

# The Looooong Arm of the Law

**E**ven the most casual observer of our criminal justice system realizes that, nowadays, a right to a speedy trial does not necessarily mean a speedy trial.

One common complaint about the system is that it has become bogged down under its own weight due to motions, petitions, appeals and other legal dealings that have slowed procedure to a crawl.

Often judges and lawyers take the blame for delays, but how much influence does the accused have on the system?

Witness the case of Jerome Krejci. In the last 15 months he has appeared as a defendant in Hennepin County District Court 30 times before 10 different judges. His numerous court appearances all stem from the same set of charges filed in December of 1986. He has been in jail since then, awaiting his trial.

He is charged with the abuse and neglect of the youngest of his four children. His wife, Linda, faces the same charges. She has also spent the last 15 months in jail.

Two Decembers ago they brought their child to Children's Memorial Hospital in Minneapolis. They said the child had fallen from his highchair and was having seizures. Doctors contacted police with what they felt was evidence of child abuse. When Linda Krejci returned to the hospital she was arrested. Jerome Krejci was arrested the following day.

The attorneys involved agreed that Linda would stand trial only after Jerome had had his trial. That was over a year ago.

The reason for the delay? That depends on who is asked.

"I've been ready to go to trial since last March," said Hennepin County Attorney Fred Karasov. "Any delays have been caused by (Jerome) Krejci."

Krejci said that any delays that he may have caused were acts of self-preservation. He claims, among other things: that his statements to police have been tampered with to imply his guilt; his two public defenders have taken no interest in defending him; his friends have been intimidated by police to the point that they are afraid to testify on his behalf; his children have been "brainwashed" by foster parents so that they are now against him.

"They've turned everybody against everybody and everybody against me," he said.

The original delay in the trial came when Scott Hoedahl, Krejci's first public defender, requested a change of venue for the trial since the Krejcis were residents of Morton, Minn. Then, in late March, Hoedahl and Karasov agreed to try the case based on stipulated facts, which would allow the judge to make a final decision based on current information, rather than a jury trial.

Krejci then wrote to the

judge asking for a new attorney, saying he was unhappy with the way Hoedahl was handling the case. Another delay resulted, and a new public defender, Peter Goorman, was appointed.

Since then Krejci has asked for: another public defender, which he was denied; time to raise money for his own defense, which he was unable to do, and time to prepare a case in order to defend himself.

"The guy is not getting along with a lot of people," said Karasov. "He's not doing it deliberately. I just don't think he trusts anybody. He's really clogged up this case, but I don't care. He can clog it up for another five years and it wouldn't bother me. He's in custody. If he were out it would be another story."

In January the case was reviewed by Judge Knoll. "I told Krejci that they were very serious charges," said Knoll, "but if he wanted to defend himself that was his decision. I told him Goorman would be available for advice. I gave him some lawbooks and told him we were going to trial on February 22."

On February 22, Krejci, Karasov and Goorman decided to try the case based on stipulated facts. All pertinent information was given to the judge, who will make a decision later this month.

And right now the case is exactly where it was a year ago.

— Jeff Hinkle