

# I Make American Flags For Thirty-five Cents a Day

Prison Labor Union

anon.

1972

I work an eight hour shift, five days a week—sometimes more.

My wife and kids are on welfare.

Just like all of you, I want to be able to support my family. I'd like to make enough to pay taxes, maybe even save a little. Hell, I'd even pay rent on the four by eight room where I live, but thirty-five cents a day doesn't stretch much.

I'm a convict and I'll be one for a few years—I don't know how many exactly. I know it's not supposed to be fun and I'm not asking for charity or pity. Just give me a job to do, one that will train me to get and hold employment when I'm released. And then pay me a fair wage to do it.

Men and women like me make other things besides flags and license plates, like your school desks, shoes for the Army, mailbags, hospital sheets, robes, gowns, baby clothes—all the things they call the "state's goods." Inside the joint we're the clerks, orderlies, tailors, porters, barbers, gardeners, librarians and maintenance men. Whatever it takes to run a prison, we do it.

Still, we've always thought of ourselves as just prisoners, and it's not a good feeling, not good at all. Then I heard about something new called the Prison Labor Union and it made me realize that although I'm still a prisoner, I'm also a laborer—and that's worth something, inside or out.

There are between 1,800 and 2,000 inmates here with me at Green Haven Prison in New York. Even though it's a maximum security facility more than half of us have risked reprisals and signed up as members of the Prison Labor Union. We've learned something about the history of the labor movement in the United States and we know that we're in for a struggle.

Our demands are the same ones that all unions have already fought for and won: To bargain collectively for wages, hours and working conditions.

But as prisoners we're not free to do a lot of the work building support that outside labor can. Already the executive committee of District 65, the Distributive Workers of America has agreed to accept our union as an affiliate. The Prisoners' Labor Union is currently considering their offer.

The Prisoner's Rights Project of The Legal Aid Society is acting in our behalf by taking our cause through the courts and state agencies.

And we're not alone in this. There are unions being formed within the walls in California, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Rhode Island has recognized the Prisoner's Union officially. Massachusetts has given the Prisoner's Union the right to openly organize the inmates.

The prisoners' union movement had its origin two and a half years ago, when the Prisoners' Union was formed by ex-prisoners in California. From a basement office at 1345 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. in San Francisco information regarding unions is available to prisoners throughout the country.

In Scandinavia the governments of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland have all recognized the Prisoner's Union as being the sole bargaining agent for all the convicts.

We've made some progress but I still earn thirty-five cents a day. We've got a long way to go and we need your help.

THE PRISON MEDIA PROJECT  
857 Montgomery  
San Francisco, California 94133

**Coupon in print edition**

I am a prisoner.

I wish to learn more about the prison labor movement, with a view toward joining the local in my area. Please send me information and membership applications.

Here is some information about myself:

I work in the (place)

doing (job title)

(blank) days a week for \$ (blank) a day

NAME, NUMBER, PRISON

CITY, STATE ZIP

I am not a prisoner.

However I wish to support the legitimate and traditional goals of the Prison Labor Union.

I am sending a check for \$ to aid you in continuing this informational campaign both within and without the walls.

Checkbox: I can aid the effort in the following ways:

Checkbox: Please send me information.

NAME, ADDRESS, CITY, STATE, ZIP

# fifth Estate

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