

PRISON INDUSTRY AS A PROFITABLE BUSINESS IN THE USA

Imprisonment has become the response to many of the social problems that burden people who fall prey to variety of life circumstances like poverty, starvation and so on. These problems often are masked by being conveniently classified together under the category “crime” and by the automatic attribution of criminal behavior to people of different social classes, ethnic and age groups, etc.

Meanwhile homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are just a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings connected with them are sent to jails, but the point is that prisons do not make problems vanish, they devastate human beings and the practice of disappearing vast numbers of people from poor, immigrant, and racially marginalized communities has literally become big business.

It is a little strange that there are 2.3 million prisoners in the US, while the US makes up less than 5 % of the world population, yet houses close to 20 % of the global prison population. The prison industry is hugely profitable, so private corporations keep on greedily building one prison after another. They collect government money for the administrative costs while exploiting prisoners for unpaid labor. It turns providing prisoners with food, medical services and other basic necessities that have greatly benefited the service industry. Securing prisons has become its own economy. This is how the so-called prison-industrial complex has become a booming business in the USA.

The *prison industrial complex* (PIC) is a term which is used to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to social, political and economic problems. PIC is not feasible without the “industrial” part. Thousands of US businesses participate in this exploitation system, many publicly traded and household names. These corporations take advantage of crime and punishment with the government’s help and put profit over everything.

Incarcerated people also work, making everything from license plates and mattresses to body armor vests. They also serve as firefighters in California. In New York, during the pandemic they made hand sanitizer, a hygiene product they

were not allowed to use. In some places, they are employed by major corporations such as Minnesota-based 3M. These American citizens get paid 8 to 15 cents an hour for this labor. In the State of Texas where they have prisoners picking up cotton, they get paid nothing, which basically shows us the picture of ongoing slavery of the 21st century.

As the result Prison construction and the attendant drive to fill these new structures with human bodies have been driven by ideologies of racism and the profit pursuit. Before Black Lives Matter protests and the appearance of pandemic, businesses weren't interested in taking a permanent stand fearing economic risks. Now is not the time for weighing economic risk or profits. It's time for businesses of the United States to divest from the prison system and play their part in overhaul of the justice system.