

SLAVERY WITH A NEW NAME

"Slavery is being practiced by the system under the color of law. Slavery 400 years ago, slavery today, it's the same thing, but with a new name. They're making millions and millions of dollars enslaving blacks, poor whites, and others -- people who don't even know they're being railroaded."

-- Political Prisoner Ruchell Magee

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime* whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

-- 13th amendment to the US constitution

The 13th amendment to the US Constitution, usually thought to have abolished slavery, actually codified it.

Most prisoners do work of some sort, whether it be for the prison they're incarcerated in, a state or federal agency, or a private company. Most of these jobs are low skill, such as cleaning the prison, or making uniforms or furniture for a state agency or Unicor (the federal agency that supplies furniture and other materials to the federal government and a handful of private companies).

While relieving the daily monotony of prison life, most prison jobs are not teaching skills that will help prisoners once they are released. The majority of this work has no demand outside. Almost all these low wage jobs have moved to Latin America, the Caribbean, and South East Asia.

Low Wages

While wages vary from state to state, CA prisoners receive "minimum wage" (\$5.75), 80% of which is taken by the state:

- 20% to victims rights organizations
- 20% into a state restitution fund
- 20% to anti drug campaigns
- 20% to an inmate "trust" fund
- leaving 20% to the prisoner

So the actual wage of a CA prisoner is a high \$1.15 an hour. With everything from toothpaste to phone calls to medical treatment grossly inflated, prisoners actually get to keep little of what's left. Many prisoners make under \$.20 per hour, and some don't get paid at all.

Unsafe, Unfair, Inhumane

The conditions for working prisoners are among the worst in the industrialized world. There are no benefits, no vacation, no decent health care, no safety standards, and prisoners are not allowed to form a union. Severe repression and longer sentences result from a refusal to work. Prisoners are beaten, put in solitary confinement, or both. There is no oversight of prison labor conditions, and no accountability, so prison officials have no incentive to provide safe working conditions or treat prisoners humanely.

Enter Private Companies

Employment of prisoners by private companies, illegal for many years, was again made legal in the mid 1970's. This arrangement is attractive for corporations because they pay about the same or less as they would in Mexico, but they use the Made in USA label. Prisons and corporations are very reluctant to release details, but we do know that in 1993 about 1000 prisoners were working for private companies, and by 1998 that number had risen to 2500 prisoners working for 135 companies. Currently many prisons are reorganizing themselves in order to accommodate private companies. If we don't stop it, this number is going to skyrocket.

This creates a very dangerous dynamic. Large corporations, with a lot of help from the media and politicians, have a strong interest in creating a larger and larger prison population, so they can have a larger cheap labor pool. This results in increased sentences, and the increasing criminalization of large blocks of society (mostly low income people and people of color).

All this is not to say that prisoners should not work. Prisoners should have the same right to work as people on the outside. They however need to have safe, meaningful work, decent pay, and the right to organize or unionize.

Some of the companies that profit from exploitation of prison labor:

TWA	IBM
McDonald's	Motorola
Compaq	Toys R Us
Texas Instruments	AT&T
Dell	Revlon
Kaiser Steel	Eddie Bauer
Microsoft	Boeing
Victoria's Secret	Honeywell
Pierre Cardin	Nordstrom
MCI	Jostens
3Com	Nortel

For sources of this info, see prisonactivist.org/prison-labor/sources

WHAT IS THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX?

The "Prison Industrial Complex" is a term that refers to:

- The exponential expansion of prisons and jails, with rising numbers of men and women prisoners from communities of color;
- The increasingly symbiotic relationship between private corporations and the prison industry (construction, maintenance, goods and services) -- a relationship in which private corporations feed the punishment industry and the punishment industry yields enormous profits for private corporations;
- The reliance of many communities on prisons and jails for short-term economic vitality, particularly in the aftermath of corporate migration to impoverished countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and South East Asia;
- The increasing political influence of prison guards, prison officials and conservative penologists;
- The collaboration of politicians and the corporate controlled dominant media in the wholesale criminalization of communities of color (and particularly youth of color) and in the representation of prisons as a catch-all solution to social problems (problems created by capitalism in the first place).

-- Adapted from an address given by Angela Davis for Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex

Of the country's 2 million+ prisoners, more than 111,000 are in the prisons of the 18 private prison corporations. The two largest are Corrections Corporation of America and Wackenhut.

Major Private Prison Corporations	
 Wackenhut Corrections (52 prisons, more than 26,000 prisoners)	 Corrections Corporation of America (81 prisons, more than 71,000 prisoners)
Operates prisons in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico, Australia, UK.	Operates prisons in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico, Australia, UK.

What can I do?

For more information, see our prison labor web pages. We encourage you to do outreach and research in your community that exposes prison exploitation, and puts pressure on those who benefit from prison slave labor. If you or a group in your area are working on these issues, please contact PARC at the address below and we can add your information to our resource bank and include you in our organizing guide. We can also send you a copy of the guide, and many other helpful materials. For more information, see our web site or write us at the address below.

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