

The function of the Parole Board is to select those inmates in the various institutions in Canada who show some indication of a sincere intention to reform and to assist them in doing so by a grant of parole. The inmate then is allowed to serve the balance of his sentence in society, but under supervision and subject to restrictions and conditions as to his conduct and behaviour, which are designed for his welfare and for the protection of society. The Board is not a reviewing authority and is not concerned with the propriety of the conviction or the length of the sentence, but only with the problem of deciding in each case whether or not there is a reasonable chance of reformation. Parole is not a matter of clemency and is not granted on compassionate or humanitarian grounds but only if it appears that there is at least a reasonable chance the inmate will lead a law-abiding life.

The National Parole Board is composed of a Chairman and four Members (one woman) and was formed in January 1959. It operates under the authority of the Parole Act (SC 1958, c. 38) which came into force on Feb. 15, 1959 replacing the former Ticket-of-Leave Act. It has jurisdiction over any adult inmate in any prison in Canada convicted of an offence against an Act of the Parliament of Canada. It also has jurisdiction to revoke or suspend any sentence of whipping or any order made under the Criminal Code prohibiting any person from operating a motor vehicle.

The decision of the Board is based on reports it receives from the police, from the trial judge or magistrate and from various people at the institution who deal with the inmate. Reports are also obtained from a psychologist or psychiatrist, when available. Where necessary, a community investigation is conducted to secure as much information as possible about the man's family and background, his work record, and his position in the community. From all these reports, an assessment is made to determine whether or not he has changed his attitude and is likely to lead a law-abiding life. An inmate need not obtain the services of a lawyer to apply for parole. He may apply by sending a letter to the Board and is assisted in preparing such an application at the institution, or another person may apply on his behalf. The Board automatically reviews all sentences of over two years. As soon as an application is received, a file is opened and investigation begun, the results of which are presented to the Board for decision.

All applications and reports are processed by the Parole Board staff at Ottawa. In addition to the headquarters staff, there are 24 regional officers stationed in ten regional offices across the country. They interview all applicants for parole to give them an opportunity of making verbal representations to a representative of the Board. The Regional Officers also submit to the Board reports of interviews and their assessment of the inmates' suitability for parole. These men have authority over the parolees in their respective areas and also give information and counsel to all inmates regarding possibility of parole and preparation for it. They may also issue a Warrant of Suspension and have a parolee arrested and placed in custody if it is necessary to prevent a breach of any term or condition of the parole. They are thus able to exercise effective and adequate control over all parolees in their respective areas.

A person on parole is under the care of a supervisor, usually an after-care agency worker or a probation officer, who reports to the regional officer. If he violates the conditions of his parole or commits a further offence or misbehaves in any manner, the Board may revoke his parole and return him to the institution to serve that part of his sentence outstanding at the time his parole was granted. If a parolee commits an indictable offence while on parole, his parole is automatically forfeited and he is returned to the institution to serve the unexpired balance of his sentence, plus any new term to which he was sentenced for the commission of the new offence.

It is essential that the general public should understand that the true purpose of punishment should be the reformation of the offender and not just vengeance or retribution. The treatment and training program in the institutions is a vital part of the correctional process and parole is an extension of this training outside the institution. It is not a matter of pampering prisoners but of trying to reform as many as possible and of giving prisoners a chance to rehabilitate if they seem to deserve it.