

Fighting the Repression of the Ohio Parole Board on Behalf of Old-Law Inmates

by Jason Goudlock

On December 25, 2013, as reported by the Cleveland newspaper The Plain Dealer¹, a Cincinnati-based group of approximately 25 prisoner advocates and friends and relatives of Ohio inmates held a People's protest in front of the Ohio Parole Board in Columbus. The group of protesters, collectively known as The Universal Support Network, sacrificed the majority of their holiday to demonstrate their commitment towards undoing the Parole Board's long-existing, unjust practice of excessively imprisoning the state's minority-class of approximately 3,500 inmates, commonly referred to as "old-law" inmates. These inmates were sentenced to indefinite terms of incarceration, such as six to 25 years for committing an offense of aggravated robbery, prior to the July 1, 1996 enactment of the state's less punitive new-law sentencing guidelines. These new guidelines allowed for the vast majority of new-law inmates to be sentenced to definite terms of incarceration, such as a flat-time-sentence of as little as three years for committing the same aforementioned offense of aggravated robbery. Old-law inmates, such as myself, are now inexplicably being made to serve up to 25 years for this same offense

With this being said, **NOW** is the time for old-law inmates and their supporters to seize the momentous moment, and to, as the wise saying goes, "strike while the iron is hot."

To the best of my knowledge, not since the mid-1990's Senate Bill 182 proposal for reforming the Parole Board, which was introduced by then-Senator Jeffrey Johnson, has there been (until this past Christmas) any significant public demands calling for the elimination of the egregious old-law-versus-new-law sentencing disparity. This disparity, in terms of the disproportionate lengths of sentences between the two sets of sentencing guidelines, is akin to the infamous crack-cocaine-vs-powder-cocaine sentencing disparity.

In any event, however, the will of the People of Ohio, as demonstrated by the Universal Support Network's demand for justice, has not been broken. With this being said, **NOW** is the time for old-law inmates and their supporters to seize the momentous moment, and to, as the wise saying goes, "strike while the iron is hot."

Anyone who is familiar with the practices of Ohio's Parole Board knows that they operate in a secretive and unjust fashion. Their arbitrary decision-making process, as it seems, isn't supervised by anyone with any integrity. And being that the blatant corrupt practices have been permitted to exist at the priceless expense of the freedom of old-law inmates, the only way that old-law inmates are going to ever receive any semblance of justice, in my opinion, is by making an organized, publicized, and continuous demand for justice that reverberates across the state and, if need be, the entire country.

The long sought justice for old-law inmates can be grasped. As I stated above, now is the time to seize the moment. By way of networking with activist and various progressive organizations on the Internet, and by way of conducting grassroots campaigns of distributing leaflets and fliers, and subleasing billboards in strategic locations, as well as holding fundraising events to finance these grassroots campaigns ... together, we can attain justice.

Let's get started, Ohio, today ... right now. I have tons of energy and ideas so please, contact me so we can streamline our efforts to eradicate the injustice that has prevented the freedom of the discriminated against class of Ohio's old-law inmates.

Jason Goudlock is a progressive writer embedded in the struggle against the repressive United States prison industrial complex. If you would like to offer him support on his quest to attain justice for Ohio old-law prisoners, you can contact him at the following:

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Learn more about Jason Goudlock and his struggle for freedom at freejasongoudlock.org.

1 The Plain Dealer – December 26, 2013, Metro Section; Page A3 – COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) Imprisonments of 3500 Protested – See attached.

The Plain Dealer - 12/26/2013

Metro

Newswatch

CLEVELAND

Robbery attempt suspected in slaying

A 22-year-old man was shot and killed late Christmas Eve in a possible attempted robbery in the 4300 block of East 141st Street. Cleveland police responded to a report of a man shot shortly before midnight and found Houston Anderson Jr. He was taken to MetroHealth Medical Center, where he died. Police said their preliminary investigation shows that the incident may have occurred as a result of an attempted robbery. Witnesses report the shooter fled in a vehicle driven by another man, but police had no further information on the killer. The Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office expects to do an autopsy today.

COLUMBUS

Imprisonments of 3,500 protested

About 25 Ohio prisoner advocates and friends and relatives of longtime inmates protested on Christmas Day outside of the state's parole board. The group said they chose to sacrifice much of their holiday for the two-hour protest in front of the parole board's building in downtown Columbus to show how strongly they feel. The Cincinnati-based group is condemning the imprisonment of what they say are 3,500 inmates sentenced before a new law passed in Ohio in 1996. The legislation called for flat prison sentences of definite amounts of time, such as a 10-year sentence, as opposed to sometimes-broad ranges under the old law. The Universal Support Network is condemning the parole board for not releasing more so-called "old law" inmates. A parole board spokeswoman did not respond to a request for comment.