

## THE NEED FOR BOOKS



"From those of us who find comfort and laughter and wisdom from those who take up the pen, and from those who find brief moments of freedom and adventure in the turning of the page, we thank you. For your time and commitment to the service of prisoners, we gratefully acknowledge you." (Inmate Committee, Elbow Lake Institution, Harrison, Mills, B. in a letter to Books 2 Prisoners)

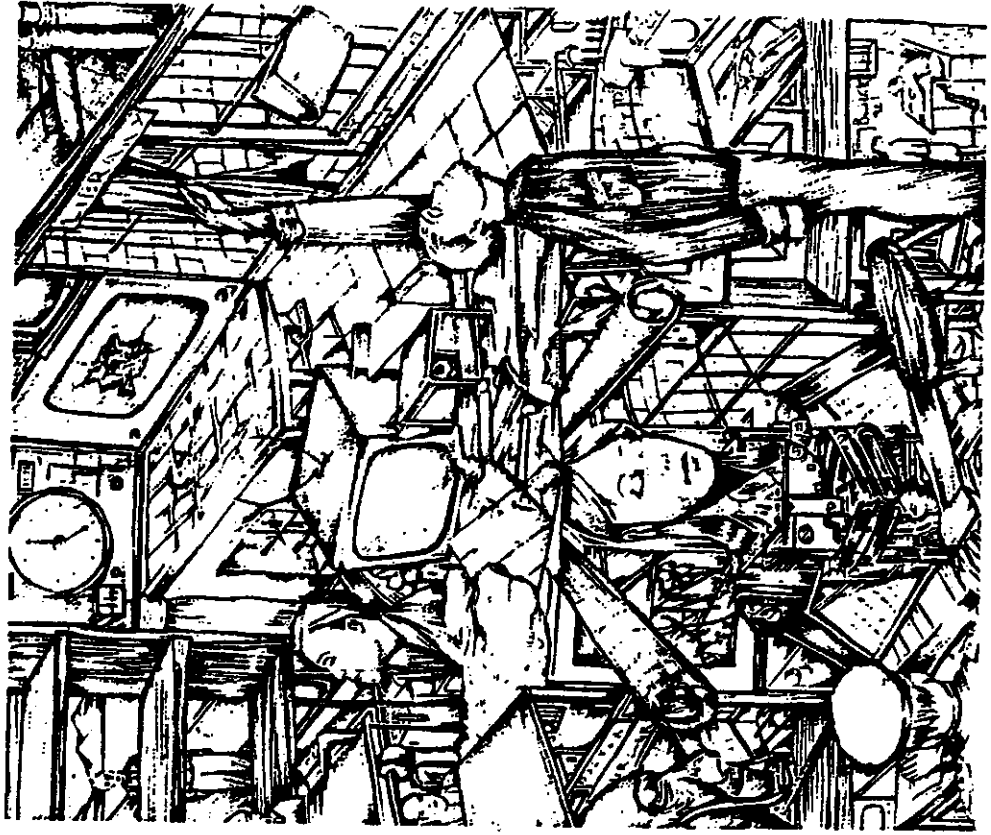
The collection of books and journals is an ongoing process. We actively solicit donations from local bookstores and individuals, as well as from publishing houses throughout North America. We receive material on a wide range of subjects, however we never know what that subject will be. The requests for books are as varied as the individuals making them. The most common requests include; health, history, art, cultural studies, resource manuals, as well as popular fiction and literature. Unfortunately, we have very little material dealing with Native issues, which is imperative considering the high rate of imprisonment of First Nations peoples.

**SUBJECTS OF BOOKS AVAILABLE:**  
**ABORIGINAL ISSUES, ART, BIOGRAPHIES, BLACK HISTORY, CANADIAN AUTHORS, CULTURAL STUDIES, DICTIONARIES, FICTION, HEALTH, LANGUAGES, LAW, LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY, POETRY, POLITICS, PSYCHOLOGY, RESOURCE MANUALS, SEXUALITY, SCIENCE, FICTION, SELF-HELP, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES.**

We are an all volunteer run organization, with no government or corporate funding. As such, we are always in need of money for postage. All of our resources come from fund-raising in the community. If you would like to donate books or postage please contact:

**BOOKS 2 PRISONERS**  
5001 151ST EAST BROADWAY VANCOUVER B.C.  
V5N 5W1  
P.O. BOX 7808

# BOOKS 2 PRISONERS



Artwork: Tony Bashforth, Untitled (1992). Pen and ink.

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## BOOKS 2 PRISONERS

"...we are looking for some books that are not available to us at this time and we are hoping you can help us in this matter. First we would like to just let you know that this group is a multi cultural group and the material we are seeking may be hard to come by. This is what the prison here is telling us is the reason we don't have any material of this nature already. We are looking for books on black history, American and African, even autobiographies or just books that touch a little on the subjects". (from a letter to Books 2 Prisoners)

Books 2 Prisoners was created in response to a pressing need amongst prisoners across Canada for diverse and current reading materials. The libraries within provincial and federal institutions carry limited and outdated selections, and prisoners' access to material outside is severely restricted. Prisoners are often forced to turn to television as their only source of information and entertainment. Inspired by similar programs operating in the U.S., our mandate is to provide reading materials to prisoners on request. We try to provide books that cover a wide variety of subjects including but not limited to; health, history, women's issues, native issues, politics, sexuality and popular fiction. All books are donated by publishers, distributors and individual sources. We cover the cost of postage, so there is no cost to the prisoner or the institution. Because books are constantly going out, and we often receive new donations, we do not keep a catalogue or list of titles, so prisoners writing us must clearly state what type of book they are interested in reading. They can make their request by subject matter or author, and if we don't have the specific book in stock we send the closest thing we have.

## THE NEED FOR BOOKS 2 PRISONERS

"The library here is not a priority when the administration budgets their funds, especially in light of the federal budget cuts to Canada Corrections...your program is like a godsend for those inmates who enjoy reading literature that up until now have seemed unattainable." (Inmate Committee from Pittsburg Institution, Kingston, Ontario, letter to Books 2 Prisoners)

It is difficult for prisoners to obtain books from the outside because of limited financial resources and restrictive prison rules. Prisoners who want a specific book usually have to purchase it directly from the publisher, at full cover price, according to Correctional Services Canada (CSC) policy. The Commissioners Directive 090 Section 14 states "inmates may not receive personal property as a gift." When a prisoner's economic means are considered, policies such as these render the acquisition of reading materials virtually impossible. While CORCAN, the CSC's prison industry, generates millions of dollars in revenue from the sales of manufactured and agricultural goods produced inside the

prisons (ie. furniture, clothing, upholstery, metal and carpentry, dairy, meat processing, etc.), prisoners themselves receive only a pittance. A prisoner earns between \$1.00 and \$6.00 a day, depending on the job they hold within the prison. With this they are expected to pay for their soap, shampoo, stamps, writing material, phone calls, tobacco, and other necessities.

It used to be that one option available for prisoners wanting to further their education was the University Prison Education Program. In 1993, however, in a regressive decision that shows a consistent practice of placing security over rehabilitation, the CSC cut funding for this project. Eddie Rouse, a lifer who was enrolled in the program, points out that the Simon Fraser University Prison Education Program, and others similar to it across the country, enabled many people to acquire intellectual tools to help them function in society. Statistics show that prisoners enrolled in the SFU program had a remarkably lower rate of recidivism (returning to prison) than those who were not. That is, only 10% of the Prison Education Program students returned to prison, compared to the rate for the general population of between 60-70%. Rouse notes that the cost of the Prison Education Program, \$150,000 a year, was covered if only three prisoners who had been through the program were released, since at the time it cost taxpayers more than \$50,000 a year to keep one prisoner inside. It now costs over \$70,000 to keep one person in prison for one year.



## A BIT OF HISTORY

Books to Prisoners started its foundational work in the fall of 1992, with the intent of offering our service on a national level. We initiated contact with CSC, wardens and Inmate Committees at 43 federal institutions, as well as all the provincial institutions in the BC region. We learned that each prison administration interprets CSC policies as they choose. We in turn adapted and negotiated with each prison administration on an individual basis to find a way for our project to proceed. For example: in some prisons we send the books directly to the prisoner and the books become their personal property. In other prisons the prisoner can keep the book until they are transferred or released, at which time they donate the book to the prison library. Some prisons we send the books to the prisoner care of the prison librarian, prisoner committee, liaison officer or administrator. Some prisons will only allow us to donate books to the library. We have been able to send books to prisoners in over 50 prisons, jails and youth detention centres across the country. When we receive children's books they are distributed for use in the visiting rooms at the men's prisons, and to the women's prisons for those in the Mother & Child program.