

U.S. Prisons

The true cost of the ‘American gulag’

by Marianna Wertz

In the 1960s, Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* opened Western eyes to the vast prison and slave labor system in the former Soviet Union. Thirty years later, America has developed its own gulag, with more than 5.7 million residents—more than 1 out of every 50 people—either incarcerated (1.8 million, **Figure 1** and **Table 1**) or on probation or parole (**Figure 2**), and with a reputation for brutality rivalling its Soviet predecessor.

Ironically, America and post-communist Russia (now suffering from the criminality fostered by International Monetary Fund policies) lead the world in the percentage of population that they incarcerate. According to The Sentencing Project, Russia is first, with a 1998 rate of 685 inmates per 100,000 population; with 1.8 million residents incarcerated, the 1998 U.S. rate was 668 per 100,000.

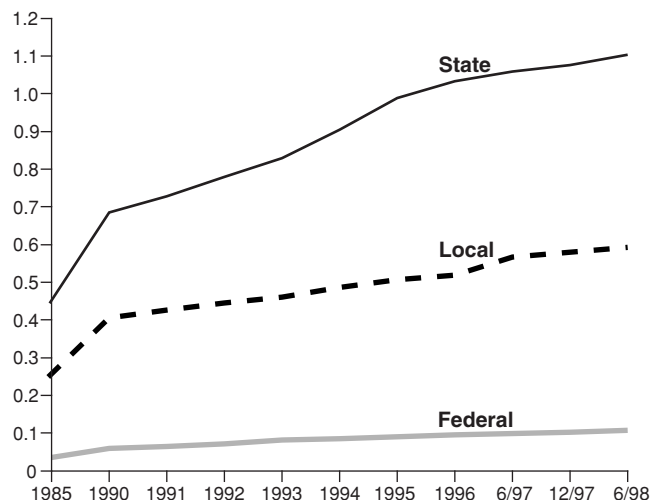
The *Atlantic Monthly*’s December 1998 story, “The Prison-Industrial Complex,” reported that the United States imprisons more people than any other country in the world—perhaps half a million more than China (which doesn’t keep official statistics), the whipping-boy for Congressional “human rights” hypocrites such as Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.). While other estimates put China’s prison population at 6-8 million, this is still less *per capita* than the American prison population.

As of mid-1998, one in every 150 U.S. residents was in prison or jail. One out of every 14 black men is now incarcerated, eight times the rate for white men. Almost 1 in 3 (32%) black males in the 20-29 age group is under some type of correctional control, as is 1 in 15 young white males and 1 in 8 young Hispanic males. In parts of the United States, such as sections of South Central Los Angeles, an estimated

FIGURE 1

From year end 1985 to midyear 1998, the number of inmates in the nation’s prisons and jails grew more than 1.058 million, an annual increase of 7.3%

(inmate population, millions)

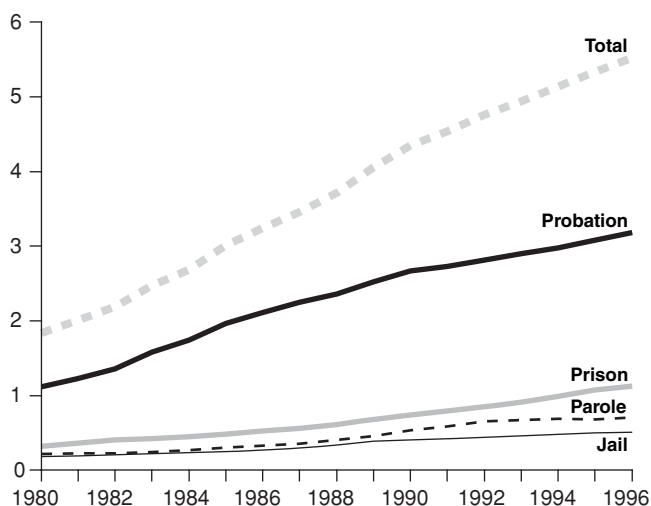


Source: *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*, March 1999, “Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 1998,” by Darrell K. Gilliard.

FIGURE 2

Correctional populations in the United States, 1980-96

(millions)



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

TABLE 1

Number of persons held in Federal or state prisons or in local jails, 1985, 1990-98

Year	Total inmates in custody	Prisoners in custody		Inmates held in local jails	Incarceration rate*
		Federal	State		
1985	744,208	35,781	451,812	256,615	313
1990	1,148,702	58,838	684,544	405,320	458
1991	1,219,014	63,930	728,605	426,479	481
1992	1,295,150	72,071	778,495	444,584	505
1993	1,369,185	80,815	828,566	459,804	528
1994	1,476,621	85,500	904,647	486,474	564
1995	1,585,586	89,538	989,004	507,044	600
1996	1,646,020	95,088	1,032,440	518,492	618
1997					
June 30	1,725,785	99,175	1,059,531	567,079	645
December 31	1,743,886	101,755	1,075,052	NA	652
1998					
June 30	1,802,496	107,381	1,102,653	592,462	668
Percent change					
6/30/97-6/30/98	4.4%	8.3%	4.1%	4.5%	
Annual average increase					
12/31/85-6/30/98	7.3%	9.2%	7.4%	6.9%	
12/31/90-6/30/98	6.2	8.3	6.6	5.2	

*Total of persons in custody per 100,000 residents on July 1 of each reference year. Source: *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, March 1999*, "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 1998," by Darrell K. Gilliard.

70% of the young African-American men are involved in the criminal justice system.

During the past two decades, roughly a thousand new prisons and jails have been built in the United States.

The question posed by this appalling situation is whether, when the true costs of such a gulag are taken into account, it can be judged to be good policy, even by its principal advocates. In the past two decades, criminal justice policy has been made largely for political gain, in response to a perceived or manipulated threat of rising criminality. "Lock them up and throw away the key," has been the calling card of the Conservative Revolution.

Today, the crime rate is going down, but we are left with the gulag, and with a burgeoning "prison-industrial complex"—including private prison companies and hundreds of suppliers for all the needs of a growing prison population—which continues to heavily lobby legislators to build more prisons. The prison-industrial complex is a multibillion-dollar sub-economy, attested to by the meteoric rise of privately run correctional facilities in the past ten years (**Figure 3**) and the broad array of products now produced in the nation's jails and prisons (**Table 2**).

It is now time, with national elections around the corner, to assess this situation and change it. That is the purpose of this report.

Crime rate and incarceration

The major political pretext for construction of the American gulag in the past 20 years was a perceived rising crime rate. In fact, according to the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the overall crime rate has been falling since 1994, and the violent-crime rate has fallen since 1994 by about 20%. In 1997, according to the BJS, the nation's murder rate fell to its lowest level in three decades, led by a sharp decline in cities with more than 1 million inhabitants. In 1995, fewer than one-third of those people entering prison were violent offenders, down from 50% in 1980. Fully 84% of the increase in state and Federal prison admissions since 1980 was accounted for by nonviolent offenders.

What *has* increased is drug-related crime and the number of drug- and alcohol-related offenders going to prison (**Figure 4**). In the 1997 BJS "Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities," more than 570,000 of the nation's prisoners (51%) reported

the use of alcohol or drugs while committing their offense. Eighty-three percent of state prisoners reported past drug use, and 57% were using drugs in the month before their offense. In 1996, drug offenders constituted 23% of state prison inmates and 60% of Federal prison inmates.

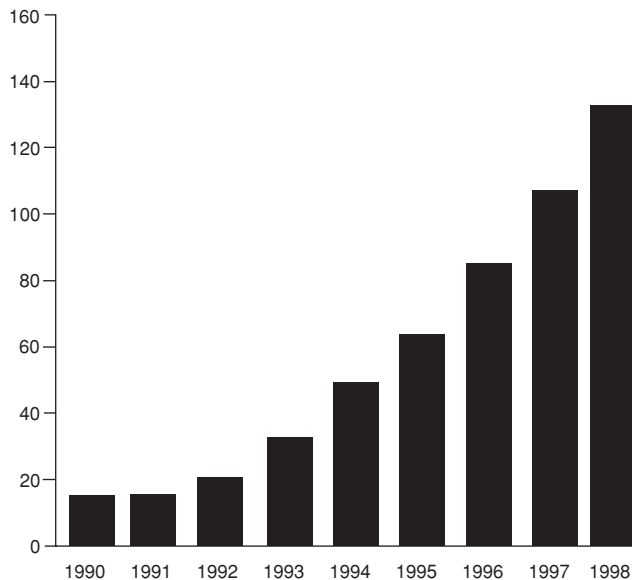
In addition to substance abusers, poor people and the mentally ill are also filling the nation's jails and prisons. Approximately 70% of American prison inmates are illiterate, 65% of state prison inmates have not completed high school, and, according to a July 11, 1999 BJS report, 16%, or 283,800 of America's prison and jail inmates suffer from mental illness. About 40% of mentally ill inmates were unemployed before their arrest, according to the BJS report.

In an interview with *EIR*, Henry Nicholas, International Vice President of the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, linked the fact that the welfare population is falling—4.5 million women and children have "disappeared" from the welfare rolls since 1996—to the rising prison population. "As we dump the poor, we increase the intensity of our industrial jail complex. Now, prisons are the fastest growing industry in the country," he said (see *EIR*, June 25).

FIGURE 3

Ten-year growth in rated capacity of private secure adult correctional facilities

(thousands)



Source: Center for Studies in Criminology and Law website.

Post-industrial crime

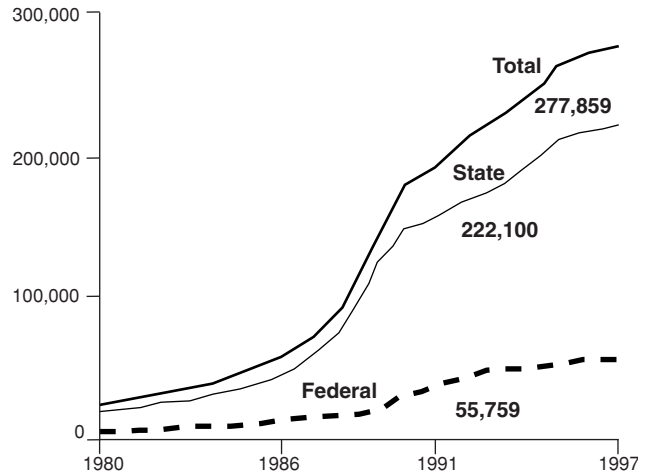
The underlying reason that such a large percentage of the American population has turned to criminal activity is the transformation of the economy, since the 1960s, into a post-industrial, and, eventually, a financial bubble, economy. The post-industrial society destroyed decent-paying industrial jobs (see **Figures 5** and **6**), and made *crime*, especially drugs, pay, while glorifying the criminal culture in movies and video games. Successful mega-speculators, such as the godfather of the drug-legalization movement, George Soros, made billions in the global casino, while the children of the formerly industrialized workers landed in jail.

Examples of this kind of transformation abound across the nation. Look at Youngstown, Ohio, once a center of steel manufacturing with a vibrant industrial economy. In 1997, its industry shut down, Youngstown turned in desperation for jobs to America's most notorious private prison company, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), to build and run the Northwest Ohio Correctional Center. Today, CCA runs a private prison for thousands of Washington, D.C. felons at NOCC, where murder and mayhem are the substance of daily life, and Youngstown residents live in constant fear of escapes.

Far from doing anything to rectify the underlying cause of this transformation of America, Soros today finances initiatives to make drugs legal (and even more prevalent), while his

FIGURE 4

Number of prisoners serving a sentence for a drug offense



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, January 1999, "Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997."

fellow speculators invest in Hollywood's booming violence-entertainment industry. At the same time, America's leading financial houses — from Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch, to Prudential Insurance, Smith Barney, and Shearson Lehman — are making fortunes underwriting prison construction with private, tax-exempt bonds.

Crippling the real economy

Now, it is time for this nation to consider the true cost of this gulag. Lyndon LaRouche's "Triple Curve," or "Typical Collapse Function" (**Figure 7**), provides a useful approach to the question. This schematic was first used by LaRouche in 1995 in Europe, to depict the interactive trends of the collapse process over time, in particular the 1960s to the present, for the purpose of warning that emergency intervention was essential.

The Triple Curve illustrates that as financial valuations of all kinds increase (top curve, referring to ballooning share values, debt pyramids, derivatives, futures, and similar speculative assets), and monetary valuations also increase (middle curve, currency inflation, etc.), while at the same time, and as part of the same process, the conditions of the physical economy *decrease* (bottom curve, falling economic inputs and outputs), then, barring a policy intervention to put a stop to this disparity, there will be a shock-wave phase reached of financial blowout and physical collapse. We have entered that phase as of the late 1990s.

In this context, the hideous growth of the U.S. "prison-industrial complex" in recent years, is a dramatic part of the

TABLE 2

Prison Industry Enhancement (PIE) Programs

The PIE Certification Program was created by Congress in 1979 to facilitate states and units of local government bringing private-sector industries into their jails and prisons, and exempting them from restrictions on the sale of prisoner-made goods in interstate commerce. According to a spokeswoman for Correctional Industries Association, there are currently 145 companies involved, employing approximately 3,000 prisoners in 40 states. Here is a sampling of the kind of work they are engaged in.

State	Work product
Alabama	commercial laundry
California	airline reservations, cargo restraint systems, pig farm, oak furniture, circuit boards, machine shop, sheet metal ducts, micro systems, T-shirts, wire display racks, word processing disks, computer frames, cervical pillows
Colorado	saddles, leather goods
Connecticut	micrographics, baseball caps, wire and cable termination
Florida	eyeglasses, custom wood boxes, portable dog kennels; material goods manufacturing
Hawaii	papaya packing
Idaho	backpacks, potato processing, furniture assembly
Iowa	newspaper inserts, specialty foods, blow-molded plastics, telemarketing, punch press/dies, light welding, small assembly
Kansas	specialty wood and lucite products, drafting, children's clothing, shampoo bottling, sport clothing, cargo nets
Louisiana	coveralls, safety items
Maine	license plates, ash trays, stamped metal products
Maryland	reinspection of glass bottles and jars
Minnesota	metal fabrication, manufacture/assemble bird feeders, ring binders, brief cases, fishing lures, party balloons, plastic goods assembly
Nebraska	telemarketing, metal assembly, fishing weight assembly
Nevada	vinyl waterbeds, antique motor vehicles, automobiles, stained and etched glass, limousine parts, draperies, furniture
New Hampshire	output chokes, jewelry, epoxy and adhesives
Ohio	party tent floors and walls
Oklahoma	telemarketing, graphics, designer rugs, alternator disassembly and testing
Oregon	wood pallets, recycling fiber and plastics, bar code reading, clothing
South Carolina	electronic cables, furniture, hardwood flooring, polish faucet handles
South Dakota	internet research/design, truck suspensions/boat docks, fence stakes, electronic components, wood products assembly, ceramics manufacture
Tennessee	drapery panels, tote bags, aprons, sheets, napkins
Texas	brass valves and fittings, electronic circuit boards, welding and cutting metal products
Utah	road signs, garments, cold weather gear, mats, telemarketing family films, electronic library catalog creation, trailer manufacturing
Virginia	portable camp stoves, embroidery
Washington	garments, mesh and canvas bags, sub-assemblies for aircraft, sheet metal fabrications, telemarketing, shrinkwrap, waterjet, laser, plasma cutting services, commercial seating, carabiners for rock climbing, bicycle assembly
Wisconsin	metal conveyors, liners, gloves, mittens, insoles, clogs, slippers

Source: Correctional Industries Association website (www.corrections.com/industries).

falling lower curve, indicating the grinding down of the U.S. population and workforce during the years of the post-industrial, casino economy. Over the past couple decades, U.S. economic activity in basic industry, agriculture, infrastructure, and vital services has *declined* relative to household and

production needs. Industry has shipped jobs abroad through the North American Free Trade Agreement and other so-called free-trade, cheap-labor schemes. U.S. food and other necessities have been coming from “global sourcing.” Millions of productive jobs have been eliminated in the process, undercutting families, skill-training, and hope and motivation for education and culture.

Then, with the proliferation of drugs, the Hollywood counterculture, and despair, the transmission belt to crime and imprisonment has grown at an ever faster rate.

In this regard, look at Figures 4, 5, and 6 together. Figure 5 gives a snapshot view of the drastic drop in numbers of U.S. manufacturing jobs over the last 20 years, for basic sub-sectors of durable and non-durable goods output (metals, textiles, machinery). *EIR* has documented this process in detail over this period. Take, for example, the flagship U.S. company, General Motors; Figure 6 shows how this company alone cut out 296,000 U.S. jobs from 1980 to 1997. (See, for example, “At Stake in GM Strike: Globalization’s Destruction of Labor and Industry,” *EIR*, July 31, 1998, p. 34.)

Figure 4 shows the rising rate of prisoners incarcerated for drug crimes over the same time period (1980-97). Now, the full scope of the costs to society of this whole prison process begins to come into focus.

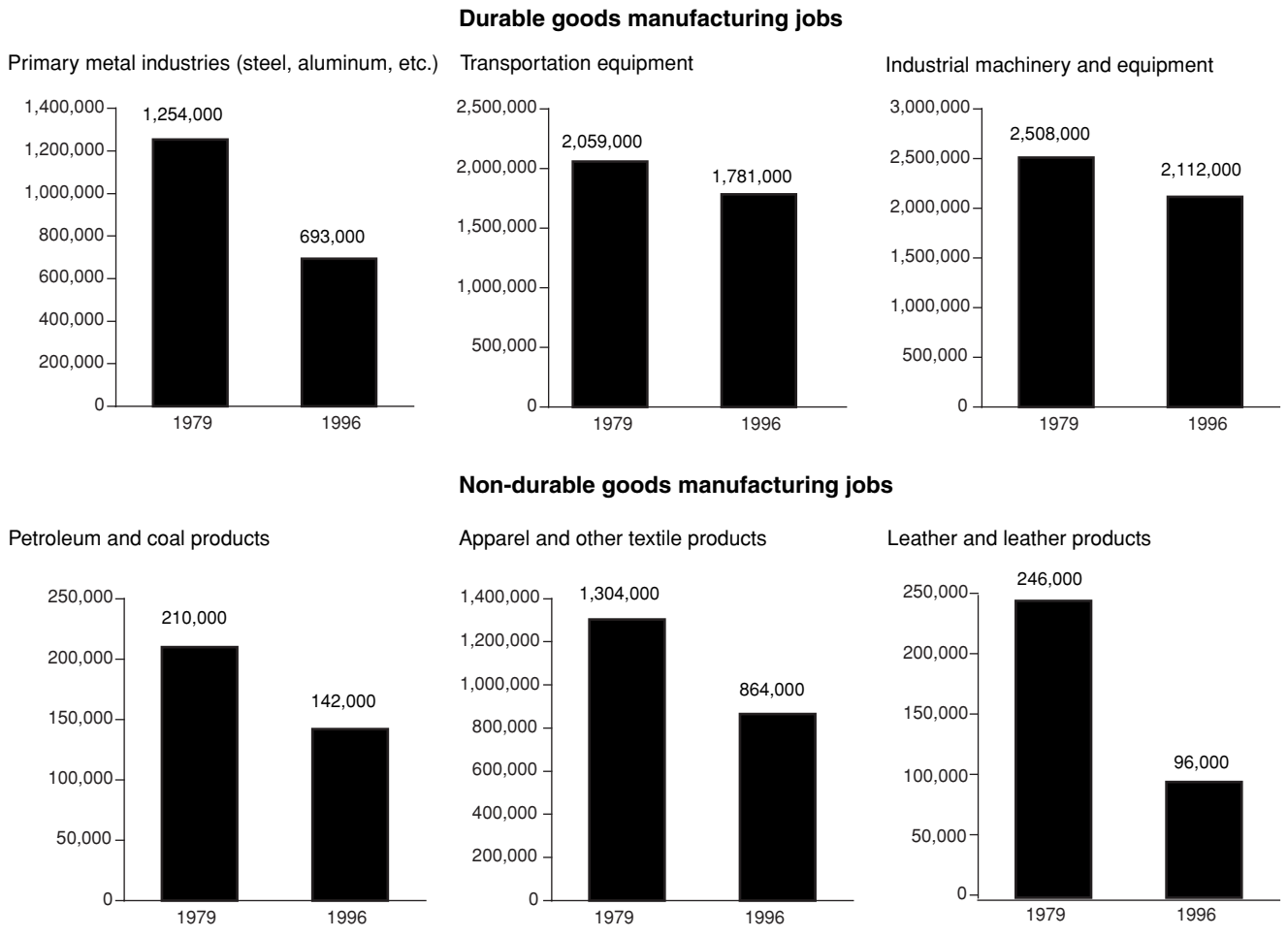
A particular irony is that the near-hyperbolic curve depicting the rate of growth of correctional facilities capacity in America (Figure 3), is similar to the hyperbolic rise in financial aggregates in the collapse function LaRouche has warned of. Like junk bonds proliferating in speculative finance, the incarceration rate reflects the junking of advanced sector industry and growing treatment of human beings, too, as mere junk — “lock ’em up and throw away the

key” — while virtually every effort to rehabilitate inmates has been discarded in recent years, as harsher and harsher punishment has become the order of the day.

The direct financial costs of the whole prison and law enforcement system, also eat up resources that should be

FIGURE 5

Decline in numbers of workers in U.S. goods-producing jobs, 1979-96



Source: U.S. Statistical Abstracts, 1995 and 1998, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

going for economically productive activity. Costs have nearly tripled in the past ten years! According to data from the Criminal Justice Institute and the National Association of State Budget Officers, in fiscal year 1997, it cost \$28.9 billion to run and build prisons for the 50 states, the Federal government, and the District of Columbia. This is up from \$10.2 billion in fiscal 1987. If one adds the cost of probation and parole for those systems, plus all costs for the 123 largest local jails in the country, the 1997 total is \$33.4 billion—equal to almost 15% of the U.S. defense budget. In 1987, only California and New York had prison budgets of more than \$1 billion. In 1997, seven states did—California, Florida, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The Federal government’s prison budget exceeded \$1 billion as well.

There are still more real, though uncounted, costs associ-

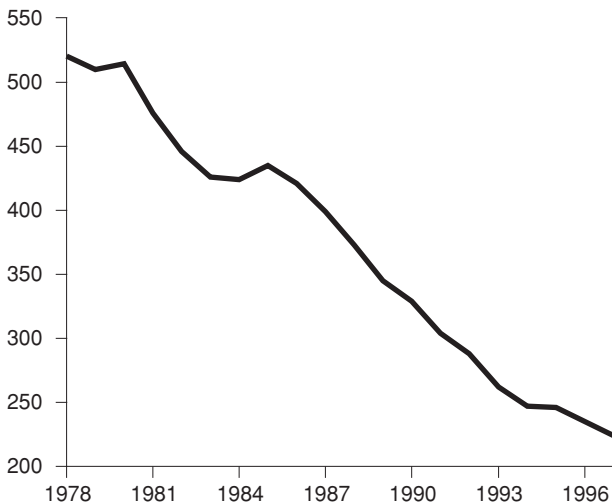
ated with the degradation of the population and the physical economic input/output shown in the falling lower curve on LaRouche’s collapse function: 1) the decreasing availability of funds for education and for drug and alcohol treatment and counseling, to keep would-be felons out of prison; 2) the misuse of the labor power of nearly 2 million incarcerated residents; 3) the resultant spread of a rage-filled and often diseased population once these inmates are released, as are 90% of the prison population; and 4) the damage to America’s image in the world as a champion of human rights.

Thus, today’s unprecedented bubble economy is paid for by the destruction of infrastructure, cities, and real living standards, to the point of vast “correctional” systems on the model of imperial penal colonies, or Roman slave brigades. The consequences are the subject of this report. But, first, let’s discuss who is responsible.

FIGURE 6

General Motors cuts 296,000 hourly U.S. jobs, 1978-97

(number of workers, thousands)



Source: General Motors.

Gore and Bush

Since Americans will soon be deciding on a new President, it should be noted that among the policymakers most responsible for the growth of the American gulag are the two top Presidential contenders: Al Gore and George W. Bush. As much as any single issue, prison policy makes clear that “there ain’t a dime’s worth of difference” between the two.

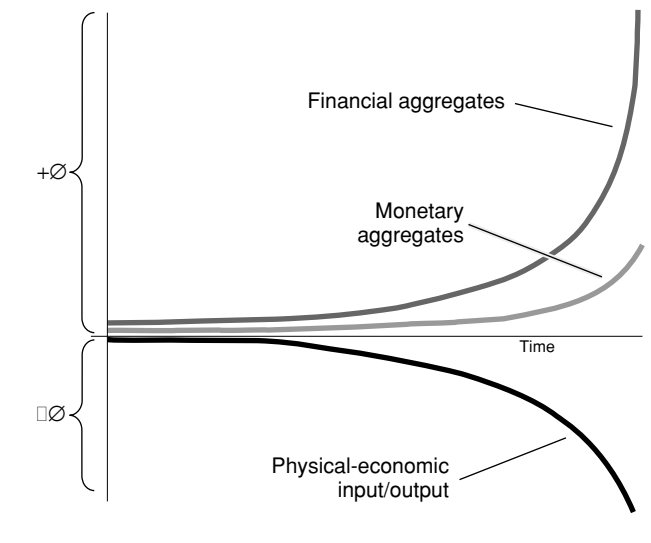
While the take-off in the U.S. rate of incarceration began under the Reagan/Bush administration, the Clinton administration, under Gore’s and former Clinton campaign adviser Dick Morris’s “triangulation” policy, has consistently pushed “get tough on crime” policies that have increased the rate of *Federal* incarceration at nearly twice that of state and local governments: Since mid-1997 alone, the number of inmates in Federal prisons has increased 8.3%; in state prisons, 4.1%; and in local jails, 4.5%.

In fulfillment of Gore’s “reinventing government” policy, a large portion of the Federal prison system is now being sold off to private prison operators. This includes the huge Lorton complex in Fairfax County, Virginia, which houses those convicted of crimes in Washington, D.C. Some 2,200 of its inmates will be housed in private prisons by the end of 2001. Gore’s Tennessee is home to the nation’s largest private prison company, Corrections Corporation of America, the pioneer in private-sector corrections, which today controls approximately 5% of the U.S. jail and prison population and is itself the sixth-largest corrections system in the United States.

Gore made clear that he will escalate in this same, failed direction, were he to win the Presidency. Speaking in Boston

FIGURE 7

A typical collapse function



on July 11, Gore called for harsher penalties for violent criminals, posturing with the Dick Morris-style statement: “Crime must have serious consequences and the rights of victims should be at the center of all justice.”

As for Texas Gov. George W. Bush, his state not only has the highest per-capita rate of incarceration in the nation (with the exception of the special case of Washington, D.C., which is both a state and municipal system), but Bush has also presided over the largest explosion of the most exploitative aspect of the new prison-industrial complex, the private prison system (**Figure 8**). While privately run prisons are growing at an even faster rate than incarceration, their growth in Texas is hyperbolic.

The following letter to the UN Secretary General from 29 prisoners on death row in Bush’s Texas, printed in the American Civil Liberties Union’s July 1999 *Abolitionist* newsletter, accurately describes the hell that exists in the “compassionate conservative’s” prisons:

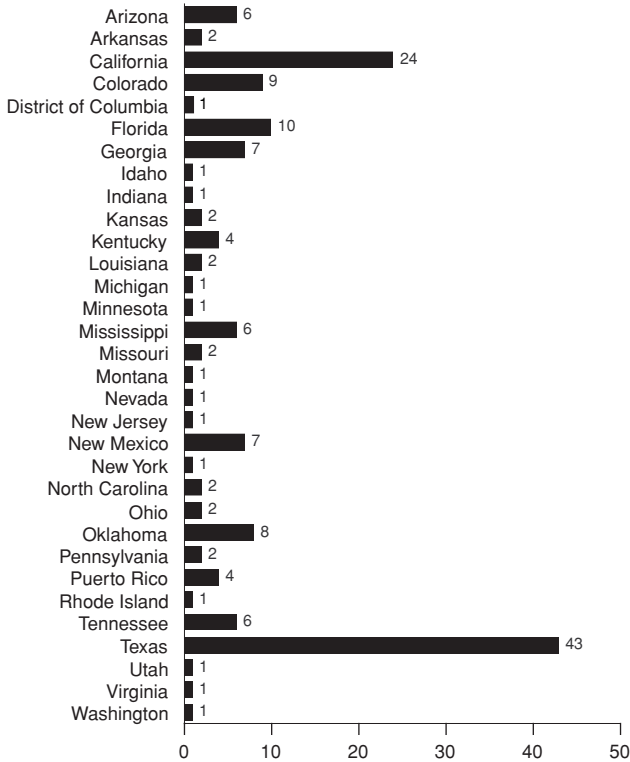
“We the undersigned men of the ‘F’ wing at the Texas Death Row Unit, Ellis-1, in Huntsville, Texas, hope and pray that you, the UN Commission on Human Rights, as well as the Italian Organization ‘Hands Off Cain,’ will investigate the inhumane conditions, mental and physical abuses, and torture tactics being practiced on us.

“... This wing is an air-tight 32-cell wing that is totally isolated from the rest of the prison. The 32 of us housed here . . . are forced to live in cells within cells. We are being gassed, denied normal amounts of food. . . . Some have lost up to 25 pounds in a few months. The wing is infested with insects and vermin. The officers routinely beat inmates in here coming or going from the shower in hopes that one will refuse to shower.

“Furthermore, we are supposed to receive an hour of rec-

FIGURE 8

Number of private prison facilities in the United States, by geographical location



Source: Center for Studies in Criminology and Law website.

The geographical location of facilities does not necessarily indicate contracting decisions made by agencies in those jurisdictions. Some states are contracting for the housing of their prisoners in other jurisdictions. Some states are providing sites only for Federal facilities. Estimates include both facilities in operation and those under construction.

reation three or four days per week. If we do choose to go out . . . [our] personal property is torn up, hygiene materials poured out, religious items confiscated, all under the guise of shakedown. . . . Everyone on this wing has been in solitary for over three months now.”

The loss of education

The question then is, what are the hidden costs to the economy, beyond the \$33.4 billion annual cost of building and maintaining the gulag, for this kind of cancerous growth? Once this is known, and honestly evaluated, there can be no sane policymaker who would continue to pursue the gulag-building policy.

Among the most important hidden costs of rising incarceration is the decreasing availability of funds for education, to

prevent our youth from becoming felons in the first place, and for substance abuse treatment for those already in trouble.

The year 1995 was the turning point for the prison/education funding debate: It was the first year in which more money was spent nationwide on prison construction than on college and university construction. The percentage of the states’ general fund money going to prisons rose from 5% in 1987, to 6.8% in 1996, according to the National Association of Budget Officers. During the same period, the states’ higher education portion fell from 15.5% to 12.9%. According to the Justice Policy Institute’s 1997 paper, “From Classrooms to Cell Blocks,” states spent 30% more on prison budgets and 18% less on higher education in 1995 than they did in 1987.

The institute’s paper concludes: “As states continue to lay off teachers to pay for corrections officers, it is becoming apparent that their citizens are more poorly educated and unemployable—precisely the kind of person who fills state prisons.”

The picture in various states is stark:

- In New York, spending has increased on prisons in the last decade by nearly as much as it has decreased on higher education. Spending for city and state universities has fallen since 1988 by \$615 million, to \$1.48 billion in 1998, while funding for the Department of Correctional Services has risen by \$761 million, to \$1.76 billion, according to the Justice Policy Institute and the Correctional Association of New York.

- Since 1984, California constructed 21 prisons and only one state university. For the first time in California’s history, since 1995, more money is spent each year on corrections (9.4% of the general fund) than on higher education (8.7%).

- In Florida, for the first time ever, the state spends more on 56,000 prisoners than on 203,000 university students, or 300,000 degree-seeking community college students. Of the increase in Florida’s general revenue over the last decade, public higher education received \$602 million, while corrections received \$1.05 billion.

- The District of Columbia has more inmates, than it does D.C. residents enrolled in its one public university. The District’s corrections system experienced a 312% increase in funding from 1977 to 1993, compared to an 82% increase in university funding during that 16-year period.

- More African-American inmates were added to Maryland’s prisons during the 1990s than full-time African-American students to Maryland’s four-year public colleges.

With respect to drug- and alcohol-treatment programs, among both state and Federal prisoners who had used drugs in the month before the offense, about 1 in 7 had been treated for drug abuse since admission; only one-third had enrolled in other drug-abuse programs.

Since admission, 14% of both state and Federal prisoners drinking at the time of offense had been treated for alcohol abuse; one-third had enrolled in other alcohol-abuse programs.

Cheap labor

The second major hidden cost of the gulag is the use of a vast pool of cheap labor in our jails and prisons. Next to welfare recipients forced to work for their checks, the 1.8 million American residents filling our prisons are one of the largest pools of cheap labor available. The one distinct advantage that inmates provide to employers seeking to capitalize on wages ranging from 12¢ an hour to just over minimum wage, is a captive labor force: Inmates don't take vacations, they have to show up for work, and employers don't have to pay overtime, comp time, day care, sick leave, or any other benefits.

UNICOR, the \$495 million-per-year U.S. Bureau of Prisons industrial conglomerate, staffed by 18,000 Federal prisoners, is the model for the prison-industrial complex. Established in 1934, it produces 150 different products, from furniture to parts for the Patriot missile. Inmates earn from 23¢ to \$1.12 per hour.

The Prison Industry Enhancement (PIE) certification program (see Table 1), created by Congress in 1979, goes beyond UNICOR, allowing states and municipalities to bring in private industry to prisons and permitting the work product to be sold into interstate commerce, something which cannot be done legally with products from UNICOR and non-PIE prison industry programs. PIE gets around objections of unfair competition by organized labor by paying inmates approximately the prevailing (but not union-level) wage for their work. Of course, the inmates actually see only about 10% of that wage; the rest goes to room and board, restitution, and family support. Despite legal guidelines, however, the PIE program has been subject to rampant corruption, as the case of Virginia makes clear (see article p. 23).

By creating this huge cheap-labor pool, the American economy is forced to bear the hidden costs of a further reduction in the overall wage level, forcing free labor to compete with a growing pool of inmate labor, and the degradation of skills of nearly 2 million inmates who might otherwise be learning real trades. In recent months, state legislators have been urging Nike footwear and other runaway American companies to bring their overseas operations home—to America's prisons—where their goods can once again be “made in America,” and made cheaper than even Third World labor can produce them.

The *Atlantic Monthly's* June 1999 followup to its 1998 “Prison-Industrial Complex,” titled “When They Get Out,” points to the crucial fact that, if the 1.8 million mainly low-skilled incarcerated American residents were counted as part of the unemployed workforce, as they should properly be, the official unemployment statistics would increase by as much as 2%. The article cites urban scholar Mike Davis's book *Ecology of Fear*, which describes the prison-industrial complex as “carceral Keynesianism”—an enormous public-works program to employ low-skilled workers whose jobs have disappeared in the post-industrial economy.

In fact, the prison-industrial complex, which is reaping an

estimated \$30 billion in annual profits, is a powerful force, lobbying in every state capital for continual expansion of the gulag. Such lobbying makes it difficult for state legislators to buck the trend. Tennessee State Rep. Joe Towns (D-Memphis), who led the fight to keep CCA from taking over the entire Tennessee prison system in 1997, exemplifies the courage that is required to do so, as his interview with *EIR* (see below) reflects.

The recent battle in Washington, D.C., which stopped CCA from winning a contract to build and run a Federal facility in the District's poorest neighborhood, was won because District residents stood their ground against CCA's millions. Our sons should be in school, not in prison, they argued, and our neighborhoods should be places for education, community activities, and worship, not incarceration.

Disease and rage

The third major hidden cost of the American gulag policy is the growing infection of prisoners with such diseases as AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis; and their transformation into even more rageful and vengeful human beings as a result of their treatment while incarcerated.

As “When They Get Out” makes clear, 90% of American inmates are going to be released some day, and they will be bringing their diseases and their rage with them.

Tennessee State Rep. Kathryn Bowers told *EIR* on June 25 that her state began testing two years ago for HIV infection among all inmates 21 years of age and under—which was all that the budget would allow. The reason Bowers sponsored the legislation, she said, “is in light of the fact that there was a tremendous increase of African-American females who are HIV positive. There is a feeling that people who are incarcerated are bringing it out into the community.” In his interview, Representative Towns makes the same point.

The preliminary result of the study is that close to 27% of those tested were HIV positive. Bowers plans to introduce legislation to broaden the study, as soon as it is economically feasible, to include more of the inmate population.

A 1999 study by Brown University researchers, led by Dr. Anne Spaulding, examined the extent to which correctional facilities in the United States screen for and treat the deadly hepatitis C infection. Thirty-six states and Washington, D.C. responded, representing 77% of all inmates in state facilities nationwide. Colorado alone reported routine screening. Only California reported conducting a systematic sero-prevalence study, which found that 39.4% of male inmates were hepatitis C antibody positive in 1994, in contrast to an estimated 2% infection rate in the general population. Only four states follow a standard treatment protocol.

The May 3, 1999 *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that Virginia's inmate population has a 30-40% infection rate for hepatitis C. Corrections Department Chief Physician Dr. M.J. Vernon Smith told reporter Frank Green that “the scope of the problem is terrifying. It's a very expensive treatment that is going to rival AIDS in terms of its cost, and, unfortunately,

in terms of its [size], it's going to make AIDS look like a little baby." Treatment, which doesn't work in all cases, costs about \$15,000 per inmate per year for the drugs alone. At the moment, about 300 Virginia prisoners, out of a potential pool of 12,000, are being treated.

Dr. Anne Spaulding, principal author of the Brown University study and medical program director for the 3,500-inmate Rhode Island Department of Corrections, told the Richmond paper that, since 83% of the country's 2 million intravenous drug users are incarcerated at some point, "a significant portion of the 4 million Americans with hepatitis C have involvement with the correctional system."

As to the danger of a rageful prison inmate population being released onto the streets of our nation, the statistics speak for themselves. On average, more than 40% of prison inmates are released in any given year. In 1995, a total of 463,284 inmates were released. As the *Atlantic Monthly* figured it, in a worst-case scenario, some 660,000 will be released in 2000, some 887,000 in 2005, and about 1.2 million in 2010. There will be somewhere around 3.5 million first-time releases between now and 2010, and America by then will still be releasing from half a million to a million people from its prisons each year (not to mention hundreds of thousands more from short stints in jail). "That is an awful lot of potential rage coming out of prison to haunt our future," the authors conclude.

Because the 1996 welfare reforms drastically curtailed felons' access to welfare money, and because most felons are barred from any but the most menial jobs, as well as from voting, the *Atlantic Monthly* authors conclude that "mass incarceration followed by mass release into subcitizenship will undermine the great democratic achievements of the past half-century." This will be particularly true in those poorer neighborhoods of our nation from which most felons come—and to which they will return.

Human rights record

The fourth, and perhaps most damaging hidden cost of the American gulag, is the loss of America's reputation as a practitioner of fundamental human rights for all its residents. This nation's hypocrisy, with respect to its own record in criminal justice, has become a matter of almost daily international news. A good case in point is U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), who parades around the world denouncing Chinese and other nations' prison policies, while his own state is incarcerating numerous political prisoners associated with Lyndon LaRouche and, in the operation of its "supermax" prisons, violating the fundamental norms of prisoner treatment established by the United Nations.

America's use of capital punishment, the only Western nation still to employ it, has elicited denunciations, from the Pope to the United Nations. In April of this year, the nations of the European Union, for the first time, denounced the United States for its use of the death penalty, considered by those nations to be a fundamental violation of human rights, and

called for a worldwide moratorium on its use.

In October 1998, Amnesty International, for its own political purposes, released its first worldwide report on human rights in the United States, titled "World Leader in High-Tech Repression." The fact that Amnesty refuses to take up the LaRouche case is evidence that it isn't really interested in justice in the United States, but the report touches on several areas which represent fundamental violations of human rights in the U.S. penal system, including the death penalty; the use of "high-tech repression tools," including electro-shock devices, chemical sprays, and restraint devices; the emphasis on incarceration rather than education and treatment in the prisons; a "widespread and persistent pattern of police brutality"; "endemic physical and sexual violence against prisoners"; and incarceration of asylum seekers.

What should be added to this list of human rights violations which have grown up in recent years in the American gulag, include the following:

- The use of chain gangs in county jails, with Massachusetts' Bristol County the latest (and the first northern) of ten jurisdictions nationwide that have reverted to the old slave-days practice.

- Alabama's decision in June 1999 to resume allowing inmates who refuse to work to be handcuffed to hitching posts, the only state so far that allows this practice. The policy was stopped last year when a judge ruled that the practice, which left inmates in the sun for long hours without water or bathroom breaks, to be unconstitutional.

- "Supermax" prisons which resemble medieval dungeons more than modern incarceration facilities. Inmates are kept in completely sterile environments up to 23 hours a day, with no human interaction, religious services, or educational activities.

- The disenfranchisement of an estimated 3.9 million Americans who have committed a felony but have served their time. This disenfranchisement particularly affects African-American men—at present, 1.4 million of them (13%). Three in 10 of the next generation of black men will be unable to vote at some point in their lives. In ten states, more than 1 in 5 black men are barred from voting because of their criminal records.

- As documented in the 1998 exposé *Acre of Skin* by Allen M. Hornblum, from the 1950s to '70s, American prisoners were systematically used for human experimentation, including drug experimentation by the U.S. Army akin to the practices condemned at the Nuremberg Tribunal following World War II. *EIR* is preparing an account of this for future publication.

If America is once again to rightfully claim its place as a leader in human rights, then the American gulag and its damnable practices must end. The costs vastly outweigh whatever benefits it provides society. Lyndon LaRouche's question—whether America is morally fit to survive—is very much at issue in the gulag. It's up to its citizens to make the right choice.