

The PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX (the PIC) is the interaction of all the interests who help expand the prison system, some intentionally, some coincidentally, but all for reasons other than our safety and justice. Most of them influence prison growth for reasons of their own profit: some profit in terms of

# THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

cash—\$, others in terms of political power, control of resources & property, or good TV ratings. Some profit from the business of imprisonment, others from having people of their way, "criminalized" and locked up. It's a system where profit is more

important than people; where people are split along the lines of race, gender & culture so their resources, labor, wealth & power can be exploited & monopolized, and prisons make invisible the damage done along the way. Is it a conspiracy? It doesn't have to be—each group's own interests are set up to grow the system...

**INFLUENCES ON PRISON GROWTH:**  
(Key to chart)

**PRIMARY INFLUENCES:** The police & prison system itself; those who profit directly from building new prisons & getting more jobs by locking up more people.

**SECONDARY INFLUENCES:** One step removed from prisons, supplying them with prisoners, services & goods. They profit indirectly by locking up more people.

**IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES:** Influence how we think about different groups of people, crime, poverty & prisons; they use "crime" as a tool to divide, to blame, & to justify inequality.

**ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES:** Create the environment of inequality & violence that push people toward prison; they exploit, destroy and rob communities of progress and development.

**PROBLEMS CAUSED BY INEQUALITY:** the results of powerlessness, social control & the environmental influences on communities; 'prisons on the outside', problems that go untreated or get criminalized & fed into prisons.

**EXCLUSION FROM POLITICS, DISENFRANCHISEMENT**

**LIMITED ACCESS TO RESOURCES**

**POLLUTION & ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS**

**MALNUTRITION**

**BIG INDUSTRY & CORPORATIONS**

...want more control over resources & political power, and with \$\$ (lobbying & pay-offs) they influence government policy to get it. They compete by paying less for workers, and use unemployment & insecurity to bring down our wages. Then they demand our tax--\$\$ for corporate welfare, but refuse to give to social welfare. Instead, they invest in building new prisons, making the problems they cause "disappear" by blaming & criminalizing the poor instead of blaming the policies that make them poor.

**POLITICIANS (tough on crime!)**

...play a large part in expanding the prison system, using the "fear of crime" to win votes. But the "fear of crime" is shorthand for racism: the fear of Black & Brown people & poor people having power; a "fear" that became a political tool during the Civil Rights era. Today, being "tough on crime" helps maintain those same structures of segregation and inequality, helping to fulfill the agendas of big business, real estate developers, police & prison guards. While politicians get big \$\$ to flex their muscles & invent new ways to lock more people up, we are left out of the political process, scared of our neighbors & afraid for our jobs.

**PRISON GUARD UNIONS**

...depend on the number of members in their unions: more members = more power. They push for harsher laws because that means more prisoners; more prisoners mean more prisons, more jobs, and their unions GROW. Guards are politically powerful & push for laws that make new things a 'crime', that keep more people locked up for longer & make life harder on prisoners. They push to make themselves less accountable for brutalizing prisoners, attack prisoners' rights and access to their families, libraries & rehab programs, thinking that will also keep prisoners locked up longer. They support victims' rights groups and use them as a front to get public sympathy & consent.

**PRIVATE PRISONS ("for-profits")**

...work like hotels: the more 'beds' they fill, the more \$\$ they make. They are built by corporations when the state is locking up so many people that it runs out of beds, helping the system to grow even more. To profit, these corporations need prisons to keep growing, & continually lobby for new laws & tough-on-crime politicians who'll lock up more people for longer. Financed by our tax \$\$, they pocket as much as they can by cutting services, programs, & using prisoners' labor on the facilities. They turn prisoners into commodities & products, and like public prisons, have high levels of abuse, violence & neglect, making peoples' lives more dangerous than 'safe'.

**PRISONS & JAILS**

...profit from warehousing people. They & discriminate against, while disappearing the neglect and abuses they suffer. Prisons are warehouses for: racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, addiction, homelessness, public & mental health crises, environmental destruction, government & corporate corruption, and other things that make people powerless. A prison's funding is based on the number of prisoners it holds & the "security level" it provides, so "profit" comes by getting more prisoners, building more cells & units, and re-classifying prisoners as "more dangerous." Instead of eliminating injustice, this makes more room for injustice to be waged on the outside. Prisons are violence & confront problems with violence. They teach us that violence is how we solve our conflicts, send violence back into our communities, cripple our families and drain our political power...

**PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS, DAs**

...are all elected, based on how many "convictions" they get (putting people in prison or giving the death penalty, etc.). They exploit the tragedies of crime—victims to advance their records, while driving the public's fear of crime through the media. They get extra convictions by pushing naive, "small time" defendants into plea-bargains, and through the District Attorneys' Association, constantly push for more power & new ways to convict people: harsher, "big headline" sentences, "mandatory minimum" laws like "3 Strikes," or new crimes to give the death penalty. They push for longer prison time & discourage effective alternatives to advance their own careers.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT**

...profit from growing, and in order to grow, they need us to think that they (and only they) can guarantee our "safety." In the face of inequality & poverty, their role is to maintain social control and the appearance of "order," often at the cost of the public's real safety. They hold great influence over politicians, and have big public relations departments to gain influence over us. They create propaganda like the TV show "COPS" & release their own news stories to the media, sensationalizing crime & justifying their desire for more power, bigger budgets & technology.

**PRISON CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES**

...make between \$10 million & \$500 million to build a prison; the more prisons they build, the more money they make. They contribute money through PACs for "tougher" laws that increase the demand for new prisons, and pay \$\$ to the politicians who will promise to build them.

**THINK TANKS**

...are "idea people" for the system. Their job is to invent new ideas and, like speech writers for politicians, "spin" them into policies the public will like, even if they'll actually be harmful. They make undemocratic policy look like democracy, racism look like justice, destroying the environment look like progress, weapons & abuses of our Rights look like our "protection." "Zero Tolerance," "Welfare Reform," "Urban Revitalization" & others were invented by think tanks like the Manhattan Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Brookings Institute, American Legislative Exchange Council & the Reason Public Policy Institute. Owned by weapons builders, prison builders, privatizers & real estate developers, they lead the way in mass imprisonment, the War on Drugs & the War on Terrorism; militarizing borders & criminalizing immigrants; gentrifying cities & driving out the poor; destroying welfare & privatizing everything—health care to prisons & schools. They push for corporate welfare, de-regulation & anything to help big business monopolize our resources, labor & political system.

**POOR EDUCATION, DROP OUTS**

**UNEMPLOYMENT, EXPLOITATION & OVER-WORK**

**DEBT, DEBT & MORE DEBT**

**DAY TO DAY INSECURITY**

**VIOLENCE**

**VICTIMS' RIGHTS GROUPS**

...came out in the last 15 years. They say, "why do 'criminals' have all the rights? What about the rights of victims?" They often include people who've suffered tragedy, lost loved ones & property, and are frustrated by the unaccountability of the justice system. But they are usually organized & paid for by law enforcement groups & 'tough-on-crime' pushers, who organize their pain into a voice for vengeance & political gain. Both prison guards & police exploit their tragedies to extend their influence over politicians, pushing harsher sentences, dehumanization, & distraction from the true problems on the outside—the injustices of the larger system.

**THE WAR ON DRUGS**

...offers big \$\$ and resources to law enforcement if they police & imprison for drugs. Similar to new policies for policing immigrants & youth, it's an example of "follow the money policing," where the profits offered by both federal grant \$\$ and the property they can seize during drug busts become resources & incentives to profile, harass, brutalize & imprison. Largely designed by Think Tanks, it has enabled unprecedented control over poor communities & communities of color through a near-permanent police presence, surveillance & violence against countless youth, homeless, jobless, and mothers who've been pushed off of Welfare.

**RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS**

...are in charge of bringing jobs & industry to rural areas. Farms have closed, factories & plants have left the country, and many are left behind, unemployed & desperate. While the state used to offer such communities public projects, building roads, parks or dams, it now offers prisons for "economic development." Communities who try to profit from a prison help the PIC to grow, but are really victims of the PIC, since prisons inevitably under-develop communities rather than develop, weakening local economies & increasing their dependence on the state & the imprisonment of others...

**CORPORATE WELFARE**

...is money given to big corporations, as tax breaks, subsidies or "hand-outs." Corporations are the biggest recipient of "government hand-outs," and each dollar they get is a dollar that won't get spent on youth, on the elderly, on housing, job training, health care, medicine, poverty & homeless prevention, nutrition or drug treatment, environmental protection and all the things that keep people truly safe, healthy and out of prison. What used to be invested in communities is now invested in police & prisons. Corporate welfare instead of social welfare de-stabilizes communities & pushes people toward prison.

**BIG AGRI-BUSINESS**

...is 'corporate' farming. It has taken over most of the farming and agriculture in the U.S. & abroad, putting small farmers out of business & replacing workers with high powered machinery. The resulting loss of jobs and resources has forced many poor, rural towns into wanting a prison, to bring jobs in guarding the similarly poor from urban areas.

**HOUSING CRISIS**

**HOMELESSNESS**

**POLICE BRUTALITY**

**RACIAL PROFILING**

**SURVEILLANCE**

**URBAN DEVELOPERS (gentrification)**

...make their money by "developing" cities for commercial business & new wealthy residents, and that means driving out & locking up "the poor." Whether it's public housing, parks & community gardens, or homeless, unemployed & retired residents, whether it's locally owned stores or anything in the way of big money making, they buy it up, arrest it, destroy or imprison it. They work with banks & the city, who also profit from more wealthy residents, tourists & shoppers coming in. Together, they undermine community relations & economies, pull out resources & drive down property values ("red-lining"), and provoke violence through "aggressive policing": harassment, brutality & profiling.

**FEAR & HATRED OF IMMIGRANTS: XENOPHOBIA**

**DISCONTENT & RESISTANCE**

**ADDICTION**

**NO HEALTH CARE**

**MEDICINE COSTS TOO MUCH!**

**NO MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT**

→ **SEGREGATION, EXCLUSION FROM POLITICS, RESOURCES & POWER;**  
→ **DAILY VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE OF COLOR, WOMEN, POOR COMMUNITIES, IMMIGRANT & QUEER COMMUNITIES, MARGINALIZED GROUPS** ←

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