

Justice:

Criminal Injustice System:

Corporate Prisons

As more and more corrections systems exceed their capacities, government is turning to for-profit prisons run by corporations in order to save money. There is increasing evidence that they not only cost taxpayers more money, but they consistently violate the civil and political rights of the prisoners. See the [Association of Federal, State, County, and Municipal Employees \(AFSCME\)](#) report "The Evidence is Clear: Crime Shouldn't Pay":

"The rapid increase in inmate populations has caused a number of jurisdictions to come under court order to reduce overcrowding in jails and prisons. At the beginning of 1998, 44 of 52 (state and federal government) corrections systems surveyed operated at or above capacity. In addition, 141 institutions were affected by court orders affecting population limits. In this frenzied climate, corporate America has found a way to generate profits by building and operating correctional facilities. Overcrowding is the most common reason cited by governments that turn to for-profit firms. Another rationale for privatizing prisons is the notion that privatization saves money. After more than a decade of experience with for-profit corrections facilities in this country, there is no clear evidence that for-profit prisons save taxpayer dollars. There are numerous examples in which for-profit prison firms:

- Get very favorable contractual terms that wind up costing taxpayers more;
- Provide low-paying jobs and inadequate benefits to employees;
- Experience a very high degree of employee turnover and understaffing;
- Avoid paying property and income taxes;
- Stick governments with the liability for their mistakes; and,
- Endanger public safety."

- AFSCME, from the report "The Evidence is Clear: Crime Shouldn't Pay" [\[source\]](#)

Organizations

[American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees \(AFSCME\)](#)

Critical Resistance

[Coalition Against the American Correctional Association](#)

Resources

[AFSCME - Private Prisons](#)

[Mother Jones - Prisons](#)

- a country-wide list of organizations against the privatization of prisons

Action / Campaigns

[Coalition Against the American Correctional Association](#)

- August 10-12, 2001 in Philadelphia, PA there will be a mobilization against the country's largest corporate correctional association

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For more information on this and other issues, visit [AFSCME](#) on the Internet.

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Justice:

Criminal Injustice System:

Mandatory Minimums

A growing number of citizens believe mandatory minimum sentencing laws are unfair. Here is some background information from [Families Against Mandatory Minimums \(FAMM\)](#):

"During the 1970s and 1980s, Congress and many state legislatures passed mandatory minimum sentencing laws that force judges to hand out fixed sentences, without parole, to people convicted of certain crimes.

Mandatory sentences must be imposed regardless of a person's role in the crime or other mitigating factors. Prosecutors, not judges, have the discretion to decide what charges to bring, whether to accept or deny a plea bargain, to reward or deny a defendant's "substantial assistance" or cooperation, and ultimately, to determine what the final sentence will be.

The only way a judge can sentence below a mandatory minimum is if the defendant provides "substantial assistance" or cooperation in the prosecution of someone else. Even then, prosecutors, not judges, determine whether the substantial assistance is valuable enough to warrant a reduction in sentence."

- Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) [\[source\]](#)

Organizations

[Families Against Mandatory Minimums \(FAMM\)](#)

Resources

[FAMM - Resources](#)

Action / Campaigns

[FAMM - Act Now](#)

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Justice:

Criminal Injustice System:

End the Death Penalty

Recent high-profile executions have sparked a renewed examination of the death penalty in America. State-sponsored murder is neither a deterrent to crime nor a cost-effective method of dealing with convicted prisoners. Amnesty International has been one of the leaders in the struggle to end the death penalty. Here is a quote from [Amnesty International USA's](#) website:

"While the world has moved away from the death penalty, recognizing that there is no worthwhile social goal that requires a government to commit state-sanctioned murder, the United States of America continues to accelerate the pace of executions. The US executes an average of six people each month and, as of January 1999, over 3,500 men and women were on death row. The death penalty was reinstated in 1976, yet 75% of executions have occurred since 1990."

- Amnesty International USA [\[source\]](#)

For more information on this and other subjects, visit [Amnesty International USA](#) on the Internet.

Organizations

[Campaign To End The Death Penalty \(CEDP\)](#)

[Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty \(CUADP\)](#)

- site contains facts, press releases, events, execution information, wrongful convictions, alternatives to the death penalty

[Amnesty International USA](#)

[Death Penalty Information Center](#)

[The Moratorium Campaign](#)

Resources

[The New Abolitionist](#)

- newsletter of Campaign To End The Death Penalty

[CEDP - Death Penalty Fact Sheets](#)

[CEDP - Five Reasons Why You Should Oppose the Death Penalty](#)

[CUADP - Death Penalty Fact Sheet](#)

[Amnesty International USA - Abolish the Death Penalty](#)

[Amnesty International USA - Death Penalty Facts and Figures](#)

Action / Campaigns

[Amnesty International USA - Weekly Death Penalty Action](#)

[CUADP - Action](#)

[CEDP - Get Involved](#)

[The Moratorium Campaign - Action](#)

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Justice:

Education

A healthy public education system is the most important factor in determining the future prosperity of any nation. In America, our system is in crisis, both in terms of equal accessibility and quality. In addition, the U.S. education system fails to teach the basics of citizenship and civic action. The [Children's Defense Fund](#) outlines the shortcomings of the education system in America today:

"Equal educational opportunity is a myth in millennial America. The richest school districts spend 56 percent more per student than do the poorest. While expenditures are not the sole determinant of educational success, this gaping chasm effectively denies a Head Start to millions of children who happen to live in lower-income school districts. Overall, America's children are not being educated to the high levels they have a right to expect:

Thirty-eight percent of the nation's fourth-graders do not read at basic level, according to [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP) studies. Seventy-seven percent of 4th graders, 73 percent of 8th graders, and 78 percent of 12th graders scored below NAEP's writing proficiency level.

While U.S. fourth graders score ahead of many other nations in both math and science, by the time they reach the 12th grade, U.S. students are falling behind in both areas.

Too many of today's teachers in our nation's public school system are not formally trained in the classes they are now teaching. In addition, over the next decade, 2.2 million new teachers will be needed to replace retiring teachers and those leaving the teaching profession as well as to accommodate population increases and the movement to reduce class-size."

- The Children's Defense Fund [\[source\]](#)

For more information on this and other issues, visit the [Children's Defense Fund](#) on the

Organizations

[National Education Association \(NEA\)](#)

- national organization committed to advancing the cause of public education

[Learning First Alliance](#)

[Teach For America](#)

- a two year program for recent graduates to teach schoolchildren from disadvantaged areas

[Children's Defense Fund](#)

- a nonprofit organization that promotes children's welfare, with particular attention paid to the needs of poor and minority children, as well as those with disabilities

Resources

[NEA - Bilingual Education](#)

[NEA - Charter Schools](#)

[NEA - Class Size](#)

[NEA - Low Performing Schools](#)

[NEA - Safe Schools](#)

[NEA - Vouchers](#)

[Education and Commercialism](#)

[Education for Everyone](#)

[Educational Investments](#)

[School Vouchers](#)

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Justice:

Living Wage

In most communities, the minimum wage is insufficient to provide working families with basic necessities. These communities need a living wage that can provide for housing, health care, food, and other baseline expenses. [ACORN's](#) Living Wage Campaign Resource Center is at the forefront of the fight for a living wage:

"In short, living wage campaigns seek to pass local ordinances requiring private businesses that benefit from public money to pay their workers a living wage. Commonly, the ordinances cover employers who hold large city or county service contracts or receive substantial financial assistance from the city in the form of grants, loans, bond financing, tax abatements, or other economic development subsidies.

The concept behind any living wage campaign is simple: Our limited public dollars should not be subsidizing poverty-wage work. When subsidized employers are allowed to pay their workers less than a living wage, tax payers end up footing a double bill: the initial subsidy and then the food stamps, emergency medical, housing and other social services low wage workers may require to support themselves and their families even minimally. Public dollars should be leveraged for the public good -- reserved for those private sector employers who demonstrate a commitment to providing decent, family-supporting jobs in our local communities."

- Living Wage Campaign Resource Center [\[source\]](#)

For more information on this issue, visit the [Living Wage Campaign Resource Center](#) on the Internet.

Organizations

[Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now \(ACORN\)](#)

[Economic Policy Institute](#)

[American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees \(AFSCME\)](#)

[Universal Living Wage](#)

Resources

[ACORN's Living Wage Campaign](#)

- contains research on living wage campaigns, summaries of individual campaigns across the country, press clips, and how to organize living wage campaigns

[AFSCME - Living Wage](#)

- AFSCME was the group that helped lead the first successful living wage campaign in Baltimore in 1994 - this site contains the history of the living wage movement, state by state living wage comparisons, and general information about the issue of a living wage

Action / Campaigns

[Universal Living Wage](#)

- see 'You Can Help' section

[Harvard's Living Wage Campaign](#)

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Justice:

The Need For Universal Health Care

Over 40 million Americans possess no health insurance at all, even with the U.S. currently spending a higher percentage of its GDP per capita on health care than any other industrialized country. The [American Medical Student Association](#) illustrates the reasons why the U.S. should pursue a model of universal coverage:

- "Currently the United States spends approximately \$1,000 per capita on administrative costs, or around 22% of our total health-care expenditures. Canada spends only \$250 per capita on administrative costs, or 11% of its total health care expenditures.

- If we adopt a single payer system, and bring down our administrative costs, we could redirect that money towards the uninsured. The General Accounting Office predicted that a single-payer system would free 100 billion dollars. This money would be enough to insure the uninsured and supplement the policies of the under-insured (patients with large co-payments or deductibles).

- Since the United States spends nearly twice as much as Canada on health care, we would be able to eliminate waiting times that Canadians experience.

- A single-payer system would offer care according to need rather than ability to pay."

- American Medical Student Association (AMSA) [\[source\]](#)

Organizations

[Universal Health Care 2000 \(U2K\)](#)

- grassroots campaign organized around the 2000 Presidential election to "move America towards achieving universal health care"

[Universal Health Care Action Network \(UHCAN\)](#)

- successor to U2K

[Physicians for a National Health Program \(PNHP\)](#)

[Everybody In., Nobody Out](#)

[American Medical Student Association \(AMSA\)](#)

Resources

General

[AMSA - Universal Health Care](#)

[PNHP - Basic Information on Universal Health Care](#)

[UHCAN - Resources](#)

- data, manuals, organizing tips, etc.

Statewide Universal Care Campaigns

[Health Care for All California](#)

[Health Care for All Colorado](#)

[Health Care for All \(Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative\)](#)

[Health Care for All Oregon](#)

[Massachusetts Campaign for Single Payer Health Care](#)

[Vermont Health Care For All](#)

[Washington State - Health Care 2000 \(Initiative 245\)](#)

Action / Campaigns

For more information on this and other issues, visit [American Medical Student Association \(AMSA\)](#) on the Internet.

[PNHP - Action](#)

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Justice:

Drug Safety

Today, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves drugs that would have been rejected in the past because of doubts about their safety or effectiveness. American lives are at risk as a result.

This spring, Rezulin was taken off the market, after causing hundreds of cases of severe liver toxicity and at least 63 deaths. Rezulin was the fourth drug pulled off the market from among those approved in 1997. Only one other time since 1970 were as many as two drugs approved in a year (1985) taken off the market.

In most of these cases, the FDA approved the drugs despite warnings from the agency's own physicians. None of these banned drugs represented a significant breakthrough, so there was no urgent need for rapid approval.

In a 1998 confidential survey, FDA medical officers -- the physicians responsible for the primary reviews of New Drug Applications for drugs -- identified more than two dozen drugs that they believed were mistakenly approved. They reported stepped up pressure from superiors, Congress and the drug industry to quickly approve a high proportion of new drugs.

The so-called FDA Modernization Act of 1997 and other legislative acts have seriously weakened the FDA's regulatory capacity, permitting the manufacturers of many medical devices to rely on private, for-profit companies instead of FDA to review their application, reducing the evidence required to prove safety, and allowing drug companies to promote drugs for purposes for which they were not approved.

The FDA needs new leadership that will refuse to compromise public safety to accommodate industry demands. The FDA Modernization Act and other deregulatory measures must be repealed. And FDA rules permitting direct-to-consumer advertising must be revoked.

Justice:

Food Irradiation

Numerous studies have shown that irradiated food is deficient in certain vitamins, has caused health problems in animals, and contains carcinogens and mysterious chemical compounds. Irradiation also kills beneficial microorganisms and spawns mutant forms of bacteria. In addition to the well-accepted health effects of vitamin deficiency, some studies have shown other health effects of irradiated food, but these effects are not universally acknowledged.

The irradiation process itself is replete with dangers. Radioactive waste is generated by some irradiation facilities, people working in and living near these facilities are exposed to radiation hazards, and smog-forming ozone is a byproduct of their operation. From 1974-89, 45 mishaps were reported at U.S. irradiation facilities.

Irradiation does nothing to remove the sources of many harmful bacteria -- the feces, urine, pus and vomit left on beef, chicken and lamb as a result of filthy slaughterhouse conditions, the result of deregulation and weak food safety enforcement, corporate consolidation and sped-up lines, and lax corporate sanitation controls.

We don't know enough about the potential economic, health, and social costs of irradiation to permit its widespread use.

We need an immediate moratorium on expanded irradiation and a rescission of irradiation permits for meat and poultry. The cure for dirty food is not radiation; it is to eliminate dirty food by cleaning up food processing facilities. Cleaning up our food supply will require: reinvigorating the USDA inspection and regulatory capacity; strongly enforcing the law against those who put filthy products on the market; and, ultimately, reversing the growing corporate consolidation of the food industry and the homogenization of the food product marketplace.

Justice:

Utility Deregulation

Deregulation of the electric power industry is creating a few big winners (electric utilities and large industrial customers) and many losers (residential consumers, utility workers, and the environment). Just ask consumers in San Diego, who have seen their electric bills double or more, upon implementation of deregulation this year.

The idea of deregulation is to let consumers shop for electricity from any generator, not just the utility that controls their electric lines.

But the utilities have argued that such competition would unfairly disadvantage them, since they are burdened with massive investment in uneconomic nuclear power. They have successfully lobbied many state legislatures to have consumers pick up the price of their "stranded cost" nuclear investments, and some other costs -- a utility bailout that may ultimately total more than \$200 billion.

Deregulation has encouraged the utilities to downsize, costing more than 150,000 utility workers their jobs. These layoffs and other cost-cutting measures affect the safety and reliability of electric service. Blackouts in New York City and Chicago during the summer of 1999 were the direct result of cost-cutting that laid off thousands of workers and delayed maintenance on power lines and transformers. On hot summer days, when demand for electricity peaks, poorly maintained power lines and transformers over-heat and fail. With fewer workers and spare parts, it takes longer to restore service.

Deregulation is also putting low-income households at risk of service cutoffs. Prior to deregulation, most states had cut-off protections for low-income households, so they could keep using electricity during extremely hot or cold weather. Low-income households could get electricity service from utilities companies - who had a legal, regulated monopoly - even if they had poor credit histories. State deregulation laws are undermining many of these basic consumer protections. Minority and low-income neighborhoods now face the prospect of electricity redlining. Electricity suppliers may attempt to sell deceptive contracts with low base rates that will increase sharply at times of peak demand. Recent events in California show that deregulation can leave consumers vulnerable to outrageous swings in prices.

Meanwhile, the 500 coal-fired power plants that have "grandfathered" exemptions from provisions of the federal Clean Air Act are able to thrive under deregulation. Since the grandfathered plants are not required to use modern technologies to reduce pollution, they can produce electricity more cheaply. By causing a scramble for the cheapest power, deregulation enables the old coal plants to run even longer, annually producing 750,000 tons of smog-forming nitrogen oxides and nearly 300 million tons of carbon dioxide beyond the amounts produced in 1992, according to the 1998 U.S. PIRG report

Lethal Loophole.

Consumers, workers, and the environment must be protected from the ravages of deregulation. "Stranded cost" bailouts must end. All power plants must meet strict pollution standards. Sufficient funds must be allocated for universal service, low-income, energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. And consumers must have the right to band together for group energy buying and to have notices placed in utility bills to invite consumers to join democratically governed Consumer Utility Boards.

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