

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

Vol. 35-g,, No. 8

PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504-1911

August 2011

THE REINVENTION OF SLAVERY

Changes in sentencing laws since the 1980s not only have drastically increased the U.S. prison population but have also been used to increase the profits of private corporations.

Before the 1970s, private corporations were prohibited from using prison labor as a result of the chain gang and convict leasing scandals. However, in 1979, Congress began a process of deregulation to restore private sector involvement in prison industries to its former status. Over the last 30 years, at least 37 states have enacted laws permitting the use of convict labor by private enterprise, with an average pay of only \$.93 to \$4.73 per day.

Federal prisoners receive a bit more money on the whole--from \$.23 to \$1.25 per hour. They are employed by Unicor, a wholly owned government corporation established by Congress in 1934. Unicor gets approximately 53% of its sales from the Department of Defense. There are some 21,900 prisoners working in Unicor program.

Unicor, in addition to soldiers uniforms, bedding, shoes, helmets, and flak vests produces missile cables, wiring harnesses for jets and tanks and other airplane components (at \$7/hour for work which pays \$30 on the streets).

The nation's prison industries--prison labor programs producing goods or services sold to other government agencies or to the private sector--currently employs more people than any Fortune 500 company besides General Motors. It generates about \$2.4 billion in revenue a year.

Large powerful corporations such as the following have a stake in the expansion of the prison labor market: IBM, Boeing, Motorola, Microsoft, AT& T, Wireless, Texas Instruments, Dell, Compaq, Honeywell, Hewlett-Packard, Nortel, Lucent Technologies, 3Com, Intel, Northern Telecom, Nordstrom's, Revlon, Macy's, Pierre Cardin, and Target Stores.

In the 1990s, subcontractor Third Generation hired 35 South Carolina women prisoners to sew lingerie and leisure wear for Victoria's Secret and JC Penney. After British Petroleum (BP) irreparably polluted the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, it hired Louisiana prisoners--70% of which are African American--to clean up its mess. In the 1990s, Escod Industries moved to South Carolina, which paid its prisoner workers even less than de-unionized Mexican sweatshop workers would have gotten. In addition, South Carolina gave a \$250,000 "equipment subsidy to Escod, also with industrial space at below-market rent.

The federal government subsidizes the use of prisoner labor by private companies through lucrative tax write-off. Under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), private-sector employers earn a tax credit of \$2,400 for every work release prisoner they employ as a reward for hiring "risky target groups" and they can earn back up to 40% of the wages they pay these workers annually.

Ohio's Honda supplier, pays its prisoner workers \$2/hour (union workers get \$20 - \$30/hour). Konica pays prisoner copier repairers less than \$.50/hour. In Oregon, private companies can "lease" prisoners for \$3/day. Sates are also enlisting prison labor to close their budget gaps. Prisoners are being hired, for example, to paint vehicles, clean courthouses, and sweep campsites. In Wis., prisoners are now doing jobs that were once held by unionized workers.

With the explosion of the U.S. prison population since 1980, there are now more African-American men in jail, on probation, or on parole than were enslaved in 1850. Black males are incarcerated at a rate more than 6.5 times that of white males and 2.5 that of Hispanic males. Black females are incarcerated at approximately 3 times the rate of white females and twice that of Hispanic women Blacks and whites are involved in street drug use, possession and sales at roughly comparable rates.

PARA DIFUSION INMENDIATA

La administración de Obama finalmente usa su poder político en consideraciones discrecionales. La administración ha anunciado la forma en que se comenzará a aplicar el memorando sobre consideraciones discrecionales emitido el 17 de junio por el director del Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE), John Morton.

En respuesta a las peticiones de las familias y los estudiantes que han estado esperando que el Congreso actúe sobre el Acta de los Sueños (DREAM Act) o una reforma migratoria más amplia y humana, el Departamento de Seguridad Nacional (DHS) finalmente emitió una respuesta a una carta enviada el 13 de abril del 2011, por un grupo de senadores urgiendo al gobierno que detuviera la deportación de los estudiantes elegibles para el DREAM Act.

Bajo el nuevo proceso establecido por la administración, un grupo funcionario que consiste de personal del DHS y el Departamento de Justicia (DOJ), desarrollará criterios específicos para identificar los casos de deportación de baja prioridad que deben de ser considerados para la discreción del fiscal. Estos criterios se basaran en los "factores" mencionados en el memorándum de ICE, que incluyen si una persona ha estado presente en los EE.UU. desde temprana edad (como en el caso de aquellos estudiantes que se beneficiarían del DREAM Act), o si la persona ha sido víctima de un delito grave o de una violación de derechos civiles, es un menor de edad, es anciana, está embarazada o es madre lactantes, o tiene una discapacidad grave o problema de salud.

El grupo funcionario desarrollará un proceso para revisar los casos pendientes ante tribunales de inmigración y federales que cumplen estos criterios. La administración pronto comenzará a revisar todos los 300.000 casos de deportación pendientes para identificar aquellos que cumplen con estos nuevos criterios. En el futuro, los abogados de ICE llevarán a cabo una revisión periódica de todos los casos que tienen una audiencia programada para determinar futuros casos que cumplan con estos criterios.

El National Immigration Law Center comentó: "Como siempre lo importante está en los detalles pero estamos deseosos de trabajar juntos para asegurar que los inmigrantes que actualmente estén en proceso pueden beneficiarse de este nuevo proceso."

SOLIDARITY MUST PERSIST

The United States, with 5% of the world's population and nearly 25% of the world's prisoners, incarcerates millions of people. This makes fighting for the rights and freedoms of prisoners a fight for equality for us all.

At end of 2010 the largest prisoner strike to date occurred in Georgia where 11 prisons participated in a strike for wages, education, nutritious food and visitation rights. At the beginning of 2011, Death Row prisoners in Ohio went on a hunger strike to end their solitary confinement and in protest of the violation of their most basic human rights, such as lack of medical treatment and warm clothes. They won.

On July 1, 2011, roughly 6,600 prisoners in 12 prisons, including Tehachapi, Corcoran and Calipatria struck. The three week hunger strike he protested Pelican Bay State Prison's conditions of solitary confinement and calling for reforms.

The Pelican Bay hunger strikers won some improvements including further discussion of their educational and programming rights with the authorities.

Their biggest victory may well be in their successful unifying of prisoners and the drawing of national attention to the all-too-common issue of solitary confinement, including the requirement of "debriefing". As one striker said: "We remain as serious about our stand now as we were at the start."

Copies of the Newsletter will be included in all correspondence we send out. To receive our monthly issues regularly, send us self-addressed, stamped envelopes (with the CPR return address)-- up to 12 at one time.

Please continue to send us address changes and renewal requests, in order to receive the year-end holiday card/new calendar. This is especially important for those in California and Texas.

Also, please note that the ONLY address to use to be sure to reach us continues to be: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504.

And remember, NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for making our Newsletter available on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at: <http://www.realcostofprisonsproject.org/coalition.html>. This is an outstanding site!

We continue to depend on our readers' financial contributions to be able to go on with our work. Thank you so much for your ongoing support over so many years!