

# Prison rehabilitative industries and diversified enterprises essay



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Thousands of hard working Americans have lost their jobs to narcotic dealers, armed robbers, pedophiles, and rapists because minimum wage does not apply to inmates because inmate labor is very inexpensive.

It is very difficult for a private company to compete against a prison that produces the same goods, especially if the prison pays an hourly wage to inmates of 23 cents (Slaughter par 10). The wage gap creates an unfair advantage for the private sector to directly compete. Also, opponents of prison labor argue that it is inhumane to make convicts to work at very low wages. Some even believe it violates the Thirteenth Amendment since some convict labor is involuntary work. On the other hand, supporters of prison labor believe it benefits convicts, because they gain marketable skills to apply once they are released. Also, prisoners are believed to be an untapped resource that should be utilized because convict labor can slow the flow of outsourcing overseas.

Furthermore, convicts are less likely to be repeat offenders if employed during their incarceration. Opponents of prison labor believe most prison jobs are not marketable skills that can be applied once released. They fear inmates learn skills such as sewing blue jeans and once released they will not find a job because sewing blue jeans is mostly done overseas (Slaughter par 19). A convict leaving prison with high hopes not finding a job once released may lead to him being a repeat offender and that would be counter productive to what correctional facilities are for. Although many correctional facilities have private influence such as Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises (PRIDE), a private nonprofit corporation that manages

correctional industries inside Florida's state prison system, that will develop prisoner's skills (Harrell par 1).

Unlike the traditional idea of prison labor, when fully-trained PRIDE inmate workers leave prison, they carry with them credentials and job skills that meet the requirements of today's businesses. Some argue since they are ex-convicts it will still be a hard uphill battle to find a job. Although attaining useable job skills will certainly give them a helping hand finding a job once released. Ex-convicts need all the help they can get. As the great free society that we are, we should put forth all we can for the less fortunate individuals who made mistakes in the past. PRIDE is relatively successful, but some state programs are even better such as a two-semester program that has been offered for the past 10 years through the Central Carolina Community College.

Inmates apply what they learn from the electronic repair program and refurbish old computers from North Carolina state surplus. They then sell them to local schools for \$20. Some say this competes with private business but if the inmates did not do this for the school, the school would not be able to afford much more than the \$20 that a private business would require. (Harry par 1-3) If the inmates have access to higher education they will be more marketable once released. Although, it is hard enough for our government to help law abiding students attain a degree. At least a two-semester program will hopefully motivate some to reach for higher goals once released.

Some programs only teach marketable trades such as lens making, computer data input, printing, or computer repair that will help them seek employment once released. Supporters of convict labor believe convicts are an untapped resource that can help stop the flow of jobs going overseas. For example when GEONEX, a computer mapping company based in Florida, was competing for a major project for an international telephone company recently, executives considered hiring workers in Pakistan or India to input computer data. Instead, GEONEX went to Liberty Correctional Institution near Tallahassee, keeping the jobs in America.

It is a win win situation if corporations look at 1. 5 million prisoners as potential national assets rather than liabilities, we can help convicts by training them with marketable skills that will give them an advantage in the evolving job market they did not have before incarceration, and corporations can utilize cost effective labor. Our country needs more exports and less imports and convict labor can help. (Zalusky par 5) Also, because of this the money stays in the country and the convicts will be able to help victims, their own family, and pay off debt. It would be great to see other countries for once hire Americans instead of going to China or some other third world country. In addition to training and a regular paycheck, they also can expect to make at least \$25, 000 or more a year doing a similar job once released.

(Richey par 5) Supporters of prisoner labor's most important and effective argument is those involved in industry programs are less likely to become repeat offenders, which of course is the most important goal of all prison systems. Florida, which has a strong post-release program in place, found that only 17 percent of inmates involved for at least six months in its <https://assignbuster.com/prison-rehabilitative-industries-and-diversified-enterprises-essay/>

correctional industries program such as PRIDE, were recommitted within two years from the time the study began in 1996. The national average recommitment rate is approximately 40 percent, according to PRIDE's 1998 Annual Report. (Cochran par 18) If this is true, correction facilities could increase labor in prisons and decrease crime and the rising cost of housing convicts. Although opponents of prison labor believe it is inhumane to require convicts to work at such low wages, federal minimum wage law does not apply to government employed prisoners.

Some government employed prisoners are only paid 23 cents an hour, and up to 50% of that is allowed to be deducted to pay for taxes, room and board, family support, and victim restitution. Some argue that this low of wage should not be considered a wage at all. Also according to AFL-CIO in 21 states one's sentence could possibly be lengthened if they do not work for the low wages they set. Slaughter par 9-10) Many argue this is essentially forced labor with no significant pay comparable to slave labor, even though slave labor has been nationally outlawed post civil war. Then again since they did break the law some support labor even with out pay at all. Some argue prisoners take jobs from law abiding civilians.

However, under the 1979 Prison Industries Enhancement law, private companies who want to operate in jail must pay the prevailing wage but this does not apply to governments local or national. Private companies must consult with union leaders in the area, local industry must not be effected and have no unemployment in that industry locally. Unfortunately this law has been ignored in many cases. For example, a glove maker in Wisconsin cut wages and outside jobs by 40 percent after hiring inmates at the Green <https://assignbuster.com/prison-rehabilitative-industries-and-diversified-enterprises-essay/>

Bay Correctional Institution. (Slaughter par 21) On the other hand, according to the American Bar Association, only about .00056 percent of the national civilian work force consists of inmate labor.

Since the labor force is so small, it is not a significant hazard to the national work force, unlike outsourcing, but it is a threat to small local firms. Also, inmate labor as of now has little impact to the civilian work force, particularly because most of them still do not compete with local industries. (Cochran par 27) Although prison labor has a small impact on the national work force, if convict labor spreads it could cause more law abiding civilian jobs. Overall prison labor could be positive for both convict and private business if reform is made. Correctional facility employment programs are not designed to train prisoners for gainful post-confinement careers. The manufacturing of goods that would otherwise be produced offshore is inappropriate training.

Furthermore, training in industries such as textiles and apparel, which already compete with low-cost imports, is of small value. Modifications within the system are needed to help the prisoners while not harming the private sector. Although this goal is lofty and complex it is still very much obtainable by enhancing training programs within prisons, as long as prison labor programs are not destroying American jobs. If production of goods must continue as an element of prison industries, such production should be only of those products for which there is no commercial market. Prison labor reform is needed to fulfill three valuable outcomes: prisoners would receive training; important goods, which are not commercially viable, would be produced; and law-abiding Americans would no longer face unfair and predatory competition from prison labor initiatives.

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If reforms are not enacted, some prisoners will continue to learn unmarketable skills which may lead to unemployment and possible re-incarceration. Also if reform is not made soon more law abiding citizens will continue to lose jobs to our national liabilities because companies seek the lowest possible labor expense and lowest cost goods even if it is manufactured in a prison.