

Sentence sparks protests

By Sandra Cordon
The Canadian Press

REGINA — Pamela George's weeping relatives fled the courtroom Thursday after a judge sentenced the aboriginal woman's two white killers to 6½ years in prison.

Many in the overflowing courtroom complained the sentence given to university students Alex Ternowetsky and Steven Kummerfield for manslaughter was too short and hinted of racism.

The two, both 20, were originally charged with first-degree murder, but were found guilty of the lesser charge by a jury late last year.

Aboriginal leaders said that was because they are white and from well-to-do families. Women's groups complained the court judged George more harshly than

the men because of her gender and the fact she worked as a prostitute.

On Thursday supporters also denounced shaky apologies to George's family by the two men before the sentencing as too little, too late.

"It's all right for . . . little white boys to go out on the streets, get drunk and use that for an excuse to start hunting down our own people," said Tony Cote of the Yorkton Tribal Council in eastern Saskatchewan.

"I don't think that's fair."

Chief Lindsay Kaye of the Sakimay First Nations demanded an inquiry.

"There is a justice system for the Indians, a justice system for the white," Kaye said outside court as about 100 people milled around.

Ternowetsky and Kummerfield picked up George, an occasional prostitute, in

downtown Regina in April 1995 after an evening of heavy drinking.

They took the 28-year-old mother of two outside the city for sex, then beat her so badly her family couldn't open the casket at her funeral.

Her battered body was found in a ditch by a passer-by heading to work.

The two have never tried to explain why they beat George so severely, Crown prosecutor Matt Miazga said during sentencing arguments. He suggested her race, gender and the fact she was a prostitute may all have been factors.

The Crown has already appealed the manslaughter conviction, although it said it was satisfied with the sentence under the circumstances.

The two killers, ordered to serve half their sentence before parole eligibility, said

they were moved to remorse by the eloquent victim impact statements of George's mother and sister.

Men and women wiped away tears as Crown prosecutor Matt Miazga read the women's simple written submissions.

"How many lives did they wreck?" wrote the mother, Ina George, who sat with head bowed in the front row.

"They wrecked my daughter's life and took her away from her daughters and myself. They also wrecked their own lives. They had good things going for themselves, but they still had to do that to her."

George was "the victim of mindless violence," agreed Justice Ted Malone.

"Not content with having inflicted bodily harm upon her . . . they cast her aside as if she were something less than human," he concluded.