



# Under Lock & Key

May 2009, No. 8

Publication of the Maoist Internationalist Ministry of Prisons

## MIM(Prisons) on U.S.

### Prison Economy

by MIM(Prisons)  
April 2009

Issue 8 of Under Lock and Key takes on the topic of American prison economics and prisoner labor. Prisons in America are funded by the States and the Federal Government, and they are quite expensive. The U.S. spends about \$60 billion a year to house over 2.3 million prisoners and yet...

Prisoners are useful as workers because they can be paid very low wages or none at all, they are always available and can be employed when needed without the difficulty of having to lay off workers in downturns, and they are literally a captive workforce who can be punished if they refuse to work. In many respects prisoners are similar to migrant workers who take the jobs in the U.S. that American citizens don't want except that migrant workers are at least free to move on or go home at night or pick between jobs.

There are many aspects to the topic of prison economics and prisoner labor, but they all tie back to the question of who is making money off all the prisoners who work for free or for very little money, and the bigger question of whether there is profit to be made off prisons in general. The main position that we challenged in ULK2 was that the prison boom is motivated by a system of modern day slavery that is exploiting the masses through forced labor. In this issue we will further demonstrate that exploitation in prisons is not a source of private profit and discuss how the prison industrial complex really evolved.

### Profiteering Follows Policy

The importance of our point that prisoners  
*Continued on page 6...*

## Pennsylvania building prisons to create jobs

by a Pennsylvania prisoner  
March 2009

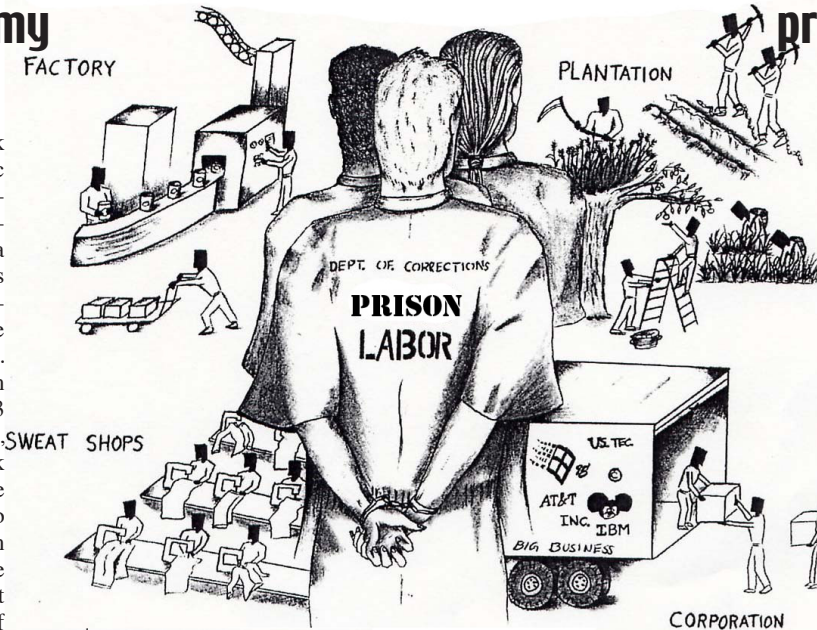
Governor Edward Rendell brought casinos and slot machines to Pennsylvania and now wants to turn PA into a prison state. He wants to add 8,000 more beds to PA plantations by the year 2013. Even with the fact that three different police districts falsified reports to get warrants, planted evidence, and paid informants to set up and testify against people, some of whom had no criminal records. Rendell noted that of the 31,000 people on parole in Pennsylvania in 2007, 95% did not commit new crimes, yet he suspended parole.

The governor has eliminated 20 educational programs including the Scranton State School for the Deaf, the Scotland School for Veteran's Children in Franklin County, and the Schools of Excellence. The Library subsidy was cut by \$1.75 million dollars. The governor cut \$205 million from the education budget. The Justice Department's budget is currently \$23.9 billion dollars and that's not including the salaries for 50,000 more police officers, the salaries for 2000 more border patrol agents, and not including the \$1.4 billion for deporting illegal aliens who are convicted of crimes, and minus the \$75 million dollars for job training for ex-cons released from prison.

There are 63 positions that convicted felons can not have. Once an individual serves their time, there shouldn't be any chains upon them. These uninsured Americans have to start over. Many have no savings accounts, homes, or any other property to fall back on. Now labeled as dangerous criminals who can't find work, they end up in homeless shelters or back in prison.

*Continued on page 11...*

**Prisoners: You will remain on our mailing list for a free subscription as long as you write in once every 6 months. Each time you write, please tell us what you have received from us since you last wrote so that we can better track our mail.**



- 19 CENTS AN HOUR
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- PENALTY FOR REFUSAL TO WORK-
- SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
- LOSS OF PAROLE
- LOSS OF PROGRAMS

While important in keeping operation costs down in virtually all u\$ prisons, prison labor is a small piece of the economic pie of the PIC. In this issue we further develop our thesis on prison labor and the questions of slavery and exploitation.

## Prison labor and economics in California: who really profits?

by a California prisoner  
February 2009

There's a little over 4,200 prisoners at this institution. About 200 or more of these prisoners are level one. They are housed outside the gun towered perimeter, in what they call the minimum support facility. All of these prisoners have jobs consisting of laborer positions, from warehouse workers to clean up crews and landscaping, their wages are at a maximum of 13 cents an hour. Other jobs include dump/garbage truck drivers and car/truck maintenance. These other prisoners cannot earn more than 32 cents an hour. The rest of the population is level

*Continued on page 2...*

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## Work, money and good time in Texas

by a Texas prisoner  
April 2009

I live in a "transfer facility" known as the Choice Moore Unit, in Bonham Texas. This facility houses 1,200 prisoners in eighteen 68-man dorms. Being that this is a transfer facility, people will stay here about 2 years before we are actually integrated into the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's prison system. This facility is known as a "farm" because it's main operation is the farming fields around our facility. The majority of the prisoners work either in the fields, kitchen, laundry, or go to school.

...continued from 1

### ... Profiting in CA

IV prisoners housed in A, B, C and D facilities, and two ASUs (D facility is SNY). With the exception of facility D, which has a joint venture program where about 100 prisoners earn the minimum wage. There are no other type of jobs in any of the other facilities, with the exception of support services positions such as yard clean up crews, kitchen, chow hall and a few clerical positions in education, program office, canteen, and law library. There would probably be somewhere around 150 job positions per facility with only about half of these positions being pay numbers earning anywhere from 8 cents to 32 cents an hour.

Yes, pay numbers are a joke throughout California prisons, and yes, we are being exploited to a certain degree, but not in the way that you may think. Profits are being made not so much from prisoner labor but from filling up the bed space in all of these prisons. Each prison creates more than 1,000 job positions with prison guards and medical staff being the highest number and receiving payment at about close to \$50 an hour plus overtime. And it is my belief that

There are only a few classes here, and all of them are not vocational. The classes provided are: cognitive thinking changes, GED, and voyagers (which is a religious class). The rest of the jobs here are: supply room, kennel/horse worker (for trustees), dorm janitor, administration helper, inmate commissary, and that's about all. None of these jobs pay us and from what I understand, TDCJ does not pay any money to prisoners. The TDCJ pays us by gaining us "good time" credits and "worktime" credits.

People in the TDCJ system are really forced to work, and here's why: If a person refuses to work, they get a written major case for not working. Once brought to a disciplinary hearing and found guilty, you lose commissary privileges, recreation privileges, and go down in line

besides the heads of the CDC, it is the prison guard's union that is profiting the most from our incarceration.

It is no wonder they always spend millions of dollars to kill every proposition or assembly bill that goes on the ballot concerning reduction of prisoner sentences or amendments to modify their biggest accomplishment, the three strikes law. Many people benefit from crime (police officers, public defenders, district attorneys, judges, etc.), and from incarceration in state prison, the matter at issue here. All these people in turn spend money and contribute to the imperialist economy. Then, there come the contracts each warden has with many different food suppliers where a lot of money is being handed down under the table. Also, the contracts with the phone company and package vendors where a lot of kick backs go to wardens or other head officials within the CDC. So as you can see, everybody's a winner in this game except us of course. With the biggest winner being the imperialist government, followed by CDC head officials and the prison guard's union being the ones getting the biggest piece of the pie. ♦

class status (line class is what gives you privileges, % of work time/good time credits, and is used for classification reasons also.) If after a period of time you were assigned another job and refused to work again, you would be written up for a major case again and the consequences continue to get worse. If continued refusal to work happens, you may end up on a max unit in the "hole" doing all your sentence. Here's another aspect of what happens to us here. Any major or minor case will be forwarded to your parole board. The parole board uses major cases (any case whether petty or not) to give offenders one year set offs, up to 3 year set offs, until they can be up for parole again. So basically any case write-up in here is like being sentenced another year.

Let's say I make 100% of my work time credits and I go up for parole and never had a write up for misbehavior. Now I get a 2 year set off from parole, even with no cases and 100% of my work credit done. Now let's say a guy had 30% work time, 25% good time credit and 2 major cases and he's up for parole. Somehow they let him go home on parole. Parole here does what it wants and all the good time and work time is just for show on paper. They do not actually honor it.

Now for crimes considered "aggravated," they make people do half their time before they are eligible for parole, but they do not get good time credits. They do, however, get work credits. But like I said, it's all for the look - we really don't get shit. A person can get 100% work time and be at half his sentence and not get released on parole (so there's no pay). People can have 3/4th of their sentence done flat time and have 150% work time credits, but still be made to serve all their sentence (there's no pay again). My point is, we do not actually get any pay or reward for working and are therefore slaves to this and for this system. ♦

In September 2007, the Maoist Internationalist Ministry of Prisons or MIM(Prisons) was formed as an independent Maoist cell. That year, the Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM) took some security hits and changed its organizing strategy as a result. One of the significant changes relates to cell-based organizing as opposed to having a centralized party. MIM(Prisons) upholds the MIM cardinal questions and uses the overall political line put forth in MIM Notes, MIM Theory and on the former website. We distribute MIM Theory and serve an archive of the old MIM web site, which we also use as a regular source for prison-based educational work. The MIM legacy in fighting the criminal injustice system is strong and we carry that legacy forward in our own work.

The Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM) is the collection of existing or emerging Maoist internationalist parties in the English-speaking imperialist countries and their English-speaking internal semi-colonies, as well as the existing or emerging Maoist Internationalist parties in Belgium, France and Quebec and the existing or

emerging Spanish-speaking Maoist Internationalist parties of Aztlán, Puerto Rico and other territories of the U.S. Empire.

MIM(Prisons) upholds the revolutionary communist ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and is an internationalist organization that works from the vantage point of the Third World proletariat.

## What is MIM(Prisons)?

MIM(Prisons) struggles to end the oppression of all groups over other groups; classes, genders, nations. Our current battles in the United States are legal ones. We encourage prisoners to join these battles while explicitly discouraging them from engaging in any violence or illegal acts. MIM(Prisons) and its publications explicitly oppose the use of armed struggle at this time in the imperialist countries (including the United States). We do recognize that his-

tory has demonstrated that armed struggle is a necessary step to bring the oppressed to power to determine their own destinies. Revolution will become a reality within the United States as the military becomes overextended in the government's attempts to maintain world hegemony.

Fighting the injustice system is just one part of the anti-imperialist struggle, and it is important that organizers on the outside and prisoners not lose sight of the connections to this larger battle. For this reason, in addition to news about prisons and prison struggles, we will also publish more general news articles from both organizers and prisoners, as well as some general theoretical writings from prisoners. We welcome support and collaboration from those who are focused only on the prison struggle, but we also challenge them to see the bigger picture of imperialism and the importance of carrying out their work as a part of a larger anti-imperialist strategy.

For more information on Maoism, write to us for a copy of "What Is MIM?"

# The privatization of war: Imperialism gasps its last breathes

by MIM(Prisons)  
May 2009

Halliburton, KBR and Blackwater (recently rebranded as "Xe") have all become household names in recent years, and generally with negative connotations. There is much to be said about their corruption that is detailed in the books cited below, and we will draw some parallels to the Prison Industrial Complex in this and other articles. But the bigger question for anti-imperialists is what this signifies for the development and maintenance of imperialism.

The books reviewed for this article describe the two sides of the modern imperialist military of the united States. On the one hand you have the state-run military that is buying off amerikan youth with the mall culture they are accustomed to, run by cheap Third World labor. On the other, you have armed contractors, often used for more elite operations, increasing salaries of u\$ soldiers by 100% and probably moreso for mercenaries from the Third World. All combined, contractors came to outnumber u\$ military personnel on the ground in Iraq. (Chatterjee, p. xvi) The stories of Halliburton/KBR and Blackwater spell out a clear trend: it is costing more than ever for imperialism to keep the personnel levels it needs to maintain global hegemony.

## A microcosm of global economy

In *Halliburton's Army* Pratap Chatterjee reports that wages for contractors in Iraq are tied explicitly to nationality. This picture is very telling for those who claim that amerikans deserve higher wages because they are more productive. Here you have people coming from all over the world to work on the same site and the pay rates are comparable to what they'd get in their home countries (usually they make more in Iraq). This rule still rang true in the common cases where the Third World persyn had more skills or knowledge than the First Worlder. Contractors from the united States who were unemployed and desperate for work started at \$80,000 a year plus living expenses to supervise Filipinos who made \$200- \$1000 per month. One amerikan reported making \$130,000 a year to work only 1 day per week. In Bagram, Afghan trash collectors were paid \$10 for a 12 hour day, while Indians made \$600 a month plus room and board working in fast food restaurants on the base. Filipinos who built the prisons in Guantanamo were kept in horrible prisons themselves, and paid \$2.50 an hour for dangerous 12 hour days with no safety equipment. Abuses by contractors got so notorious that India, Nepal and the Philippines all made it illegal for their citizens to work in Iraq. (Chatterjee, p.157)

With 35,000 of 47,000 Halliburton employees in Iraq coming from the Third World (Chatterjee, p.142), and comparable wages being paid by nationality, you see a replica of the global economy that most First Worlders defend, even many so-called "Marxists." About 25% of the employees were making exploiter level wages,

while the rest were Third World (mostly migrant) workers doing all the hard and dangerous work, for wages below the average value of labor. According to the oppressor nation left, Halliburton wouldn't employ the amerikans at \$80,000 plus expenses if they weren't exploiting them. These pseudo-marxists think that an amerikan signing a check produces 10 times more value than a Filipino doing construction work or food preparation. On the global scale there are borders and oceans that somehow make this very same situation even more palatable to the oppressor nation.

## The Prison Connection

While Halliburton's and Blackwater's ties to the federal government have long been in question, the government's 39th largest contractor is its very own Federal Prisons Industries (FPI) or UNICOR. (Wright, p. 111) Like the Third World labor behind Halliburton/KBR, author Ian Urbina asserts that the u\$ military could not do what it does without the vast amount and diversity of products that FPI provides with prison labor that is paid \$0.23 to \$1.15 an hour (amounting to \$400 million in sales to the Department of Defense in 2002). Franklin D. Roosevelt set up the company using legislation that forced the Department of Defense to purchase from FPI, even when their prices were not the lowest. (Wright, p.113) This move by FDR kept money circulating within the state to further fund its repressive aims, rather than allowing tax money to return to private hands in the form of profit.

This validates the overall patterns that MIM(Prisons) has seen; even the biggest prison labor-powered industry in the country is a subsidy for state repression, not a source of private profit. However we do recognize that the U\$ military is not saving money by buying products from FPI - private industries can offer products for as cheap or cheaper. And so we don't agree with Urbina's implication that prison labor is essential to military operations.

Another interesting relationship between the military industrial complex and the prison industrial complex is found in Blackwater owner Erik Prince's \$500,000-plus in contributions to the Prison Fellowship Ministries(PFM). PFM is an evangelical Christian organization that sends more than 50,000 volunteers into u\$ prisons. (Wright, p.130) While MIM(Prisons) is kept from sending mail to prisoners all over the u\$ for saying that revolution is necessary to end the plight of the oppressed, Prison Fellowship

founder Chuck Colson has cited Thomas Jefferson to imply that Christian revolution is necessary in the united States. (Scahill, p. 95) Over 1800 facilities have granted PFM access to run programs inside the prisons that have enrolled over 20,000 people. Once again, we demonstrate that censorship of Maoist literature is about politics and not security.

## Wannabe amerikans

Blackwater is busy recruiting former CIA operatives around the world as mercenaries, bribing them with u\$-level paychecks. The outcome of this should help demonstrate to our critics the importance of the buying off of a whole nation. Amerikan nationalism provides a much stronger defense for imperialism than a mercenary army. Even if most of these mercenaries are steeped in fascist ideology that is conducive to imperialist militarism, the chances of conflicts of interests developing are significantly greater.

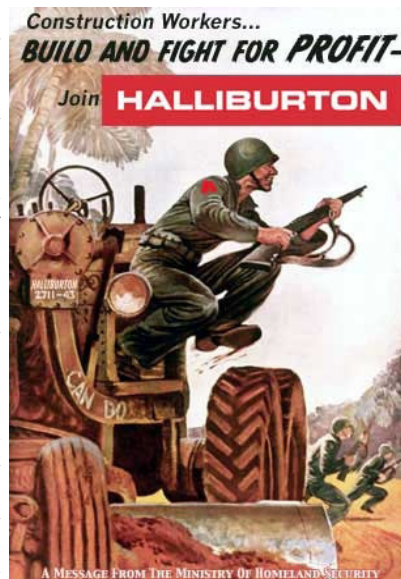
The globalization of the imperialist army is a sign of weakness, not of growing strength. Soon there will be absolutely no way for their army to grow (except with robots).

## 21st Century Amerikan soldiers

From the Civil War to the Cold War, the u\$ national military was not recruited through profit motives. However, while amerikan nationalism provided a strong base for imperialist militarism, the continued increase in demands of the parasitic nation

eventually undercut their willingness to fight and die for their nation. They could hire Mexicans to do their housework and manual labor, while hiring East Asians to do their industrial production, couldn't they just hire someone to handle the dirty work of fighting their wars for imperialist plunder? Or to paraphrase Chatterjee, amerikan soldiers went from peeling their own potatoes in tents that they set up themselves to having Third World workers serve them all you can eat dinner buffets. You know, to make it feel more like home.

U\$ military public relations explains the need to provide such creature comforts as necessary to maintain an all volunteer army in the 21st century. (Chatterjee, p. 10) But the question of why a draft is not viable is the same question of amerikans not being willing to give up their cush lifestyles, which brings the threat of a draft resistance movement that feeds into anti-imperialism.



## Remove the profit motive

by a California prisoner  
March 2009

I am currently incarcerated in California serving a 220 year life sentence that I'll never finish.

I know every state is a little different as to how it taxes its prisoners and uses the sweat of our slave labor to promote the prison industrial complex. Following is an outline of a few of the ways they do it here in California.

Some of our taxation comes in the form of "restitution," for which we are taxed 55 percent of all money that lands in our prisoner trust accounts. Ten percent of that goes to the prison for administrative costs and the remainder goes to the state's general fund.

The next money-grabber comes in the form of a \$5 co-payment for all medical and dental visits, which is outrageous considering that we are provided substandard and unconstitutional medical, dental, and mental health services under the control of a court-ordered receivership.

Another tax comes in the form of our prisoner welfare fund, which gets collected in various ways, the most common of which is a 10 percent tax on the purchase of an appliance, quarterly package, special purchase or hobby supplies.

A lot of guys - and girls - are unaware of the money that gets clipped from our friends and family. For example, every time we make one of those collect calls, our friends and family get clobbered with outrageous phone bill charges, which the phone companies kickback to the prison for allowing them to provide us with phone service. To give you an idea how badly our families are being taxed by these calls, last year the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) received over \$25 million in kickbacks from phone companies.

A similar tax can be found in our visiting rooms by way of the "super high" prices of vending machine items. The vendors, like the phone companies, pay kickbacks to the prisons for the privilege of putting their machines in our visiting areas! I don't know what this amount is annually, but I assure you, it's a lot.

Also in the visiting area are the sales of pictures for which all the profits go to the inmate welfare fund, which gets quietly shuffled into the general fund. The same applies to the profits from our canteen purchases.

Next we visit the prison labor issue. Here in California we've been operating with a pay scale system that was developed in the 1970s and there hasn't been a cost of living adjustment since it was implemented. In fact, the only change that has come has been the elimination of paid positions, because there is always some desperate prisoner who is willing to work for nothing just to get out of his or her cell. This practice must stop if we are ever to see a pay

increase.

We pretty much make everything for the state prison system and government offices: Clothing, food, bedding, cleaning products, tables, chairs, and even modular offices. We make license plates and the tags that go on them; our labor saves the state \$billions annually. Yet we continue to jump at the opportunity to work for 10 cents an hour or for nothing at all!

I could go on for hours about all the ways the state is extorting our money and the sweat of our labor. It's endless, and all we are doing is making it possible for them to hold us longer and, quite possibly imprison our friends, neighbors and loved ones to expand their prison industrial complex. This has got to stop.

Now, here's my solution. This should work, considering the current economic crisis affecting every state, but it won't come easily or without sacrifice.

I call upon everyone to use up or send out all the money in your prison trust account. This will deprive the state of millions of dollars that they acquire from interest on our money, as well as funds they won't get from restitution, fines, inmate welfare and other bogus charges, because we'll have no money to spend. Second, everyone must stop using the phone and start writing instead. Third, stop working for nothing. I guarantee you this will quickly get the attention of your administrators - but don't collapse under pressure. Last, demand prisoners' rights, including the right to vote. Once that is established you will have the power to do just about anything.

For everyone's information, I want you to know I have already undertaken this plan of action. I have remained indigent since my incarceration in 2005 and, as a direct result, the state pays me 20 metered indigent envelopes a month, all my necessary hygiene equipment, soap, razors, toothpaste, toothbrush, comb and so forth. They also pay for all my legal copying services, paper, envelopes and postage of which I have used many. I have deprived the state of the interest from my money and the \$850,000 it claims I owe in restitution. I have refused to work from day one and will continue to do so until I see radical changes in prisoners' rights. I don't pay for my medical visits or my medications, which are numerous and extremely expensive.

Again, I could ramble on for days, but I want you all to start thinking about how you are contributing to the prison industrial complex and start taking actions to change this environment in which we live. If done nationwide, we can and will stop the heart of the Prison Industrial Complex by removing the profit motive.

**MIM(Prisons) adds:** This comrade points out a lot of ways that prisoners can take legal and non-violent actions against the prison industrial complex. This sort of organizing is important. However, this will not remove the profit motive from the PIC. While the PIC is making extra money off of prisoners through all the methods

listed above, the fundamental source of money for prisons is still the government. Prisons are not profitable in the sense that they do not generate enough value to pay for themselves. They are a subsidized industry that pays a lot of people a lot of money to build, fill and operate. And so the portion of this that prisoners can impact by the direct actions described in this article is limited to a minority of the money. That doesn't mean these actions will be useless, but we can't fool ourselves into thinking these actions alone will stop the heart of the Prison Industrial Complex. ♦

## Federal prisons and prison labor

by a Federal prisoner  
April 2009

I am a federal prisoner confined to the Coleman II United States Penitentiary. In most federal penitentiaries there are approximately 1500 prisoners in the general population. Approximately 90% of general population prisoners hold prison employment working jobs that range from being cooks in the kitchen, providing janitorial work throughout the prison, working in the maintenance department as electricians or plumbers, or in the most coveted of prison jobs: the UNICOR factory.

Prisoners are compelled to work in two ways. First, the administration utilizes the Financial Responsibility Program to coerce prisoners to work. All convicted Federal prisoners are assessed \$100 per count for the crimes for which they are convicted. Many others are given fines, restitution and other "criminal monetary penalties" at sentencing. When a prisoner arrives to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, s/he is required to pay these "financial obligations" during incarceration through the Financial Responsibility Program or face loss of privileges such as commissary, telephone, visitation access, etc. A prisoner must obtain prison employment to meet these so-called obligations in order to keep his/her ability to maintain community contacts through visits and phone calls and to supplement the horrid diet through the commissary.

The second means of lawful but unjust enslavement of the prison population is through disciplinary action. A prisoner who refuses to work is, under prison rules and regulations, "refusing to program." Violating this rule also results in loss of privileges but has additional adverse consequences such as loss of "Good Conduct Time," time in disciplinary segregation, impoundment of personal property, and other sanctions.

It is without doubt that if the federal government had to pay wages to unincarcerated laborers, the cost of cleaning, maintaining and repairing prisons would be extraordinary. It is much easier to run the gulags of America when you prey upon the incarcerated poor and offer them \$12 a month to work 8 hour, 5 day workweeks.

This does not account for the UNICOR laborers. UNICOR, also known as Federal Prison Indus-

*Continued on page 12...*

## Slavery without Capitalist Exploitation

by a New York prisoner  
February 2009

I received the January 2009 issue #6 of Under Lock & Key, for which I was most grateful. I salute the Mexican comrade for his excellent and exemplary contribution to that issue ("Misplaced rejoicing in prisons over Obama victory"). I am a Black man, the son of an Eritrean emigrant and a descendant of First Nation peoples and Africans enslaved and transported to the Americas. The comrade was right on target, especially when he wrote: "... How can there be real change if the system is never changed, only its leaders? For those of us who are convinced that we are 'soldiers' ask yourself, who's soldier are you? Are you some common criminal's soldier? Do you fight and work for greed, power and lust of recognition? Or will you be the People's soldier?..." Yes. I salute the comrade for his courage and determination. Palante, siempre, hermano!

I am responding as well to your request for feedback on your assessment of the prison labor/economics situation. I have been aware of the reality of MIM's findings for some time, and am in agreement with you wholeheartedly. I perceive that prisoners' disagreement with MIM's assessment is not rooted in an analysis of the facts on the ground but rather is due to their misunderstanding and confusion regarding the nature of our enslavement.

It seems that prisoners who disagree with your findings do so actually because they fear that such assessments will confound the acknowledgment of U\$ imprisonment as slavery and a capitalist enterprise. U\$ imprisonment is certainly slavery and it is certainly a capitalist enterprise whether prison labor is a source of great profits or not. Forced or coerced labor is not the most defining characteristic of slavery and such labor within U\$ imprisonment is hardly the source of the real lucrative profiteering that stems from U\$ imprisonment in general. The depraved creatures who crafted the language of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution understood this all too well.

*slave n. one owned by another: one completely subject to another or to some habit or influence;*

*slavery n. the holding of persons as property;*

(The New International Webster's Pocket Dictionary of the English Language, New Revised edition. Trident Press International 2002)

And it is enough for the state and government to "own" us to profit from us, whether we are sweating away in their industries or not. Much of the elaboration that follows is adapted from "Prison Town", by "The Real Cost of Prisons" project:

During the 1980's and 90's many jobs and sources of income evaporated in the rural and farm areas of this country. Federal, state and local officials were then tasked with discovering a new type of "growth" industry that would revive

and sustain the dying economies of the municipalities, districts and sectors they were elected or appointed to serve. Prisons were touted as a viable growth industry with significant potential. Perhaps it was for this reason that former New York State legislator Daniel Feldman stated, "When legislators cry 'lock 'em up!', they often mean 'lock 'em up in my district!'" Certainly it was for this reason that Texas judge Jimmy Galindo said:

*"We live in a part of the country where it's very difficult to create and sustain jobs in a global market. [Prisons] become a very clean industry for us to provide employment to citizens. I look at it as a community development project."*

Some private developers build prisons in states like Wisconsin without legislative edict from officials and then "sell" the prisons, prompting people like former Wisconsin state corrections chief Walter Dickey to declare,

*"... It flatly introduces money and the desire for profit into the imprisonment policy debate, because you've got an entity in Wisconsin, a private entity, with a strong financial interest in keeping people in prison and having them sentenced to prison."*

Investment banks, construction companies, private developers, real estate agencies and many others stand to profit immeasurably from prisons in innumerable ways. Federal, state and local officials are then lauded for bringing financial security and economic prosperity to their respective regions and lobbyists.

This phenomenon was complemented by another phenomenon, namely the "mandatory sentencing", "three-strikes-you're-out" and "rockerfeller-type" drug laws introduced by legislators during the same aforementioned period of rural economic decline. It is no secret nor is it debated that such legislation contributed to a 370% prison population growth since 1970. Small wonder, then, that there are more prisons in America than there are Wal-Mart stores.

Thus it matters little whether the imperialist slaveowners can glean profits from our

work on their institutional plantations. Their ownership of us prisoners ensures a diverse profit source, whether by accommodating the labor aristocracy or enriching corporate entities.

Thanks to MIM(Prisons) for providing a venue where revolutionary-minded prisoners can connect and exchange ideas. Among other things, *Under Lock & Key* certainly accomplishes that. I hope that the information in this letter will be useful towards compiling the upcoming issue on prison labor/economics.

**MIM(Prisons) adds:** As we explain in the introduction to this issue of ULK, we prefer Marx's definition of slavery to the one found in Websters and so conclude that imprisonment is a system of oppression distinct from slavery. We agree with this prisoner's discussion of the ways that corporations, labor aristocrats, and American imperialism benefit from imprisonment. In addition to the points discussed by this comrade, the lockup of oppressed nations by the U\$ prison system also prevents the self-determination of those nations through their own labor. So, while capitalist profits are not generally extracted from the 2.3 million locked up, that is a huge chunk of labor that is being denied to the oppressed that otherwise could utilize their people locked up to further the development of meeting the needs of their respective nations, and the oppressed people of the world in general. ♦



## On Prisons & Prisoners

MIM(Prisons) seeks to build public opinion against Amerika's criminal injustice system, and to eventually replace the bourgeois injustice system with proletarian justice. The bourgeois injustice system imprisons and executes a disproportionately large and growing number of oppressed people while letting the biggest mass murderers -- the imperialists and their lackeys -- roam free. Imperialism is not opposed to murder or theft, it only insists that these crimes be committed in the interests of the bourgeoisie.

All U.S. citizens are criminals--accomplices and accessories to the crimes of U\$. oppression globally until the day U\$. imperialism is overcome. All U.S. citizens should start from the point of view that they are reforming criminals.

MIM(Prisons) does not advocate that all prisoners go free today; we have a more effective program for fighting crime as was demonstrated in China prior to the restoration of capitalism there in 1976. We say that all prisoners are political prisoners because under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, all imprisonment is substantively political. It is our responsibility to exert revolutionary leadership and conduct political agitation and organization among prisoners -- whose material conditions make them an overwhelmingly revolutionary group. Some prisoners should and will work on self-criticism under a future dictatorship of the proletariat in those cases in which prisoners really did do something wrong by proletarian standards.

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### ... On Prison Labor

are not generally exploited for economic profit is in understanding the real motive force behind the u\$ prison boom. Fundamentally, prisons are a money losing industry. It costs more money to run prisons than is generated from prisoner labor or any other aspect of the industry. If prison labor was a gold mine for private profiteers, then we would see corporations of all sorts leading the drive for more prisons. On the contrary, though the fifth largest prison system in the u\$ is the private Corrections Corporation of America (CCA),(1) the government still runs over 95% of the prisons overall.(2) So if the u\$ didn't build the largest prison system in the history of humankind for slave labor profits, then why did they do it?

As a parallel example, consider the war-profiteering of Halliburton and KBR through the military industrial complex; it was the government who started wars, and then the contractors appeared. In fact, the stories of most of these contractors start with people with political connections, not with any particular interest or knowledge of the product or service in demand. (3) War was created for the overall economic benefit of the imperialist system, but not by the companies that most directly profited. Once the profits start flowing, the intertwining of interests between politicians and their private benefactors creates conflicts between the imperialist interests abroad and those who are just trying to make a quick buck. Hence, we see some backlash against Halliburton and, their former subsidiary, KBR's corruption within the White House and the Senate (including the Senate hearing on May 4, 2009).

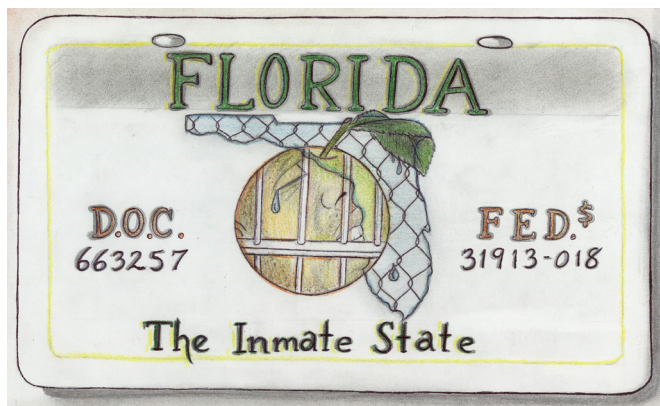
Similarly, the prison boom originated in government policy, and then new companies formed to profiteer, or in the case of telephone and commissary, old companies adapted their product to a specific opportunity. Prisons serve u\$ imperialism in controlling the local population, while placating the demands of the oppressor nation as a whole. Only now, with the emergence of the massive Prison Industrial Complex (PIC), the demands of amerikans for more prisons are more economically oriented, rather than just social. And most of that economic interest is among state employees and unions, not private corporations.

In Ohio, the Department of Corrections had to go to the state Supreme Court in order to close prisons over the protests of the guard union.(4) The California Correctional Peace Officers Association, notorious for being the strongest in the country, has applied similar pressures preventing the state from cutting anything from the CDCR budget except for education programs in recent years.

Private industries are making lots of money off prisons. From AT&T charging outrageous rates for prisoners to talk to their families, to the food companies that supply cheap (often inedible) food to prisons, to the private prison

companies themselves, there is clearly a lot of money to be made. But these companies profits are coming from the States' tax money, a mere shuffling of funds within the imperialist economy. Some companies like AT&T or some of the prison package services are selling goods or services directly to prisoners at drastically increased prices from what you'd get on the street. But even then, they are not exploiting the prisoners labor, they are merely extorting their money. The private prisons are the only example where prison labor (used to run the prisons) may come into play in determining corporate profits.

Some activists see opportunity in the current capitalist crisis; perhaps states will be forced to listen to arguments claiming that prisons are a money pit for tax funds. However, Governor Quinn of Illinois responded to the crisis in his state last month by canceling plans of the previous governor to close Pontiac Correctional



Center, citing "fiscal responsibility" and the protection of 600 local jobs and \$55.4 million in local revenue.(5) Pennsylvania is continuing down its path of prison expansion with plans for 8,000 more beds in the next 4 years for the same reasons.(6)

These governments could generate jobs and revenue in countless ways. The reason that prison guards are generally funded over teachers is initially a question of the government's goals and priorities. While there is much public pressure to fund schools over jails, this battle is one for the labor aristocracy's unions to fight out. Revolutionaries have no significant role to play in such debates. We can combat national oppression with institutions of the oppressed, not by more jobs for amerikans in one government sector or the other.

Meanwhile, the capitalists will invest in operations based on where the funding goes. So it is not really the evil corporations that are directly to blame for the u\$ prison boom. The government decides whether prisons are built. The u\$ government serves the overall interests of the imperialist class first and then must answer to its amerikan constituency. It is the combination of these two interests that have led to the largest mass-incarceration in history. Currently, the strategy to dismantle this massive humyn experiment must recognize these two forces as the opposition, and then mobilize forces that have an interest in countering both imperialism and

amerikanism.

### Prisoner Labor

After publishing an article entitled *Amerikans: Oppressing for a Living* (see ULK2), we received some criticisms from comrades of our position that corporations are not profiting from prison labor in a significant way. We then made a call to our correspondents on the ground across the united States to research this issue further. Not only did we receive much data to back up our position, but many wrote in to say that our analysis was right on.

In this issue of Under Lock & Key we are printing data on the prison labor going on in New York, Texas, California, Florida, Colorado, Oregon, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Washington, Utah and the Federal system. These systems represent over half of the u\$ prison population, so we feel confident that our conclusions are fairly accurate for the system as a whole. We still welcome reports from correspondents in other states and prisons for future research.

In summary, all states have industries that produce goods for sale. Most if not all of those products are sold back to other state agencies, mostly within the Department of Corrections itself. Workers in these industries usually make more than those doing maintenance and clerical work, with a max of a little over a dollar an hour. While we don't have solid numbers, these are generally a small minority of the population and not available at most prisons.

Maintenance workers are also universal across all prison systems. Even most supermax prisons have lower security prisons adjacent to them, providing a labor source for running it. In many places such work is not called a job, but "programming." In some states, like New York, your programming can be pseudo-educational or rehabilitative programs instead of labor. Programming is often required. When it is paid it is usually less than fifty cents an hour.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons has one of the largest prison industries selling goods outside of the prison system, but it is selling mostly to the Department of Defense - another government agency.(7)

The UNICOR annual report boasts the benefits of prisoner labor: "With an estimated annual incarceration cost of \$30,000 per inmate, FPI's programmatic benefits represent significant taxpayer savings, while restoring former inmates to a useful role in society." They claim "a 24% lower recidivism rate among FPI participants."(8) There is no information on how this number is calculated but we suspect that it is flawed because the selection of UNICOR workers from the general prison population is not random. On the other hand, we do know that there are few opportunities for prisoners to acquire any useful skills prior to release. If UNICOR training truly reduces recidivism, this

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should be an obvious and compelling argument that prisons need more such programming. It does not have to be tied to low pay and forced labor.

Jobs related to running the prisons (cleaning, library, administrative roles, etc.) help reduce the costs of running prisons but clearly don't create any new wealth. UNICOR and its parallel industries in the state systems merely allow the Departments of Corrections to obtain money from other state agencies that they were going to spend anyway, or directly benefit the DOC by providing it with supplies. Even with requirements that state agencies purchase from such programs, they do not come close to covering prison expenses.

It is a dangerous proposition to tie financial benefits to prisons as this gives those who profit an interest in growing the prison population. However, at this point in time only a small minority of prisoners are actually employed, so prisoner labor does not appear to be a major drive behind the ongoing rapid growth of the American prison population.

### Modern day slavery or exploitation?

Many prisoners raise the question of whether forcing prisoners to work for no pay violates the constitutional amendment that abolished slavery. The 13th amendment abolished slavery "except as a punishment for crime." The article by some New York prisoners in this issue *Under Lock & Key* does a good job of explaining the history behind this exception.

Slavery is a system characterized by the capture or purchase of humans for the purpose of exploiting their labor. As Marx explained "As a slave, the worker has exchange value, a value; as a free wage-worker he has no value; it is rather his power of disposing of his labour, effected by exchange with him, which has value." Marx is clarifying the distinction that slaves, as objects to be purchased, have exchange value. While capitalist workers are not purchased, they are selling their labour instead.<sup>(9)</sup> While prison labor is similar to slavery in that it involves workers who are receiving virtually no pay for their labor but are being provided with housing and other basic necessities, there are a few factors in prison labor that distinguish it from slavery as we use that term to define a system of exploitation. First, states have to pay other states to take their prisoners, implying they have no exchange value. Prisons are used as a tool of social control, with the use of prisoners' labor only as an after thought to try to offset some of the operating costs. Which leads to our second point: there is no net profit made off the labor of prisoners - incarceration costs so much that the state is only able to offset a portion of the cost of providing for a prisoner by using his/her labor. Because of these features of prisoner labor, we do not call it slavery.

Even if prisoner labor is not slavery in the economic sense of that term, it is still possible that prisoners are exploited. Exploitation means

## Three Main Points

MIM(Prisons) differs from other communists on three main questions:

\* MIM(Prisons) holds that after the proletariat seizes power in socialist revolution, the potential exists for capitalist restoration under the leadership of a new bourgeoisie within the communist party itself. In the case of the USSR, the bourgeoisie seized power after the death of Stalin in 1953; in China, it was after Mao's death and the overthrow of the "Gang of Four" in 1976.

\* MIM(Prisons) upholds the Chinese Cultural Revolution as the farthest advance of communism in human history.

\* As Marx, Engels and Lenin formulated and MIM has reiterated through materialist analysis, imperialism extracts super-profits from the Third World and in part uses this wealth to buy off whole populations of oppressor nation so-called workers. These so-called workers bought off by imperialism form a new petty-bourgeoisie called the labor aristocracy. These classes are not the principal vehicles to advance Maoism within those countries because their standards of living depend on imperialism. At this time, imperialist super-profits create this situation in Canada, Quebec, the United States, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Israel, Sweden and Denmark.

"The theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin is universally applicable. We should regard it not as dogma, but as a guide to action. Studying it is not merely a matter of learning terms and phrases, but of learning Marxism-Leninism as the science of revolution." --Mao Zedong, Selected Works, Vol. II. p. 208.

that someone is extracting surplus value from the labor of someone else. The profit or surplus-value arises when workers do more labor than is necessary to pay the cost of hiring their labor-power. This is the way that capitalists make a profit - they pay people less than their labor is worth and then sell products for their full value. The difference is the profit.

In America the imperialists are paying workers more than the value of their labor. They can do this because of the tremendous superprofits stolen from exploiting the Third World workers. And they want to do this because it maintains a complicit population at home which has a material interest in imperialism and keeps capital circulating with its excessive consumption. Americans support their imperialist government because they benefit from it. They may not all earn the same as the big capitalists, but even in a recession they can look to the Third World and see that they don't want to share the wealth around the world evenly because that would mean a step down for First World workers.

There are some notable exceptions within U.S. borders: non-citizens are often forced into jobs that pay far below minimum wage (or often don't pay them at all) as they are in a shady sector of the economy. Many migrants in the United States are exploited, but they make up a very small portion of workers in this country.

Using the term exploitation to describe prisoner labor is complicated. Prisoners certainly earn very little for their labor, but we also have to include the cost of providing prisoners all of their necessities (although with very poor quality that leads to many unnecessary deaths). Of course much of what is being provided "for" prisoners is not part of their cost of living but rather part of the cost of keeping them captive and providing a high standard of living for their captors.

It is fair to say that prisons are stealing the labor power of prisoners. They have made it impossible for prisoners to refuse to work and the

actual pay prisoners receive is far less than the value of their labor. By stealing labor power, the US prison system also prevents the self-determination of the Black Nation and First Nations whose people are vastly over-represented in the system.

To the extent that the states can't continue to run prisons on tax money they don't have, prisoner labor is a valued part of the money going to the many labor aristocrats working in the prison system. An offset to the cost of running prisons is useful, even if that offset does not come close to covering even the cost of those prisoners doing the work. But it's important to remember that this labor is only useful because expensive prisons existed first.

### Solutions

A number of articles in this issue include calls from prisoners to take actions against the prison industries that are making money off prisoners, and to boycott jobs to demand higher wages. All of these actions are aimed at hitting the prisons, and private industries profiting off relationships with prisons, in their pocketbook. This is a good way for our comrades behind bars to think about peaceful protests they can take up to make demands for improved conditions while we organize to fundamentally change the criminal injustice system. ♦

Notes:

(1) Wright, Paul & Tara Herivel. *Prison Profiteers: Who makes money from mass incarceration.* The New Press: New York, 2007. p. 11.

(2) Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California.* University of California Press: Berkeley, 2007. p. 21.

(3) see our review of Halliburton's Army on p.3

(4) Wright, p.42.

(5) <http://www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/news/default.shtml#20090312>

(6) see article on p. 1 : *Pennsylvania building prisons to create jobs*

(7) see our review of Halliburton's Army on p.3

(8) [www.unicor.gov](http://www.unicor.gov)

(9) Marx, *Grundrisse*, pages 288-9.

# New York Prisoners report on Labor and Economics

by New York prisoners  
May 2009

*"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..."*

*--Thirteenth Amendment, United States Constitution*

## History of Legalized Slavery

The Thirteenth Amendment was ratified by Congress by the required three-fourths of the States (27 of 36) on January 31, 1865, and declared an amendment December 18, 1865. To understand it in a prison setting, it is important to look at the history after it was ratified until today.

It was during the time of the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment that "slaves", or better yet, the offspring of slaves had heightened their resistance to this torture and inhumane treatment that they inherited by bad luck. Slave leaders like Fredrick Douglas and Harriet Tubman started to educate themselves, assist in the escape of other slaves, and lobby for the rights that they felt they were due. Former slaves, escaped slaves, and others sympathetic to them led negotiations of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Once enacted, what was to be a victory for slaves, the Thirteenth Amendment later became nothing more than a smoke screen. When southern slave owners figured out that the second part to the amendment gave exception "as a punishment for crime" crafty southern lawmakers substituted various equivalents. One of these was "peonage." Peonage is a labor system in which the worker, who owes money to his or her employer, must "work off the debt." The term also can be defined, however, as virtual slavery or serfdom. Southern states enacted a series of laws that required, as punishment, high fines. Poor, now-"free" slaves were forced to borrow money to pay the fines and "work off" the debt, often times never paying off the interest. Some "crimes" included breaking curfews, and vagrancy.

The Freedman's Bureau, a government agency established to help former slaves assume responsibility as free citizens, attempted to replace "Peonage" with contracts. However, southern "Black Codes" prevented much progress. Vagrancy laws were abundant, and slavery was still existent, just under an alias.

In 1867, Congress enacted the Peonage Act in New Mexico, applying it to all of America. Now it was a felony to hold a person in Peonage or to seize or arrest a person to enforce Peonage. This same act outlawed any state law designed to enforce Peonage. In the 1900's the Peonage Act was accepted in full.

As we'll see below, modern laws and policies continue this legacy with many of the same oppressor nation motivations as in the 19th cen-

tury.

## Control those who can't be exploited

Every year, hundreds of thousands of mostly Black and Latino men from the 5 boroughs of NYC go thru the biggest county jail in the united States: Rikers Island in New York. After being convicted (which happens 70% of the time), private contractors bus them to state prisons upstate, more than 2/3rds of which are in rural areas with almost all white populations. Most of the officers, nurses, vocational instructors, etc. are from farming populations that lost their traditional economies largely to imperialist expansion into foreign markets in the Third World where they can exploit the people and buy food for excessively cheap prices.

Prisons are now the epicenter around which many towns have sprung up, reviving the dying rural communities. The local populations compete for these jobs, which are unique in their high wages and pension plans, while requiring minimal thinking ability.

No one can deny the stark increase in incarceration of Blacks within the past three decades. This increase is largely due to policies and harsh laws which are racially motivated. One notorious example is the federal guideline that sentences people to 10 years for possession of 5 grams of crack or 500 grams of cocaine, when whites are much more likely to be caught with cocaine. No study has ever proven that crack - cocaine in its coagulated form - is more harmful than its powder form. And though this law was modified recently, its purpose has already been served.

Since the end of slavery's role as a profitable enterprise by the u\$ farming industry, the principal question for law officials has been, "What is to be done about the fast growing population of restless young Black men?" - Prison has be-

come the solution to this never ending problem. A population that is no longer a significant source of labor to be exploited, nor allowed to be junior partners to the imperialists, has no role to play in the modern imperialist economy. Hence, we have seen the growing lumpen class behind u\$ prison walls.

Prison serves three valuable solutions, or better yet, prison has been the solution which can be explained in three forms.

- Prison is used as a social contraceptive to reduce and control population growth.
- Prison is a way to ebb the radical political consciousness of the people. To separate those radical elements among oppressed nations from influencing others to seek change rather than reform.
- Prison has been used as a way to deal with rising unemployment and stem entry into the already declining job market. (This is true despite the fact that after years of incarceration, most Blacks and Latinos are released to their communities with little hopes for employment, regardless of any participation in vocational programs.)

As we can see, the prison system is much more than an economic force exploiting labor. This is not to deny economic benefit that is reaped by the corporate elites and the amerikan so-called "worker" stooges. Prison, as a part of the capitalist system, has a further implication beyond jobs; it is also a way to repress other nations of people: the Black, Latino and indigenous nations, as well as migrants from the Third World.

## Economics of NY Prisons

New York State Department of Correctional Services (DOCS), has approximately 60,000 inmates. In this system, "programs" are *mandatory*. Programs range from industry work, to

*Continued on next page...*

## HEY YOU! CONTRIBUTE TO ULK

Below are the upcoming issue topics with deadlines for submissions of articles and artwork. The earlier you submit, the more time we have to send you feedback.

**Issue 9: Migrants & non-citizens in u\$ prisons** - With prisons, tent cities and militarized zones spreading across the u\$ border with Mexico, migrants have been the fastest growing segment of the federal prison population over the last decade. With efforts to curb imprisonment in the largest prison state in the world, non-citizens may be the main reason that the total population keeps increasing. In this issue we will expose what's going on. We want to hear from prisoners who are not u\$-citizens and those in states like Arizona and Texas where this boom has been focused.  
**DEADLINE: July 1, 2009 or sooner if you want time to do rewrites**

**Issue 10: Hip Hop as Revolutionary Culture** - Culture is an important part of the revolutionary struggle at all stages. Coming from the oppressed nations within u\$ borders, Hip Hop has been the culture to define and unite the youth and lumpen for more than a generation. Going global and commercial, what role does Hip Hop have to play today? Is Hip Hop a vehicle for change? What does revolutionary culture look like? In addition to discussing these questions we welcome reviews and examples of culture for this issue.  
**DEADLINE: August 15, 2009**

**Issue 11: Organizing Strategy & Tactics** - As primarily prison-based organizations, MIM(Prisons), USW and many of our allies face particular conditions and target a specific population. Factors that affect our organizing include the fact that most of our comrades are behind bars, living among the oppressor in the belly of the beast, and living in the late stage of imperialism as crisis heightens. What are strategies vs. tactics? and which ones are going to push forward the fastest the struggle for liberation, justice and equality? How can we improve ULK as a tool for organizing?  
**DEADLINE: October 15, 2009**



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maintenance, to pseudo-rehabilitative or educational programs. Most people work to keep the facility up and running. The five pay grades are as follows:

Grade 1	16¢ per hour
Grade 2	25¢ per hour
Grade 3	32¢ per hour
Grade 4	38¢ per hour
Grade 5	42¢ per hour

Each facility is limited to a small number of people being paid grade five, so in all actuality Grade 4 is top pay. Grade 4 is reserved for foremen, who are a special class within themselves where the old rule of divide and conquer prevails. They have proven their loyalty to the system through years of hard work and often report other prisoners if something goes wrong - many of these positions are given to white prisoners.

There are "industries" in several facilities: Attica specializes in making lockers that you find in state office buildings; Great Meadow specializes in manufacturing various chemicals such as liquid soap to clean public transportation and soap that is given to inmates; Cox-sackie manufactures bed sheets, pillow cases, clothing worn by doctors and nurses, as well as money bags used by banks. All of these items are manufactured under the name "CorCraft." CorCraft made over \$40 million in 2005, while prisoners were paid pennies. CorCraft is a government industry so the \$40 million all goes back into the state General Fund, essentially offsetting some of the cost of running prisons or other public "services."

A "bonus" is given based on the individual productivity of every prison. For example, at grade 2 my base pay for a 40 hour work week is \$10.00 (all programs other than Industry work 25 hour work weeks). With a 50% bonus I would make \$15.00. Unlike all other prison programs, Industry workers punch a time clock and are forced to punch out whenever they leave their shops, even for meals which are in most cases mandatory.

An inmate in DOCS, comes in with a substantial debt to pay automatically: \$40.00 Gate Fees, \$150.00 Surcharge, \$50.00 DNA fee, \$20.00 Victims Fee. Additional debts may include restitution, child support, appeals fees, legal fees, processing fees, disciplinary sanctions (if incurred), etc. Oftentimes these amounts run into the thousands of dollars, and higher.

The cost of Commissary staple items, hygiene supplies, stamps, etc., have increased so dramatically that, in proportion, the payment DOCS pays in exchange for hard work becomes virtually worthless. For example, at \$0.13 an hour, after a three hour work day mowing lawns in 90-degree weather, an inmate still cannot afford even one \$0.42 stamp. The pay deteriorates even more if a percentage of the inmate's earnings must go toward fees, surcharges, fines, or other obligations.

## Where it leaves us

Previous challenges to DOCS Peonage system of pay have been unsuccessful because DOCS maintains that they are not "paying" but rather "compensating" inmates for their "program" participation. International Law, such as the Geneva Convention, is pretty clear that prisoners of war cannot be "forced to work" without compensation. However, it does not state what compensation is. The Japanese, for example, compensate their prisoners with food.

In fact, food is one of the greatest incentives for New York inmates to work inside of prison. The Mess Hall is one of prison's more unpredictable locations. While the Mess Hall is mandatory for all meals in some prisons, here in DOCS, attendance is elective. In order to avoid potential conflicts, when possible, many inmates choose to skip the Mess Hall meal and eat a quick sandwich with Commissary items. A positive account balance is required in order to purchase food from the Commissary.

Another great incentive for prisoners to do work is postage. Years of study have proven that inmates who work to maintain family ties strive to do well in general prison populations. Inmates who receive visits do even better, and those who do not maintain family ties are statistically more vulnerable to problems. The ability to correspond with family is usually essential to maintaining family ties. If a person cannot afford a stamp after three hours of hard labor, the incentive for that person to be positive for the remainder of the day greatly diminishes.

DOCS originally established a system to pay inmates, in order to prevent theft and encourage inmates to work. However, by not paying a meaningful wage, what DOCS actually creates is a mirror of the Peonage System. An inmate in prison for ten years, without the assistance of family, may leave prison, not only still in debt, but convinced that hard work is useless and that society is inherently unfair. This is one of the results of a system based on punishing individuals, rather than changing the system that created their bad behaviors. In contrast, a socialist prison system serves to turn those who commit crimes against the people into productive contributors to society.

If the DOCS simply raised the "compensation" from pennies to even just \$1.50/hour, this financial outlay surely would pay for itself. An inmate who has no hope of meeting his needs through legitimate earnings is likely to attempt to get what he wants, i.e. stamps, food, cigarettes, etc., by illegitimate means: thievery, violence, extortion, gambling, etc. Such activity increases the likelihood of claims for property, of altercations and of injuries, which lead to civil actions brought against the State.

It is time for the State to increase "compensation" for inmates - compensation that will assist inmates in maintaining hope and in maintaining family ties while inside of prison, and compensation that will convince inmates that there truly

## Direct Appropriation of Labor by Staff

by MIM(Prisons)  
May 2009

Although the economic exploitation of prisoners may be insignificant on the scale of the greater imperialist economy, it is very real on the scale of the individual prisoners and CO's involved in this abuse.

One prisoner in New York sent us a copy of a claim he made, which read in part:

*The complaint/grievance was the result of the claimant's having been enslaved by Mr. Snye, the horticulture instructor of Riverview. The claimant was forced to choose between completing a web-site for one of Mr. Snye's personal business ventures or punitive physical measures (being forced to shift enormous stones and to engage in other extremely demanding physical labor) and, if the claimant continued to refuse, expulsion from the program. Threats of bogus charges and accompanying disciplinary measures were constantly looming, along with vague, yet clear indications that there would be SHU time, if anyone found out. (1)*

Even in California where CO's made an average of \$62,230/yr in 2007, with some exceeding \$130,000/yr, these amerikans still aren't satisfied. (2) In a couple of recent cases CDCR employees have received additional pay when they were not supposed to. In one case 9 office technicians got raises of \$16,530 for 3 years prior to being caught, that they were not entitled to. In another, 2 CDCR doctors scammed an additional \$108,000. (3) And as a comrade reported in ULK 6, nurses within CDCR make up to \$582 a day for about 2 hours of work. (4) With all that money from the state, you'd think exploitation of prisoners would be the last thing on their mind. Yet, again so-called "vocational" programs are tools of exploitation where prisoners being taught auto body and paint work on the pigs' BMWs, Porsches and Corvettes for free. (5)

How can we expect prisoners to benefit from these programs in any way when they are run for the benefit of amerikan jail keepers? ♦

(1) *Slavery and Racism justify SHU time in NY.* <http://www.prisoncensorship.info/news/all/NY/158/>

(2) *Bureau of Labor Statistics*

(3) *Sacramento Bee, October 3, 2008.*

(4) *Prison workers paid overtime for 2 hours labor, ULK6.*

(5) *Jobs and rehab in California prisons.* <http://www.prisoncensorship.info/news/all/CA/327/>

is benefit in working hard to earn one's way toward productive life, once they get outside.

MIM(Prisons) supports the application of a global minimum wage under capitalism. Although it would have to be taken into consideration that prisoners are provided with most basic needs before being paid - as poor as they may be. ♦

## Texas prisoners forced to work for no pay

by a Texas prisoner  
February 2009

In Texas, every general population prisoner is required to work. They either work in the service of prison upkeep (i.e. maintenance, food service, field labor, support service inmate, etc.) or they work in one of the various factories owned by TCI (Texas Correctional Industries).

TCI is not part of the state. It is not part of the prison system. TCI is a private conglomerate which contracts with the state for prisoner labor. They operate metal fabrication plants, stainless steel works, meat packing plants, furniture factories, computer restoration plants, and many others throughout the 130+ prison units around the state. These industries do indeed provide products which the prison system needs for itself, but these products are also sold to other states for their prisons and jails at prices greatly marked up. The profits come from the fact that the prisoner labor is free. Texas prisoners do not get paid for working

There are a couple of pilot programs which started a couple of years ago, that do pay their workers a tiny bit. But these programs employ less than 1% of the 150,000+ prisoner population, and there are no plans to extend or expand these programs.

When general population prisoners in Texas attempt to involve the U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA, or other labor organizations concerning the exploitation of prisoners, we are told that prisoners in Texas "volunteer" to work, and are therefore not entitled to any support. They fail to mention that if a prisoner refuses to work, he is subject to disciplinary action, loses commissary and recreation privileges, has his good time credits taken away, gets locked up in administrative segregation - all of which has a negative effect on chances for parole. So the Catch 22 is: either work for free, or suffer the consequences.

Oh, they tell us that our good time credit is our pay. But good time only affects non-3G prisoners. It means nothing to the rest of us.

Furthermore, the extent of embezzlement within TCI is outrageous. The managers and department heads, even the foremen, are ripping off the tax payers with their thefts. I personally have witnessed many such incidences. For example: the maintenance department receives a new pump which it does not need at the time, so it is put into storage. Three weeks later I can't find that pump. A month after that, the supply truck delivers another pump which has the exact same serial number as the first.

Another example: just before Thanksgiving, the meat packing plant receives a truckload of frozen turkeys. The plant closes on Friday evening, and come Monday morning there are 120

frozen turkeys missing. The official ruling is "inmate theft." But no prisoners are at the plant on weekends.

And again: the stainless steel fabrication plant makes the round circles which are used for the seats we sit on at the chow hall tables. I saw a bill for 24 of those seats, the price? \$40,000 for 24 one foot circles of stainless steel.

The factories build all the bars, the bunks, the toilets and sinks, the steel doors, etc., using prison labor. Then TCI sells all that to the contractors who build the new units at an unbelievable mark-up. The contractor then builds the prison, and sells it back to the state for an even more exaggerated price. Meanwhile, briefcases of cash keep changing hands. How else do you think the state gets away with telling the tax payers that a new prison costs \$64 million when the outside of that prison is all pre-fab, and the inside is all prisoner built? Where is the oversight? Where is the accountability? The nature of bureaucracy allows these things to go on. Hell, they learned it from the feds, there's no one left to tell. Those officials who are supposed to look out for these things just take their share too.

The nature of capitalism ensures that the abuses of prisoner labor and the rape of tax payers in Texas will continue unchecked while the imperialistic standards thrive.

**MIM(Prisons) responds:** This is an excellent exposure of the prison labor conditions in the state of Texas and the benefit that private industry is getting for this free labor. The stories of corruption ring true across the whole federal government. See our article on Halliburton/KBR and Blackwater on page 3 to see parallels in the military industrial complex.

We only disagree with the author in their assessment that the tax payers in Texas are being raped. While it is true that the State is paying ridiculous prices for goods, this is no different than the state paying high salaries to guards: these things actually work to ensure good jobs for those working in the service to imperialism. And the vast majority of taxpayers in Amerika are benefiting from imperialism so we can't agree that they are being raped. The criminal justice system is helping to prop up the system of imperialism that benefits the taxpayers, and a little more money exchanging hands to enrich another imperialist institution (TCI) does not change this situation. ♦



## Info about work in WI: We need to keep fighting

by a Wisconsin prisoner  
February 2009

At this place there are 1050 prisoners. There are 2 dorms. Dorm B holds 55 prisoners and Dorm A holds 110. There are 2 cell halls, North and South, about 300 prisoners each. The hole holds 150 and stays packed to capacity. Intake holds about 100 and a medical unit about 40.

Approximately 300 have jobs at maintenance, yard crew, bath house, rec, school hallway janitor, rotunda janitor, dorm janitor, canteen, library, tutors, cell hall swampers, paint crew, wardens clerk, treatment center janitor, health service clerk, visiting room janitor, picture project photographers, the kitchen, and Badger State Industries, in which they are paid between 12 cents to 42 cents an hour plus 2 cents extra on weekends and holidays, and they work up to higher positions in wages.

Prisoners who go to school get 15 cents an hour - yea they pay them, if you can call it that, to go to school. And those who don't go to school or have a job get 5 cents an hour to sit in a cell, which adds up to about \$4 every 2 weeks, not nearly enough to get a stick of deodorant and soap, especially once they take out 50% for child support or other court obligations one might have. Yes, I still have to pay child support while in prison, 50% of any earnings.

The pay ranges are: 12 cents (\$9.60 every 2 weeks), 19 cents (\$15.20), 24 cents (\$19.20), 35 cents (\$28) and 42 cents (\$33.60). And Badger State Industries is separate from institutional jobs. 18 prisoners have those jobs and get from 79 cents to a dollar an hour. They make clothing for outside vendors and to sell to prisoners around the state. They also make the pillows and mattresses. People on the streets want this closed because BSI could provide them with jobs. Prisoners at BSI used to get minimum wage and up.

I see brothers I rotate with work around here to get basic necessities because they have no income or family support on the outs. And if I give a brother a bar of soap or something to eat it is viewed as an infraction and I will be written up for "unauthorized transfer of property" and the soap confiscated. We aren't allowed to do what is right here and help our fellow man. Divide and conquer. Just like they do with the jobs. Brothers will cut each other's throat for a higher paying job around here.

On the other hand, I hate the idea of working in a prison (or on a plantation) because it helps to fuel it. If we all protested by not working, the staff would have to cook, clean, etc. It happened during lockdowns before and staff hated it. But there are not enough brothers willing to sacrifice their only income for change. The wages have continuously gone down in the 10+ years I've been down and canteen prices have continuously gone up.

*Continued on next page...*

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I know of brothers who made this little money to send it to their kids, etc, or pay for phone bills. So some work for their families. But if the 100 kitchen workers all stopped working that would cause a lockdown and the warden would want to know why they won't work. In 2002 I was sent from here to Supermax for inciting a riot against staff and the old warden here asked prisoners what it is that they wanted and these suckas said more rec, shoes with air bubbles, porn and cigarettes. But when they took the cig-

arettes in 2000 they didn't riot. They only got more rec and the staff took 1 pair of shoes (we used to be allowed 2 pair) but that 1 pair could have air bubbles if they could afford them. I got back here in 2006, 4.5 years later and realized that brothers sold us out.

So I don't put my head on the chopblock any more because I know that most won't ride for a real cause for improvement such as more law library time (we only get 30-40 minutes a week, if lucky), better wages, better medical care. If

the workers did stop working they have another prisoner that will fill that spot before the day has ended. Capitalism taught them individualism so most are for self and quick to say "I came in by myself, I'm go do me."

**MIM(Prisons) responds:** We get a lot of letters like this one from comrades behind bars who are down for the struggle but frustrated with the lack of support from their fellow prisoners. It is true that capitalism has taught prisoners individualism well. And the reality of Amerika  
*Continued on page 12...*

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### ...Halliburton

One soldier reported,

*"[I]t is no exaggeration that I live a higher lifestyle here on a base in Iraq than [I would] in the United States. We have free laundry, apartment-like housing with unlimited, free A/C and electricity, hot water, various American fast-food outlets, lounges, free Internet, coffee shops, and a large PX... Baskin Robbins ice cream... once a week we get steak and lobster... karaoke night, all kinds of sports teams..."*

And he goes on to conclude,

*"Yet just a few hundred meters outside the fence, little kids are begging for anything: food, bottled water... The reality is very, very, very shocking. We are truly a pampered and spoiled culture." (Chatterjee, p. 11)*

This is not a unique realization for spoiled amerikans to make when sent to war in the Third World. But as this soldier also points out, many are there for the very reason that they get better material conditions in Iraq. So they aren't exactly converting to internationalism in droves, despite the dose of reality.

Far from peeling potatoes indeed, Chatterjee describes the typical dining area with ice cream, waffle bars, lobster tails and elaborate holiday dinners, all free to soldiers. Other facilities on big u\$ bases include a "mini mall" with stores like Burger King, KFC, McDonalds, Pizza Hut and Green Beans Coffee. He goes on to describe the "Scorpions Den": "one is greeted by almost pitch darkness, the background music from a one-hundred-seater open theater, the soft glow of laptops, and the flickering lights of video games... There are also free popcorn, boxes and boxes of bottled water... and a Dipping Dots ice cream machine." Then there is the "Sandbox" where "Dozens of soldiers sit slumped into fake leather armchairs, playing war games or programs like Guitar Hero and watching a Star Trek movie." (Chatterjee, p.6-7)

We see this as a new stage in the history of military recruitment by the oppressor nations. The brutal occupation forces of colonial powers in the Third World more than a century ago acted in their own direct interest. They were similar to the Conquistadors and settlers of North America centuries earlier, when amerikans stole the land they now occupy. The national unity they subsequently built on their stolen land and wealth, provided for over a hundred years of relatively successful forced military drafts. Today, however, amerikans like to pretend that their prosperity is not built on genocide and slavery. Combined

with their very comfortable lives, the idea of going to war often seems not just unappealing, but unnecessary. In other words, historical amnesia may help undercut the oppressor nation as some don't understand what it takes to maintain their positions of privilege.

In the beginning of the 21st century, Halliburton had to double people's salaries to get them to go to Iraq as civilian contractors, not soldiers. But even then, is it worth risking your life when life at home is so comfortable? Americans allegiance to u\$ imperialism is demonstrated in their politics, but when it comes to going to war, their actions will fall a bit short until they really start to see their material wealth start to diminish, which will happen once the Third World begins shutting of the paths of exploitation as it has in the past.

The military industrial complex will not be stopped by amerikan taxpayers. It is being stopped by resistance fighters who have ensured that only those who really need to be there are going to Iraq. Unfortunately, that includes many Third World nationals, some of whom are being held as prisoners while being forced to work for little to no pay under the most horrible conditions. More and more will learn the folly of trying to work for the imperialists. There is no future for the Third World nations within the imperialist system, only in resistance to it.

The debates about sending more troops or streamlining the u\$ military are debates about optimizing u\$ imperialism. The interesting part to us is that the struggle appears to be so acute as neither plan is proving viable.

In our criticisms of the prison economy and the labor aristocracy in general, we point to overpaid bureaucrats as a significant part of the problem. But MIM(Prisons) is not Libertarian. If anything, experience seems to show a greater degree of misappropriation of funds when services are contracted out. The cause of corruption is the profit motive, whether ownership is private or public. This is why nationalizing industries or banks does not stop exploitation, nor does it signal a move towards socialism. ♦

notes:

- (1) Chatterjee, Pratap. *Halliburton's Army. Nation Books, 2009.*
- (2) Scahill, Jeremy. *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army. Nation Books, 2008.*
- (3) Wright, Paul and Tara Herivel. *Prison Profiteers: Who makes money from mass incarceration. New Press, 2007.*

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### ...PA Creates Jobs

The prison business is booming in PA. Three new prisons are currently under construction and a fourth prison will break ground in 2010. That is on top of plans to add 860 beds to four operational institutions, plus an additional 1,600 beds at 10 more prisons before 2010. The Governor wants 8,000 more beds by 2013 because the prison industry has proven to be so very lucrative in PA. In January 2009, the prison population was at 49,215. It will surpass 50,000 before 2010 because the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole aren't releasing prisoners when they reach their minimums.

Why are fewer prisoners being released on parole? It's a conspiracy! Population control! Whose population does PA legislators want to control? The Pennsylvania Legislature has burned through \$5.8 million dollars of tax payer money so far on legal fees and other expenses stemming from an investigation into staff bonuses and the misappropriation of public resources. House Democrats spent \$2.6 million. Senate Republicans spent \$1.4 million, and House Republicans spent \$1.8 million. We have a \$1.75 trillion dollar federal deficit because of all our wasteful spending.

The disparity in prison sentences between white people convicted of crimes and Black people convicted of the same crimes would suggest that Africans in America are under attack. In the past their birthright was stolen via the slave trade. Today, this modern day slavery is accredited to unjust laws. Just as slavery was once legal in this country, you can buy stock in the prison industry on Wall Street. The price tag for all this construction is \$862 million dollars and the bidding for the jobs this prison will create is effective immediately.

The quickest way to create jobs is to build a prison. The state prison population increased by 10,783 in 2008. Two-thirds of them were non-violent offenders. At this rate the prison population will be at 60,000 within five years. Tougher sentencing laws are sending younger people to prison with longer sentences. Take a look at who is running the prisons and who is being put in the prisons and for how long. The slave traders plan for their children to work alongside of them and they also plan for prisoners to be confined with their children. With the substantial amount of time prisoners are forced to serve, the prisoners who will be released are those who were forced to max out. Their ages range from 40 to 60 years old when they get out. ♦

# State-by-State Labor Data

## Florida

Prisoners are employed by the DOC, and most do maintenance and clerical work. No Florida DOC inmates are paid for work, with the exception of inmates assigned to work in the inmate canteens (making \$65 a month) or the few locations in the state where they have PRIDE factories, which are manufacturing-type businesses run by DOC to make goods for correctional use (clothing, cleaning supplies, etc). Even these inmates are paid a few cents an hour.

## Colorado

Denver Women's Correctional Facility has a capacity of 900. Everyone is assigned for work unless they have medical excuses. Those not assigned to a job make 25 cents a day, 7 days a week. Those assigned to standard prison work make 60 cents a day, 5 days a week. Prison Industries jobs are a sewing factory, print shop, and dog training program. These jobs may pay up to \$40 per month. All salaries are automatically docked 20% if restitution, court costs, or child support is owed.

## Pennsylvania

SCI Fayette has about 1800 to 2100 prisoners, of those 1200 to 1400 work for the DOC doing various work assignments. Jobs are related to running of the facility, such as maintenance, commissary, grounds crews, schooling, laundry, barber shop, library and janitors. Some also work for "Correctional Industries." The pay scale is as follows in \$/hour:

	Step A	Step B	Step C	Step D
Class 1	0.19	0.20	0.21	0.23
Class 2	0.24	0.25	0.27	0.29
Class 3	0.33	0.35	0.38	0.42

People usually work from 120 to 160 hours per month, so top pay would be \$50.40 to \$67.20. Correctional Industries makes 51 cents or about \$81.60 a month. Like similar programs that exist in all 50 states, Pennsylvania Correctional Industries produces things such as furniture, clothing and personal care products primarily for purchase by state agencies.

## Washington

Washington State Penitentiary holds about 2240 people. Of those around 250 work for correctional industries. Most of those sew clothes for inmates, the rest do welding of furniture for cells and make license plates. They pay up to \$1.10/hr. "Inmate duties" pay from \$35 to \$55 a month, and include cooking, cleaning, serving food and washing clothes.

## Oregon

Industry jobs pay between \$100 to \$175 a month and all the rest pay between \$25 to \$75 a

month. The industry jobs make couches, chairs, tables and desks for the outside world. Other jobs make jewelry, saddles, clothes and toys. The lifers club has a lot of these items in the visiting room so when our people come to see us they can purchase them.

The Prison Blues clothes are made by prisoners at EOCI in Pendleton and SRCI. They have construction programs where we build trailers and sheds for people to live in. Almost all the money made goes to the staff's checks, only 10% gets put toward the inmate trust fund.

## Connecticut

In MacDougall-Walker CI only about 25% of prisoners have jobs here. Some pay rates here are:

job	\$/2 weeks
dishwasher	\$10.50
barbers, laundry, cooks	\$17.50
school	\$7.50
small engine repair	\$25
making uniforms/clothes	\$25

## New York

New York has programming that varies from educational/rehabilitative programs, to maintenance work to CorCraft industries. see *New York Prisoners report on Labor and Economics* on page 8.

## California

For wages between 8¢ and 34¢ an hour prisoners do normal maintenance work as well as produce clothing, food, bedding, cleaning products, tables, chairs, modular offices, license plates and the tags that go on them for the state.

see *Remove the profit motive* on p. 4 and *Prison labor and economics in California: who really profits?* on p. 1.

## Wisconsin

Wisconsin pays for programming including educational programs, prison maintenance and Badger State Industry jobs. The pay ranges for non-industry work are: 12 cents (\$9.60 every 2 weeks) to 42 cents (\$33.60).

see *Info About Work in WI* on p.10

## Utah

Utah pays \$7 a month and has thrown out a lot of work positions that used to be available. The prison does manufacture houses in their carpentry program, and UCI commissary has convicts making sweats and shorts in Gunnison, then selling these products back to the U.\$ and community.

## Federal

In Coleman II, 90% of prisoners work, most of them do facility maintenance for \$12 a month to work 8 hour, 5 day workweeks. A minority get to work for UNICOR.

The private industries run by UNICOR employ 21,836 prisoners across the country, with pay ranging from 23 cents to \$1.15 per hour. In 2007 UNICOR showed profits of over \$45 Million, with most of their products being military supplies for the Department of Defense.

## Texas

In Texas, every general population prisoner is required to work. They either work in the service of prison upkeep (i.e. maintenance, food service, field labor, support service inmate, etc.) or they work in one of the various factories owned by TCI (Texas Correctional Industries). There is no pay for work.

see *Work, money and good time in Texas* on p. 2

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## ...Wisconsin

is that citizens in this country have a material interest in preserving the system that is benefiting them. While prisoners are in a unique position because the very system that used to benefit them is now locking them up, it will not be an overnight transformation for people to see the connections with the capitalist system and move beyond individualist thinking. We know that most prisoners are not down for the anti-imperialist struggle. But we also know that their conditions leave many prisoners with open minds hungry for education. And so it is our job, both on the streets and behind bars, to provide educational material and food for thought to as many prisoners as we can reach. This is the purpose of *Under Lock and Key*. And we rely on conscious brothers and sisters behind bars to circulate it and spread the word.

In addition to many letters like this one, we also get many letters from prisoners who talk about how they pursued an individualist and selfish mentality for many years before having their eyes opened by something they read or by someone on the yard talking to them. ♦

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## ...Federal

tries, manufactures uniforms, kevlar helmets, furniture, armored cars, and other materials for the U.S. military. Prisoners are paid a maximum of \$125 a month but can make hundreds in overtime. To the average prisoner such wages are too tempting to pass up. They don't realize they are fuel for the capitalist military industrial complex which saves hundreds of millions of dollars making military material and products in prisons.

Prisons may not reap profits but they do save costs with prison labor which, considering the amount saved, is tantamount to profits. It is certainly a basic tenet of the criminal injustice system and helps the government run its oppression camps by not having to tax the average citizen to run these torture chambers. Nothing grabs the attention of Americans more than taxes, more prison labor means more prisons without more taxes. ♦