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LERNER LOSES PAROLE BATTLE
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Convicted killer Maurice ''Pro'' Lerner, once linked to an alleged plot to kill Cuban leader Fidel Castro, has lost a long legal battle for immediate parole eligibility in two gangland slayings.

Attorney General Arlene Violet said Friday the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that Lerner must stay in prison until 1989, 20 years after his arrest on charges in the 1968 gangland deaths of Rudolph Marfeo and Anthony Melei.

The dispute began when the state Legislature reduced the minimum prison time required for parole eligibility in life sentences from 20 years to 10. The action came prior to Lerner's 1970 trial but after the killings, touching off a 12-year legal battle.

Lerner, who was once linked to a purported CIA plot to kill Castro in the 1960s, was serving consecutive life terms in the shotgun slayings. He claimed he was eligible for parole in 1979 under the revised rules.

Former Attorney General Dennis J. Roberts II said even though the Legislature reduced the minimum time period for life sentences, Lerner had to serve 10 years of each life term because they were consecutive.

Roberts had contested an opinion from his predecessor, Julius Michaelson, which supported Lerner's contention and various state and federal courts made different decisions as the case progressed.

During the legal battle, the convicted killer was bounced back and forth between mimimum- and maximum-security units at the state prison and even entered work release at times, though he was never actually paroled.

In a January decision, the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston ruled in favor of Roberts, overturning a 1981 ruling by a U.S. District Court judge. The district court ruling had overturned a state Supreme Court decision against Lerner.

Lerner appealed the Circuit Court ruling to the Supreme Court, which issued its decision June 10.

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