

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

April 17, 2019

Riot Supression Training In Stanley

On Monday, April 8, 2019, SCI prison officials staged riot suppression training by locking down the housing units with no staff members present in the living areas. In order to justify training for riot control, I assume these officials have reason to believe there is a strong likelihood that there is going to be a riot in SCI. If that's true, wouldn't they be better off spending their time implementing riot-prevention strategies - be proactive rather than reactive? And if it's not true, why are they squandering resources preparing for something they have no evidence to believe is going to happen?

In reality, riots are not caused by prisoners but rather by prison officials driving prisoners to lash out in frustration and desperation in response to harsh treatment. In other words, prison officials are preparing for a riot that can only occur if they force it to happen.

But anyone who thinks prisoners in SCI could or would stage a riot have a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature. There are hundreds of old men here, many of whom are too sickly or decrepit to participate in a riot. There are also hundreds of men who have short sentences with a chance of early release who would not jeopardize that by rioting. Add to that the hundreds of prisoners who don't want to be caught up in the unpleasantness of a riot and there aren't enough prisoners left to create a critical mass for a riot.

The only people who benefit from a riot are prison staff. They get to come charging in like the calvary, restore order and be heroes. In the aftermath, they can mistreat and abuse prisoners without fear of sanction. Officials can then pad their resumes with their acts of valor and parlay that into promotions and higher wages. It will also justify more funding for new prisons to protect the public from the monsters as only those prison officials are qualified to do.

I've been in prison over 34 years and each year conditions become worse - not by prison overcrowding - but by prison officials vying with each other to see who can justify implementing increasingly restrictive policies and earn a promotion by doing so.

The culture of the DOC needs to change and the only way to do that is to stop the policy of exclusively promoting from within. Prison officials only promote like-minded people and this has been going on for so long there is massive group-think among staff. Agreement and consensus is more important than doing the right thing and until that changes, the DOC will keep on getting more oppressive and dysfunctional.