

# Prisoners' Justice Day in Canada, The Rights of Prison Inmates. The Prison Reform Movement

summer series 2020

By [Michael Welch](#)

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Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [GLOBAL RESEARCH NEWS HOUR](#),  
[History](#), [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State](#)  
& [Civil Rights](#)

*"Solitary is used against prisoners who continue to resist against the oppressive environment within the system, and it is used to extremes that are hard for anyone to believe possible in a modern-day society. It is used to wear us down, to degrade us, humiliate us, and to try and break our spirit. They want to make a man less than a man, and when they find that they can't make a dent in his resolve they just keep him in solitary."*  
- Prisoner (anonymous) in Millhaven solitary confinement [1]

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According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer in Canada, the total spending on Canada's Prison System (2011-12 statistics) was around \$20 billions dollars, \$5 billion dollars of which came from federal sources. According to the numbers for 2015-2016, 40,147 adult offenders were incarcerated at the federal and provincial levels. [2][3]

By contrast, according to 2018 statistics, \$3 billion a year was spent on the federal Department of Health, Aboriginal Affairs costs \$10 billion a year, Veterans affairs is \$3.5 billion, and the federal Department of the Environment stands at \$1 billion. [4]

So, prisons are essentially one of the largest expenditures paid for by the public purse.

And yet, efforts to gain access from the incarcerated is incredibly difficult. Family members have a rough time just trying to communicate with people in custody. Frequently, people die in jail under suspicious circumstances, and the death rate among the detained is alarmingly high.

According to a report commissioned by Reuters, between 2012 and 2017, 270 died while in custody. Of that number, 174 were merely awaiting trial. [5]

The numbers suggest that for the vast sums of money going into the enterprise, there is a shocking low level of transparency with regard to the numbers suffering at the hands of the state.

August 10 was the date when a prisoner in a Millhaven Institution, Eddie Nalon, died as a result of neglect. His death in segregation inspired a mass uprising among inmates

everywhere, consisting of a day of fast and no labour. Prisoner Justice Day is still commemorated in communities across the country, although numbers are not quite as robust as they had been in the press. [6]

This past August 10 marked the 46th anniversary of Prisoner Justice Day. We chose to commemorate the occasion by making the topic of prison justice the theme for this week's broadcast of the Global Research News Hour.

In our first half hour, we aired an interview with Robert Gaucher on the history of the prison reform movement. We next spoke with two prison justice organizers from opposite end of the country on the current challenges facing the movement.

*Robert Gaucher was a distinguished professor of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. He led the fight for ending the death penalty in 1976. In 1988, he started the Journal of Prisoners on Prisons. Bob also spend a period of time in prison.*

*Johanne Wendy Bariteau is a Montreal based organizer with for Prisoners' Justice Day. She has spent time in prison as well.*

*Meenakshi Mannoie is an organizer for the Prisoners' Justice Day event in Vancouver.*

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The [Global Research News Hour](#) airs every Friday at 1pm CT on [CKUW 95.9FM](#) out of the University of Winnipeg. The programme is also podcast at [globalresearch.ca](#).

Notes:

1. [http://www.vcn.bc.ca/august10/politics/1014\\_history.html](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/august10/politics/1014_history.html)
2. <https://johnhoward.ca/blog/financial-facts-canadian-prisons/>
3. Julie Reitano, 2017, 'Adult correctional statistics in Canada, 2015/2016', Statistics Canada; <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14700-eng.htm>
4. [http://www.vcn.bc.ca/august10/politics/1014\\_history.html](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/august10/politics/1014_history.html)
5. Anna Mehler Paperny, August 3, 2017, 'Canada's jailhouse secret: Legally innocent prisoners are dying', [Reuters](#);
6. [http://www.vcn.bc.ca/august10/politics/1014\\_history.html](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/august10/politics/1014_history.html)

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