

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

April 24, 2017

Long Johns In Prison

I'm not talking about thermal underwear which are referred to as Long Johns. I'm talking about the pastry called Long Johns. For people in the real world, if they get a hankering for a Long John (or any other pastry) they just go to the donut shop, deli or grocery store and pick some up. Or for the more creative and ambitious, they make their own. Not so in prison.

The prison staff decided to sell Long Johns next month as a fund raiser. The funds will be used to buy a service dog for the City of Stanley Police Department. Why that little one-horse town needs a dog is beyond me, but I don't get to choose what fund raiser profits go toward so I guess it's not for me to worry about.

When I read the notice about the Long Johns, I thought that was pretty nice and started looking forward to placing my order. Some guys have such a small amount of money, especially after the new deductions policies for restitution and court costs took effect, that they must start saving up a month ahead of time in order to be able order the Long Johns. When you make only \$5 or \$10 every two weeks, the \$4.00 cost of Long Johns is a major purchase which must be budgeted for.

What the fund raiser made me realize once again is how bizarre the life is that prisoners lead compared to what it's like in the real world. What is considered normal in here would be looked upon with disbelief out there. Sure, we can expect North Korea or Syria to have limited options but to live each day under a state-created scarcity makes no sense at all. There are thousands of capable, diligent people in prison who could (and would if given the opportunity) be productive, earning members of society - even while in prison. But our prison system is set up to keep prisoners in penury no matter how talented or capable they are. They know that money is power and the poorer they make the prisoners and the scarcer the chance for obtaining amenities is, the better they can control them.

Prison is not about changing people or improving them. It's about providing well-paying jobs with benefits for members of society. To release deserving individuals from prison is to jeopardize those jobs.

We could have Long Johns all the time if the prison officials chose to let us have them. And we could have enough income to afford them on a regular basis if the prison officials chose to let us earn that much. But alas, we can't so I'll just be grateful for the chance to buy Long Johns for the first time in decades.