

## **Life Sentences Are Evil** *Anonymous Concerned Convict*

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I have been incarcerated for some time now. I have many issues with how the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the Canadian justice system are *not* working. I do not understand why Canada has the life sentence. I came here from Portugal as a young child and always thought of Canada as being this larger than life country when it came to human rights. All my parents talked about when I was growing up was how great a country Canada was and how every citizen in Canada counts for something, and that just being Canadian gives you a better standing internationally because of how the world looks at this country. Growing up here in Canada, I did feel proud. I did feel that somehow when visiting friends and family in the United States or Europe that I was coming from a better place, a nation with a higher moral standing. This impression I had of Canada was completely shattered when I came to prison. Portugal may be a poorer country when we compare our GDP (OECD, 2019) to Canada, but I think that what the former lacks in international wealth, it makes up in moral wealth.

It is against the constitution of Portugal to be given a life sentence (*Constitution of the Portuguese Republic* art. 30, § 1). Why does Canada still rely on such cruel sentencing guidelines? There are several countries around the world that do not dole-out life-25 or life-10 or any form of life sentence and their societies are not crumbling into disarray. America, with their ‘tough on crime’ stance, is a very bad moral compass for Canada to bet its future on (Prince, 2015). We as Canadians should not look to a country that would let one of their citizens die in the street because they cannot afford health insurance as any type of moral compass. I have read, but never understood the expression “a society can be judged by how they treat their prisoners”, until I did some time myself.

The Harper government butchered any positive progress (Prince, 2015). The Harper regime all but officially removed rehabilitation that the Canadian Government had strived towards in the period following the Second World War (Cook and Roesch, 2012). How can anyone claim that there is a possibility for rehabilitation when you hand out life-75? How is it that the average Canadian does not see this as an attack on human rights? How is it that nobody stood up and pointed to this as the start of a very dangerous movement? I have seen these types of movements in Europe’s history and it never turns out very well for the masses. Do not let the government pass new laws so easily. Fight, argue, write letters and e-mails, change your

voting to a more left-leaning progressive candidate because when a leader is installing new longer, tougher sentences and is talking about building super prisons to house all these new prisoners, it usually means that lots of innocents will end up in jail.

There are many, many problems with our federal penitentiaries. I can go on and on about the lack of halfway house availability (thus trapping people in prison past their parole eligibility dates), the fact that the pays are so low that prisoners are living far below the poverty line (Shook, 2018), that there are no more much needed training programs for people being released without proper job skills (Guérin c. Canada), that there are more problems than solutions in the CSC. People need to make noise about these issues. They need to force the government to act. Any government that claims to be an honest democracy that allows innocent people to stay in jail because it would be too complicated to release them or to fight for them does not deserve to exist. In a just society, people should not be afraid of their government, it is the government that should be afraid of their people.

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Anonymous Concerned Convict* is imprisoned at Archambault Institution.