

~ The Fallacy of Life ~

no. 5

The newsletter of "INFINITY" the Lifers' group of Collins Bay Mar. 8/88

This question-naire is being sent to you by the Infinity Lifers Group of Collins Bay. We ask that you answer these questions and compare your answers with the accompanying information sheet.

- 1. Do you know why the 25 year minimum sentence was introduced?*
- 2. Since this sentence was introduced do you know how many people have been sentenced to it?*
- 3. When will someone sentenced to the following minimum life sentences be paroled?
a) 10 year b) 15 year c) 25 year*
- 4. When does a person convicted of a life sentence first have contact with the National Parole Board?*
- 5. Do you understand what the 15 year judicial review process is?*
- 6. Do you think someone receiving a favorable judicial review will be automatically released?*
- 7. Do you what the projected cost factor is for keeping a person with a) 10 year b) 25 year minimum life sentences is?*
- 8. Do you understand what a life sentence means?*

1. The 25 year minimum life sentence was brought into legislation in 1976 as punishment for first degree murder. It was to replace Capital murder which was punishable by hanging.
2. There have been over 350 people sentenced to the 25 year minimum sentence since 1976. By the time the first person has reached their full parole eligibility date in 2001 at the current conviction rate over 1,000 people will have received this sentence, enough to fill three federal penitentiaries. Compare the number of people sentenced to the 25 year minimum sentence since 1976 to any other similar time frame that Capital punishment was in effect. Would we as a nation have sentenced that many people to death?
3. The parole dates for these mentioned sentences is only the eligibility dates. In no way should they be misconstrued as automatic release dates. A life sentence is a life sentence, it is forever never ending. Someone sentenced to a life may never be released from prison. It is not an uncommon occurrence for a prisoner to "serve many years past their parole eligibility date. As a side note—since the introduction of the 25 year minimum sentence the average length of time served for any life sentence has increased.
4. It is an often misunderstood notion that prisoners are in contact with the N.P.B. throughout their entire sentence. In fact the first time a prisoner actually sees the parole board is at their parole date. The Correctional Service of Canada has a parole service which does have a parole officer serve as part of a prisoners case management team. However contact with the C.S.C. parole officer is very limited and it is not uncommon for a prisoner not to have any contact with this officer for many many years. How can accurate reports be developed if such limited contact exists? We suggest that the N.P.B. be given the responsibility of keeping contact with the prisoner throughout his/her entire incarceration period.
5. The 15 year judicial review process simply put is another jury trial. Instead of deciding guilt or innocence a trial is held on a prisoners last 15 years while incarcerated and decision is made whether or not to recommend a lower parole eligibility date. It is and will be a very expensive and time consuming process serving only to further strain an overcrowded court system.
6. Someone receiving a favorable decision at the judicial review does not receive an automatic release. It only means that the prisoner may appear before the N.P.B. at an earlier date. the

parole board then must decide after accessing the prisoner if and when to begin a gradual release plan. Doesn't it seem strange that after 15 years the N.P.B will begin to access a prisoner, why not at the start and throughout the entire period of incarceration? It seems odd that prisoners are asking for a better quality assessment, and more contact with the parole board, yet their concerns are not being addressed.

7. It costs an average of \$40,000.00 a year to keep a prisoner in a federal penitentiary. At that rate it would be \$400,000.00 for 10 years and \$1,000,000.00 for 25 years. Think about it, and with the projected number of people that will receive the 25 year minimum sentence by the year 2001 the cost is staggering. We are not suggesting that people should not be sent to prison simply because of the cost factor but we are saying that people are spending far too much time in prison. With a better assessment and better programs people could return back into society as productive citizens more quickly and at less expense.

8. A life sentence is just that a sentence for life, it never ends. Recently there have been some cases that have been in the media spotlight. They have been horrendous failures which have provoked outrage throughout the nation. They have provoked outrage for us as prisoners as well. As a spin off the backlash created by these cases affects us all. What we as the Infinity Lifers Group are saying is for legislators to look at those cases and discover from them how mistakes were made and act on that. Do not allow an overreaction to take place, rather discover how the breakdown in the system occurred and move to improve the system. These cases followed a similar pattern, they were failures by the C.S.C. and how they accessed them. Put the parole board in charge of the releasing mechanism and have them work with the prisoner throughout his/her entire sentence as opposed to the way it is done now. Why wait for the parole date to come up before the parole board decides what to do with a prisoner.

The Infinity Lifers Group of Collins Bay believes that the 25 year minimum sentence is an inhumane and totally unmanageable sentence. We believe that the minimum sentences should be lowered. We also believe that we should have contact with the parole board throughout our entire sentence. We feel that if this were to happen then prisoners would be much more motivated to rehabilitate and that the parole board would have a more accurate system of accessing our performance.

Should we wish any further information in this regard please feel free to contact us The Infinity Lifers Group of Collins Bay P.O.Box 190 Kingston ONt. K7L 4V9