

WHO'S AFRAID OF THE PIC?

The Myth of the "Prison Industrial Complex"

Who's afraid? Not me, because there's no such thing as a "Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)." It's a boogeyman, whose myth serves to disguise the fact that most prisons are little more than warehouses used to store and torture the victims of state oppression (i.e., the justice system) in the form of racism and class warfare. However unwittingly, by disseminating the PIC myth, a section of the left is misleading people into thinking that the prison system is a productive industry that may benefit them, when it produces little or nothing and simply soaks-up public funds that would be better spent on education, health care and the general well-being of the community.

The PIC myth was popularized in the '60s by Angela Davis, an avowed statist and at the time a member of the revisionist Communist Party (CPUSA). It is a total misnomer, but one that echoes former president Eisenhower's valid term, "Military Industrial Complex." As such, it was very easy for the pseudo-marxists in the CPUSA, and other social democrats, to spread this false terminology far and wide.

One need look no further than a dictionary to realize the PIC misnomer cannot be logically applied to the American prison system, as there is absolutely nothing "industrial" or "complex" about it. The primary definition of industry is the "Commercial production and sale of goods." The American Heritage Dictionary, 4th Ed. (2000), p895. A complex is defined as "Consisting of interconnected or interwoven parts." Ibid., p377. Thus, an "Industrial Complex" would be like the Ford Rouge Plant complex in Michigan, where iron ore was made into steel, stamped into parts and assembled into cars. There is nothing going on in America's prison system that even remotely approaches this.

The overwhelming majority of prisons are warehouses and the prisoners within them seldom, if ever, engage in manufacturing or production. I suspect that considerably less than 5% of American prisoners have jobs that produce anything for sale and most of those are farm products from the prison plantations in the South. Thus, the PIC label is patently false and misleading. Albeit, indicative of exactly the type of moribund, undisciplined thinking that made the CPUSA infamous as a failed organization.

Sure money is made on prisons by swindling the taxpayers through various methods such as skimming and kickbacks. Even more is thrown away through sheer bureaucratic incompetence and you can bet it winds up in somebody's pocket. Money is even made from the prisoners by selling them poor food and shoddy merchandise at inflated prices. Theft and corruption may be a business, but by no stretch of the imagination is it an "Industry" or an "Industrial complex."

So enough of the PIC boogeyman. Let's call it what it is - a system of state oppression, racism and class warfare. To persist in using the PIC myth serves to aid the state's oppression of groups it has assessed as a threat and, consequently, engage in the same counter-revolutionary activity that led up to the mess we're in today.

In memory of Jonathan Jackson, died in combat 17 August 1970.

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