open themselves to the objective eyes of the public, the media must have complete access to all aspects of "CORRECTIONS and REHABILITATION". No longer can this leviathan operate in secret with controlled release of information.

The prison argues the media must be kept out to "protect victims" by not allowing the press to be sympathetic to convicted felons. This argument collapses in that the prison has failed in its professed mission of "REHABILITATION", thereby releasing thousands of parolees whom are committing crimes which compound the ever growing number of victims. Who are protecting those "victims"?

Banishing the media asks the question, who is really being "protected". In the seventeenth century philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza offered "It has been one song of those who thirst after absolute power that the interest of the state requires that its affairs should be conducted in secret." Should the twenty-first century tolerate state secrecy?

The media must be allowed to sit in on Board of Parole hearings and various other conclaves. The prison's mantra of "Safety and Security" has been over used to assure secrecy.

The public must know what goes on behind the prison's lethal electric fences. Disclosure is the first step to curing this Social Cancer, with the least financial impact.

#### PUNISHMENT or REHABILITATION

Once the prisons are open to full objective scrutiny "REHABILITATION" must become more than a rhetorical device. The prison system must conduct due diligence in true reform, thereby returning prisoners to society as responsible citizens.

Currently California proclaims "REHABILITATION", however the reality is the majority of prisoners are held like livestock in cells, stacked in dormitories and stored out of state, while serving draconian long sentences. Beyond a token offering of "REHABILITATION" programs most of these men are left to their own devices for rehabilitation. The most lay penologist would recognize this as "punishment". The current multi-billion dollar budget, paired with a 70% recidivism rate, translates to failure using a punishment driven system.



LAUNCH IMMEDIATE REHABILITATION STUDY AND REDUCE PRISON POPULATION

2. California must look to states who have a proven "REHABILITATION" program, and establish a legitimate program of its own.

Prison bureaucratic arrogance has eschewed promising and proven rehabilitation programs. Case in point: esteemed California leaders; Larry Bowler former State Assemblyman; Robert Presley former State Senator; D.O. "Spike" Helmick former CHP Commissioner, brought forth to prison officials a proven rehabilitation program. In their words "CDCR bureaucracy simply blew us off." (See Sacramento Bee VIEWPOINTS, Dec. 3, 2008). This status quo arrogance of prison officials, sanctioned by politicians, is expensive and dangerous.

Establish viable curricula for instruction in work ethics, time management, financial planning, philosophical studies in social responsibilities, understanding morals and ethics, communication skills, anger management and other life style skills for successful reassimilation back to society. No prisoner should be allowed to idly waste away his incarceration time.

3. Simultaneous to establishing a meaningful rehabilitation program, objectively reduce the prison population to a manageable inmate community. Determine through a panel of qualified experts, the common denominators of those 30% of parolees that successfully stay out of prison. Then, identify those prisoners in the prisons and parole them. Come to the reality the current Parole Board is dysfunctional, and its policies contribute to the problem.
4. Further prison population reduction can be achieved by U.S. Homeland Security and California collaborating in deporting illegal alien prisoners who have served 50% of their time. For many years our forefathers used banishment as a form of punishment. Today, we punish the offender with excessively long sentences, then further punish with banishment. This system extends punishment to the taxpayer; especially in a time of financial hardship.

Those illegal aliens who are not recalcitrant recidivists should be advised that they will be deported to their homelands, and if they should return they will be required to serve out the remainder of their unfinished sentences.

This conventional wisdom would reduce the prison population, allow better rehabilitation focus on homeland citizens and relieve a financial burden on the taxpayer.

5. There will always be a class of prisoner that will remain recalcitrant. These prisoners must be identified and housed separately from prisoners active and participating in their rehabilitation.

STAFF TRAINING IN PROPER REHABILITATION

6. Rehabilitation is behavior modification. To successfully modify behavior an established reinforcement program has to be in place with clear positive and negatives. The less sophisticated the subject, the less abstracting of these reinforcements. The current system is an aversion conditioning method that polarizes prisoner and guard. The punishment is associated to the punisher rather than the act. Aversion conditioning produces unpredictable behaviors, paranoia and suppressed anger: Behaviors we see in 70% of the current paroling prisoners.

Qualified experts in psychology should conduct training and supervision of staff that deal with prisoners on a daily basis. Those who handle prisoners must be aware of their influence in behavior modification.

Basic understanding of conditioning tells us, if a caged dog is tormented by its handlers, that dog is going to be mean when it is released.

COMPREHENSIVE REASSIMILATION PLANS

This arena is another signature of California's prison failure. Prisoners are released back into a society that has been well prejudiced to recognize them as pariahs bearing social stigmas of "ex-con", "convicted felon" and other modern day Scarlet Letters. These prisoners are given \$200. release money, a stipend that has not changed in over thirty years. Consequently, the parolee has little more than bus fare and a solid recipe for failure.

7. Rehabilitation must incorporate well designed and realistic reassimilation plans, ideally with an extensive work furlough program.

SUMMARY

These basic recommendations come as starting points. California citizens, taxpayers and guardians of the public trust must come to realize the state's prison system is in such a dysfunctional condition it will take years and funds to bring it to a worthy state entity. Or, California can continue on its current direction of wasted lives and treasury.

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