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| <p><b>NEWS ANALYSIS</b></p> <p><b>Unpaid Labor in Texas Prisons Is Modern-Day Slavery</b></p> <p>By <a href="#">Jason Renard Walker, Truthout</a></p> <p><b>PUBLISHED</b> September 6, 2016</p> | <p>The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) has the biggest prison population in the United States (<a href="#">over 140,000 prisoners</a>) and the most prisons of any state (over 100). It is also known for being one of the most self-sufficient and profitable prison systems in the nation, thanks to prison labor.</p> <p>Beef, pork, chicken and vegetables are raised, processed and harvested by prisoners. Soap and clothing items are manufactured through prison labor as well. Prisoners in Texas <a href="#">grow 24 different crops</a> and <a href="#">tend to over 10,000 head of cattle</a>. They also act as painters, electricians, maintenance workers, cooks, janitors and dog trainers.</p> <p>It is wrong that this labor, which is managed by Texas Correctional Industries (TCI), is being forced upon prisoners, who are required to execute it for free. If they refuse, they receive discriminatory punishment and thus longer stays in prison.</p> <p>That's right: prisoners in Texas are working for free. Total sales for TCI in the fiscal year 2014 alone were <a href="#">valued at \$88.9 million</a>, and not one dime of it was used to pay those who produced this handsome reward. Whenever TCI is scrutinized by the public for this practice, they note that prisoners receive other rewards for their labor, such as time credits called "Good Time" or "Work Time."</p> <p>On paper, these credits are supposed to cut down the prisoner's sentence and allow them to be released on mandatory supervision — earlier than they would if these credits didn't exist. But in reality, mandatory supervision is discretionary. This means that the parole board doesn't have to honor these credits. It can keep denying a prisoner's release until they have served their entire sentence.</p> <p>TDCJ claims that the prisoners' free labor pays for their room and board, while the actual work gives them job skills to successfully seek and maintain employment upon their release. Georgia, Arkansas</p> |
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| <p>and Alabama are other states that utilize this money-making scheme. The other 46 states — one way or another — pay prisoners for their labor with funds that can be used to purchase items off the prison commissary.</p> <p>Some prisoners work — for free — up to 12 hours a day. This is flat-out, modern-day slave labor and it will continue as long as society accepts the notion that prisoners deserve less.</p> <p>Meanwhile, people incarcerated in Texas still need money to maintain anything approaching an adequate standard of living. Prisoners who have no money in their accounts are only allowed to send out five one-ounce letters to family and friends per month. Not to mention that a trip to the nurse for illnesses costs \$100 — which all gets deducted when funds exist.</p> <p>Despite Texas having the biggest prison system in the US, it provides the fewest privileges to prisoners out of the five biggest systems. (Unlike some prisons, it does not allow the use of cable TV and tape players in solitary confinement.) The Texas system is also among the worst when it comes to nutritious meals; it is always understaffed, and it uses inadequately trained prison and medical personnel. So, where is all the money going?</p> <p>Prisoners are human. Prisoners deserve the same rights as people on the outside. We are more than the dregs of society and dead weight. In fact, we are actually keeping the prison system functioning with no pay.</p> <p>Only in America will you find a prison system that treats their prisoners like they aren't worth a dime. What can we do to change this? Are prisoners in Texas really benefiting from this? Am I the only one that believes Texas should start paying all prisoners for their labor?</p> <p>This is a topic we all need to be discussing: Is Texas Correctional Industries slave labor or transitional rehab? However you look at it, all work and no play is inhumane under any circumstances. And prisoners must be paid for their labor — not just in 46 states, but all 50 of them.</p> |  |
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