

## **parole sans parole, the prequel: the vulture (a play).**

*the termite collective*

*(((The Termite Collective is a group of creative and concerned people who want to expose the ever increasing repressive nature of prison through political parody and criminal cabaret. Most of the situations and experiences in the skits are lived and true, only the names and faces have been changed.)))*

This play was performed at the Study in Action conference 2012, Montreal. A longer version of this play is available at [www.convergencejournal.ca](http://www.convergencejournal.ca)

### **PRE-ACT/ENTRY**

The stage is filled with posters. They read: “no tobacco beyond this point”, “photo ID required”, “no cell phones”, “all persons can be searched beyond this point”, “all information acquired is kept on file”, and “all persons can be subject to Ion scan, search by drug dog, strip search, metal detector”. A laptop is visible, its screen filled with a game of solitaire. Two screws, eating bananas, sit near the laptop. Their name-tags read “my name is Screw.”

As ‘program’ is being handed out, the two screws ad-lib with the dialogue below as audience members filter in, the kind of questions you would get if you were entering a prison.

SCREW #1, SCREW # 2: How many rings are you wearing? Do you know this person? Do you have a prescription for those glasses? Are you carrying a cell phone, tobacco or more than \$10 cash? Then you'll need a key for this locker. Are you willing to submit to being searched?

## **OPENING**

MEGAPHONE VOICE (heard from offstage): END OF ACTIVITIES. RETURN TO YOUR CELL BLOCKS FOR COUNT.

## **ACT I**

### SCENE I

Twilight Zone theme music plays as Rod Sterling enters the stage.

SHOW HOST, ROD SERLING: What you are about to experience is like being in another dimension; another dimension of illogic and of no reason; a journey into a land that boggles the mind. Surreal as these stories may seem, these stories are true. This is a truth that is hardly ever written, but a truth that is real none the less. You are entering the 'parole sans parole' zone.

## **ACT I**

### SCENE II

Mr. Rogers' Neighbourhood theme music plays as characters enter.

A powerpoint displays statistics on UTAs and ETAs\*

Mr. Harper is escorted in by two Vultures. Mr. Harper takes a seat and Vultures stand on either side of him. Occasional cash register (cue \$) sounds are heard throughout the speech.

MR. HARPER: Hello everybody and welcome to Mr. Harper's neighbourhood. I am Stephen Harper. Yes, the Stephen Harper. I am a lucky man. I live in a nice neighbourhood, but more importantly, I live in a safe neighbourhood. How about you? Are you living in a safe neighbourhood? You may think it is safe, but are you sure it is? You see that house down the street? Well, there is an ex-convict living there. A dangerous man. How come he's not in jail? Well, he is on parole. Yes, I know, our parole system is too lenient. Blame it on all those years of Liberal governments.

So, you still feel safe knowing who lives there? Well, I've got more bad news for you. Check that building over there. Right now as I speak, there are a half dozen prisoners attending a meeting there. No, not ex-prisoners but actual inmates that aren't on parole. How can this be possible? Well, these "people" benefit from a program called escorted temporary absences. Meaning that for a few hours, they are allowed to roam about your neighbourhood.

'Well', you'll say, 'at least they are escorted by guards who won't let them do anything harmful.' No, sorry, that's not how it works. Do you want to know who escorts those criminals? Volunteers - soft-hearted, left-wing pinkos who should take care of victims of crime instead of giving support to the scourge of society. Oh, by the way, those inmates attending that meeting over there are not petty thieves. They are murderers. The only thing that stands between them and you are unarmed volunteers (mostly women, on top of it). So, I'm asking you again. Do you still think you live in a safe neighbourhood? That's what I thought.

I don't want to scare you even more but there is another program for inmates called un-escorted temporary absences. Yes, you heard me, un-escorted. No supervision. Not even softy volunteers to rein them in. They're on the loose! So, now every time you'll be walking around your neighbourhood, you'll always be wondering, "Is he one of them?" and "What about this one, he's got a mean face." Well, thank the Lord I am your Prime Minister. In the past four years, through all kind of administrative measures, I have managed to cut down the number of escorted absences by 19% and the un-escorted ones by 30%. And, believe me, that's only the beginning. I intend to do anything in my power to cut them down by another 30%. And...Oh excuse me, my cell phone. Bear with me please. Hello?...Oh really? Is that so? Well, thank you, I'll catch you later.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a scoop for you. We're going to call elections! So, as I was saying before being interrupted, I plan to cut down on inmate absences by another 60%.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I thought you said 30%!

MR HARPER: Excuse me? I said 30% before? Are you sure? Then I misspoke. I meant 60%. But let's not waste our time with figures. The bottom line is that I want to keep more people in jail for a longer time. And make it harder for those who are out to stay out! So you can finally live safely in your neighbourhoods. I invite you to join me in a discussion on this topic. I'm confident that you will all endorse my views on public

security. Thanks for listening to me. And, God bless me.

Mr. Rogers' neighbourhood music plays as Vultures escort Mr. Harper offstage. Birds theme music plays between acts.

## **ACT II**

### SCENE I

Twilight Zone theme music plays as Rod Serling enters the stage.

SHOW HOST, ROD SERLING: You are holding a key. A key to a door that is seldom ever opened by those not used to the inexplicable, the absurd, the non-logics of the workings of the Correctional Services of Canada. For those not used to confusion and irrationality, be warned: these stories are not suitable for those who use their minds.

Twilight Zone theme music as Serling exits stage.

## **ACT II**

### SCENE II

The Screws sit around a table covered with stacks of papers and folders. There is a large rock on one of the stacks of papers.

characters:

screw #1 newbie

screw #2 jerk

screw #3 vacationer

Screw #1 and Screw #2 are sitting at the table sifting through papers, disinterested, talking about what they did this weekend, up-coming holidays, golfing, salaries, whatever.....at one point one of them decides it's almost lunch time and maybe they should do a little 'work'

SCREW #1: So, I've got this one case. No institutional charges, no incidents. I was thinking of giving him a full recommendation to the board.

SCREW #2: No charges? That doesn't mean he didn't do anything - just means he didn't get caught. Screw 'em... I got this one guy I hate. I didn't submit the psych report - he can wait. (cue \$)

SCREW#1: What's with the rock on those files?

SCREW#2: Oh that... those files aren't going anywhere anytime soon. (cue \$)

Screw #3 walks in with file in hand and adds it to the pile with a rock on it.

SCREW #1: What's with that file?

SCREW#3: Oh, I've only got this one for 6 months 'cause someone's on mat leave. She's a lifer anyways. What's another six months! Plus, I'm going on vacation for the next few weeks and I already hit my quota for this month. I can't have any more people going out. Doesn't matter how 'eligible' they are. You've seen the press...it's not a good time to let people out on 'passes.' (cue \$)

Screws exit taking some files with them, leaving others behind, engaging in idle chatter. Screw #1 returns and sits down, profile to audience so that prisoner can sit facing them, sifting through some papers.

## **ACT II**

### SCENE III

Enter Prisoner #1, sits facing Screw with profile to audience; Vultures in the periphery.

SCREW #1: I'm not recommending you for full parole. I don't think you're ready yet. You've been inside for too long. You have to take it slow. You don't have enough life experience to be on the street.

PRISONER #1: (obviously trying to control temper) My granddaughter's turning ten in a few months. I was hoping to be out for her birthday.

SCREW #1: I just don't think you're ready. In six months, we'll see. What's another six months to you anyway? (cue \$)

PRISONER #1: \*#@\* if I'm not ready now, when will I be ready?! You're twenty years old! What the \*#@\* do you know about being 'outside'!! I could be your grandmother!!!!

Vultures drag her offstage. Screw #1 shaking head. Birds music begins. Screw #2 enters and they talk amongst themselves. Screw #1 takes out sheet of paper and scribbles some-

thing on it, puts it on top of files that she takes with her and, with determination, leaves. Screw #2 sits. Enter Prisoner #2.

SCREW#2: I'm recommending you for a closed half-way house.

PRISONER #2: But I thought we talked about how an open half-way house would be better?

SCREW #2: Yeah, but times have changed.

PRISONER #2: Since last week?

SCREW #2: You haven't done anything to make me think you could handle an open half-way house. You need maximum structure.

PRISONER #2: But I've done all the programs you've asked for... at least twice. (cue \$) I haven't been hit with any infractions since I've been inside!

SCREW #2: Hey! You're expected to follow the rules! A clean record doesn't count for anything. (pause) Are you questioning my judgment? Maybe you still have a problem with authority. Maybe another 'anger management' program will do you good! (cue \$)

Prisoner #2 stares at Screw #2. Nothing more is said. Prisoner #2 stands up and exits. Screw #2 closes file and leaves. Enter Prisoner #3 who waits, waits and waits some more. Screw #3 eventually enters without any regard for delay. They both sit and continue to wait until lights dim.

## **ACT III**

### **SCENE I**

Twilight Zone theme music as Serling enters.

SHOW HOST, ROD SERLING: You have been witness to an utterly disturbing bureaucracy. Within this bureaucracy parole eligibility dates are meaningless. They are lost in a time warped machinery of control where past, future and present have no reference point to time or context. Here peoples' lives are subject to the workings of 'the national parole board'.

Serling is interrupted by the distant voices of prisoners chatting offstage. Their voices are silenced by a megaphone announcement, also offstage.

MEGAPHONE VOICE: END OF ACTIVITIES. RETURN TO YOUR CELL BLOCKS FOR COUNT

## **ACT IV**

### SCENE I

Twilight Zone theme music starts up again.

SHOW HOST, ROD SERLING: You enter this world at your own risk because it leads to a world that is ‘half-way’ into the future. This is not a new world. It is merely an extension of what began in the old world - a prison. It has patterned itself after every power-hungry ruler who has planted the imprint of a boot on the pages of history. This world has regulations, technology, a system of rules and a legal approach to the destruction of human freedom, but like every other disciplinary apparatus that has preceded it, it has one primary rule: logic is an enemy and truth is a menace. Any state, any entity, any ideology that fails to recognize the worth and dignity of every human being is obsolete. These words are direct quotes from Rod Serling, of the Twilight Zone.

Twilight Zone theme music as Serling exits.

Powerpoint image appears. It reads: “Do not leave a 100km radius without receiving permission from your parole officer.” Below the words is a map of the island of Montreal with a red circle around it.

## **ACT V**

### SCENE III

Powerpoint image appears. It reads: “Testimonial of lack of transparency.”

PRISONER #2: After spending 22 years in prison, I was finally released to a closed halfway house, but things didn’t go the way I expected. I was told that since I’m a lifer, I have to tell my potential employer that I have a criminal record before I start working for him. This took away a lot of job possibilities, so I ended up only getting minimum wage jobs that nobody wants. Since I have to do at least 3 years in the halfway house before I’m eligible for full parole and since my room and board is free, I tried many different jobs. If, after a couple of weeks, it wasn’t the job for me I’d quit and find another

one. I wanted to work, but the jobs I was getting were in bad places. In one place they were making paint. You had to wear a mask, and after work you'd take a couple of showers and still smell. So I quit, as did other people that had started the job at the same time as me.

Believe me, I really wanted a job, even if it was at minimum salary, but I wanted one that I would like, that I could get ahead with in the future. But after three months of this, my PO decided that wasn't ok, that he wasn't recommending me for an open halfway house. So, I got another 6 months in the closed halfway house. One month later I did find a job that I liked and things seemed to be going well for me. Or so I thought. First there was a problem with money. I bought a car and my mom was supposed to help me financially with the insurance, but she didn't make the payment. She couldn't remember that she was supposed to (we later found out that my mother was in the early stage of Alzheimers). So, I was labelled as being disorganized. This was not enough to send me back to prison, but I had a red mark on my file.

Then I started going out with this girl from my home town and my PO found out that for many years my girlfriend had been a stripper. I hadn't mentioned this to him. I told him that yes I had known about this but that she hadn't been a stripper for the last ten years. She had quit when she got pregnant with her little girl. I didn't try to hide this fact from my PO. It was ten years ago! I didn't think of mentioning it! Me being a criminal in the past...I certainly didn't judge her on it. Anyway, as far as I know being a stripper isn't a criminal offence. My PO accused me of something called "lack of transparency" and sent me back to prison. I did two years in prison before I was released to a closed halfway house again. Can you believe that?

*\*UTA stands for unescorted temporary absences and ETA stands for escorted temporary absences. These are "codes" that prisoners serving longlife sentences can qualify for part of the way through their sentence as a supposed way to ease them back into the community. The Harper government has been adamant about cutting down the number of allowed UTAs and ETAs, the stats are changing drastically from year to year.*

*\*The money sounds are just a cash register "cha ching" sound. They symbolize money CSC is making off of various changes in the prison system.*

*\*The BIRDS sound is supposed to be the sound of the birds in Alfred Hitchcock's movie of the same name. Throughout the play it is used to symbolize the repression of resistance.*



*\*Conditions are things that people are required to do or not do once they are out on parole. Examples include non-association with other people with criminal records, not being allowed to drink or go into bars, weekly urine tests, weekly psychologist visits, and attendance requirements for programs like AA, CA etc.*