

even more severe fashion for the incarcerated subpopulation and their families. Whereas under segregation, minorities at least enjoyed place on lower economic ladders, had reserved sway in some professions (eg, railway porters), and could climb professional ladders within their own communities (doctors, lawyers, undertakers, educators, clergy), such that at least honorably if humble livelihoods could be and were achieved, while incarcerated workers are entirely walled off from all access to any means of family support.

4. The “Two Minute Primer on Competitive Economics, Theory and History”

The first objection to welcoming the incarcerated subpopulation to the US civilian labor force is that their participation will drive down the economy and take civilian jobs.

But...

Bedrock western economic theory and observed/documentated 20th century US history convincingly show exactly the opposite of arguments commonly flaunted in barring US inmates from employment: *barring* inmates from the civilian labor force drives down the economy, while welcoming them spurs economic growth, including business and civilian hiring expansion.

- The central tenet of western competitive economics is that every resource be used (employed). Not using (unemployment) by definition reduces a nation's output of goods and services and reduces national well-being.
- In addition, not only should every productive resource be used, each should be used to its highest (most valued) production.
- Further, via “multiplier effects,” unemployment triggers successive unemployment, by reduced consumer purchasing (demand reduction) cascading into wider layoffs. The observed fact is that employment spurs additional jobs and that layoffs trigger additional unemployment.

In sum, barring a subpopulation denies the broader society the goods and services the subpopulation could have produced (supply effects) and at the same time removes the purchasing power that employed subpopulation could have exercised, thereby reducing or preventing business expansion and additional jobs available to the majority population as well (demand effects). Even with the minimal multiplier of “2,” direct losses in jobs and consumption get doubled under current policies.

Practical exercises:

- Do other local businesses prosper when a large local employer closes?
- If employing inmates “drives down the economy,” then why does having employed those persons before prison (50% were employed), or after release *not* drive down the economy?
- The language used today to exclude inmates repeats language used to bar African Americans and women in the 20th century. Did their acceptance drive down the economy? What would happen to the US economy if the discriminations in place in, say, 1920, were to return today?

Seeing “Unfair Competition” With Clearer Eyes

The second major objection to inmate labor force participation is that inmate labor is unfair competition to civilian labor and business.

There is truth to the argument. An inmate working in prison industries annually obtains less than the weekly average income of a civilian, and gets no benefits. Prison industries operate on taxpayer provided land and buildings, pay no taxes, barely pay incarcerated workers, are granted preferred access to government markets, and are exempt from many employer obligations imposed on civilian businesses.

But wait. What we learn is that prison industries, not prison inmates, are unfair competitors. Prison inmates are the victims of prison industries, and prison industries are the instruments of our (citizen and public) social policies. Prison

laborers want the same opportunities as other labor, and we are the makers of the rules under which both civilians and incarcerated workers operate.

At its heart, unfairness and fairness both arise from public policies that we control. And the heart of promise lies in fairness, simply meaning *applying to incarcerated labor and incarcerated business (prison industries) exactly the same rules as for civilian business and labor. If the rules are the same, the competition is fair.*

5. The Good That Can Be

21st Century “Prison Labor,” Full Integration into Civilian Labor Force, Indistinct in Law and Regulation from Other Labor Rights, Protections, and Obligations.

Summary Scope: The exact net dollar damage to US GDP emanating from inmate exclusion from the civilian labor force, that is, expelling incarcerated persons from participating in the civilian economy, is unknown and subject to widely varying definitions, assumptions, and measures. Statistics are at the very best highly tentative. However, at least conceptually accounting for the GDP-reducing effects of --

- Productivity reductions among affected offspring of the incarcerated as a result of parental incarceration (succeeding generation effects);
- Productivity reductions from post-arrest and pre-conviction disruptions of persons who did spend time incarcerated (pretrial damages);
- Productivity reductions resulting during the time of incarceration;
- Productivity reductions from reduced education, training, and employment experience and advancement during criminal justice involvement;
- Productivity reductions post-incarceration from incarceration experiences plus post-release discriminations (post-release damages); and
- Multiplier effects downward on GDP - at least conceptually doubling any direct losses from the direct negative effects on inmate productivity and purchasing power.