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The Rich and Powerful

(are phoenixes rising from the graves of the oppressed.)

by Steven McCain

Everywhere one looks it is apparent that the wealth of the wealthy springs from the poverty of the poor. The criminal justice systems and the prison industrial complex are no exceptions to this observation. In fact, these two industries exemplify the principle that resonates from these words, words similar to those first spoken (written, actually) in French, by Pyotr (Péter) Kropotkin, in La Conquete du Pain (1892).

I challenge the ethics, integrity, and even the intelligence of anyone who would dare say — and many politicians (and others who have a profit interest) do say — that prison makes society safer, for there exists not one article of evidence supporting such a claim; there never has been. This is a myth (no, it is a downright lie) that has been carefully injected into the psyche of the American public for so long that the majority accept it automatically, without questioning it, without considering it, and without investigating it. It is a matter of curiosity, however, that those promoting this lie are the very ones profiting from it. And the same people that promote the lie that prisons are a good and necessary part of society

- In white America, prisons are good places where bad men (and sometimes women) pay for their crimes. —
- In black America, they are too often used as warehouses where fungible human commodities (chattel slaves) are maintained. —

also promotes another: that the whole of the criminal justice system is concerned with public safety, and is, therefore, itself a good and necessary part of society. The criminal justice system, by and large, is good only for the criminal justice system, and the only safety that either of these two industries (criminal justice and the prison industrial complex) are concerned with is the safety and security of the livelihoods of those persons employed by (or who are otherwise financially benefitting from) them. For example, consider:

How many people are employed by prisons, jails, and other forms of incarceration (as guards, administrators, etc.) in the United States?

Yet there exists no evidence that suggests that prisons actually make society safer. In fact, a significant body of evidence exists that suggests the complete opposite.

Many people profit from these industries, but what no criminal justice or prison concern is telling the people about are the innumerable souls (many of whom are innocents) whose lives are materially damaged, or utterly destroyed, that such profits might exist, that the industries and their employees might prosper, even though it cannot be definitively demonstrated that these industries have anything but a negative impact on society.

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## Why Can We Not Change It?

The restraining of Abolitionist efforts can be distilled down to a single line that was once advanced by Upton Sinclair:

It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on him not understanding it.

In essence, there are so many people in America who depend upon this (intentionally evil) system for their livelihoods, that almost no one is amenable to changing it. The potential for adverse economic impact (close to home) associated with doing so is too great. So instead of reimagining what we are doing, and imagining what we might do, we continue to feed the monster we have created. This is viewed by most to be the better (at least, it is viewed to be the least immediately painful) choice. But this is a short-sighted solution. At some point, the monster will awaken and devour us all.

Those who would venture to address these problems face yet another dilemma, which Joseph Campbell addressed in his 1949 book, The Hero With a Thousand Faces:

The cave we fear to enter holds the treasure we seek.

This is to say, that radical change, including prison abolition, lies in legislation that we fear (because of economic impact) to seriously, and on a large scale, undertake.

Words alone are largely phantoms, so let us add some substance to them. Consider the material reality of the following:

There are approximately 1,500,000 arrests made each year in the United States for possession of controlled substances.

How many police are employed to enforce these laws and conduct these arrests?

How many lawyers are paid to defend (Can what they provide actually be called defense?) these persons?

How many prosecutors are employed to prosecute them?

How many judges are paid to hear their cases?

How many investigators, lab technicians, and others are employed because of this?

And the list goes on and on and on.

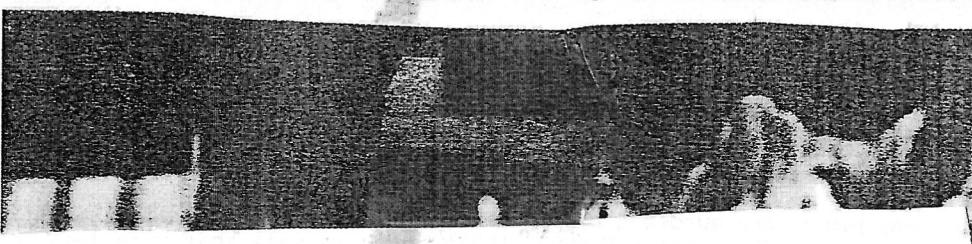
The numbers are near unimaginable. And drug laws do far more harm than good. They are leading America ever closer to despotism.

How many people are murdered by police in, for example, drug raids, when our experience with "Prohibition" (1920-1933) taught us well that vice laws make society less, not more, safe. The effect of such laws is, typically, the polar opposite of the legislators' stated intent (and the legislators knew the outcome beforehand). Vice laws do not stymie, but rather stimulate criminal activity and violence (including murder). The enactment of "Prohibition" in 1920 spawned and supported the rise of the American Gangsters, the names which most everyone knows: Al Capone, Babyface Nelson, and others too numerous to mention here. Our modern-day version of "Prohibition" has given rise to the drug cartels, such as the Sinaloa Cartel, once controlled by Joaquin Guzman Loera ("El Chapo"), who now resides as a hostage of our federal government in a Supermax facility in Colorado.

Drug laws spawn violence (including murder) on three fronts: 1) on the streets (as rivals intersect), 2) by the police (as people are subjected to State sanctioned violence), and 3) by prison staff (where more state sanctioned violence, and even torture, occurs).

Too few government actors are ever held accountable, though those government actors are zealous to prosecute and incarcerate those on the streets that commit the same crimes. The government portrays street violence to be bad, but I would postulate that government created (i.e., sanctioned) violence more than dwarfs that which is a natural streets phenomenon. And with regards to the criminal justice and prison industries, cause of death is of little consequence. Whether dead because of a bullet, a beating, being choked out, or being indifferently neglected by (among others) medical staff, DEAD is DEAD!

How much immunity from prosecution or other forms of accountability is too much for government actors (police, prosecutors, judges, etc.)? How much immunity from prosecution do we, as the proletariat have? How much accountability are we protected from? How many persons can we abuse or murder with impunity? The various "immunity" doctrines exist for but one purpose, to provide the government with the means to protect its own. These doctrines are flashing neon signs that declare, "All persons are created equal, but government actors and the elite of the country are created MORE EQUAL. Those things which are prohibited the general populous the government must also be reser...



strained in. The nation cannot stand under the operation of such double standards. We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, must not allow two standards (one for us and another for them) to exist. Borrowing the words of the 'Highlander,' "There can be only one."

There are a hundredfold questions that must needs be asked, but to ask them all here would be exhausting, for you the reader and for the writer alike, but they all need to be asked nonetheless, and they all require answers. It is up to each and every one of us to ask the questions, and to seek their answers.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "If you make yourselves sheep, the wolves will eat you." I submit for your consideration, "Have we not been sheep for far too long already?" Amen. Any cause will only advance with much agitation: let that cease and despotism is complete. The author invites your dialogue.

