

NEWS

Dungavel detention centre in slave labour shame as asylum seekers paid just £1 an hour for work

The centre is run by GEO Group, one of America's top private prison companies, who backed Trump's Presidential campaign.



By **Phil Miller**

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Dungavel Detention Centre, where 249 men and women are detained (Image: Tony Nicoletti/Daily Record)

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An American firm that gave hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Trump campaign is paying asylum seekers in Scotland just £1 an hour in wages.

The GEO Group is one of America's top private prison companies and saw its share prices soar when Trump became President.

In Scotland, GEO runs the [Dungavel immigration removal centre](#) in South Lanarkshire where 249 men and women are detained while the

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There are 64 detainees working up to 30 hours a week in Dungavel. The jobs include cleaning, hairdressing and gardening - much of it vital for the running of the detention centre.

New figures reveal that the detainees received just £130,919 for 128,742 hours worked between November 2014 and April last year.

Paying detainees the minimum wage, which rose from £6.50 to £7.05 for over 21s, would have cost an estimated £727,607 extra.



Asylum seekers in Dungavel are earning just £1 an hour for work (Image: Daily Record)

Now lawyers acting for the detainees are preparing a legal challenge against the low-paid work scheme.

Labour peer Lord Rosser, a shadow home affairs spokesperson, said: "These numbers are a shocking admission of the continued use of under-paid detainees instead of paid staff in Immigration Centres. Who pockets the millions from this use of under-paid labour? Is it the Government itself, or is it a year round gift to the companies who run these detention centres?"

The asylum seekers' lawyers claim the work is mundane and exploitative - and if the refugees are working they should receive the minimum wage.

Lawyer Toufique Hossain, of law firm Duncan Lewis, said: "Our clients and other detainees are doing work essential to the management of the immigration removal centres like Dungavel, much of it banal and tiring. They are working as cleaners, barbers, laundry workers, litter-pickers and food servers. This work would otherwise need to be done by workers paid at least the minimum wage."

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"Men and women deprived of their liberty, in a position of powerlessness, are forced to carry out unedifying jobs for next to nothing by the circumstances which have been imposed on them. If this isn't slavery, I don't know what is."

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GEO defended the scheme, which is endorsed by the Home Office, telling the Daily Record that "Detainees do not have to pay for their living costs, as do people earning minimum wage in the community."

The company added: "We usually have a waiting list of detainees wanting to take work opportunities, which shows that the scheme is popular with them."

There are eight other detention centres across Britain, run by private companies G4S, Serco and Mitie. Overall, detainees were short changed by almost £13 million in wages according to estimates.

The Home Office said: "The opportunity for detainees to engage in this scheme is entirely voluntary and provides constructive and purposeful activity. Paid activities is not a substitute for the work of trained staff."



Dungavel Immigration Detention Centre, near Strathaven

A spokesman for GEO said: "We are paid to employ an agreed staffing complement to operate the centre. The voluntary paid work scheme for detainees is paid for at the equivalent of the Home Office rate for the work within the fixed fee contract for operating the centre."

In the US, where GEO detains thousands of immigrants, the company is also under fire for its treatment of detainees. Washington State's attorney general is suing GEO for paying immigration detainees \$1 in wages, instead of the \$11 a day minimum wage.

The suit alleges GEO uses immigration detainees to run "virtually all non-security functions" at its Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma, Washington. The site can hold over 1,500 people, making it America's fourth largest detention centre.

"A multi-billion dollar corporation is trying to get away with paying its workers \$1 per day," Washington's Attorney General Bob Ferguson said. "That shouldn't happen in America, and I will not tolerate it happening in Washington."

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Protesters regularly hold rallies at Dungavel detention centre (Image: Daily Record)

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GEO runs 140 custody facilities across the US. The company's shares sunk when the Obama administration announced a plan to close private prisons.

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The company donated hundreds of thousands of pounds to parts of the [Trump campaign](#) and its shares soared when he was elected.

Since Trump's victory, GEO has won a contract worth \$110-million to build a 1,000 bed detention facility in Texas – however the company stressed that the bid was evaluated under the Obama Administration and that it was a “long-standing, competitive, and transparent procurement process”.

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This week it also emerged that GEO was paying out half a million dollars to a group of 16 women to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit concerning male staff at two prisons in Arizona.

The suit alleged that male officers asked female officers for sex, made sexually explicit comments to female officers and that a male manager grabbed the breasts and crotch of a female prison officer, according to local reports.

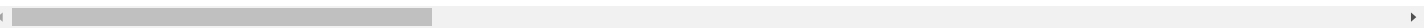
GEO said the company has “zero tolerance towards all forms of sexual harassment in all its facilities,” and that the allegations were from several years ago. As a result of the settlement, it has now implemented new measures.

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