

Trump donor firm accused of 'slave labour' made £1m profit

Billy Briggs on July 13, 2018

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A private prison firm paying asylum seekers held at Dungavel detention centre £1 an hour prompting claims of “slavery” made nearly £1m in profit last year, The Ferret can reveal.

The GEO Group UK Limited – a subsidiary of US-based GEO Group which [gave \\$250,000 to Donald Trump’s election](#) campaign – runs the immigration removal centre in South Lanarkshire where people are held while the Home Office decides applications for asylum.

[GEO Group](#) is one of America’s largest prison companies and it runs 141 facilities worldwide including detention centres in Texas where migrant families are detained. The firm is currently [facing two law suits](#) in Washington after allegations that migrant detainees were exploited and paid a dollar a day for work



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Detainees in Dungavel are allowed to work but only for a fraction of the minimum wage, prompting fierce criticism of the UK Government which contracted GEO Group to run the centre. Rates of pay are determined by the Home Office.

A lawyer acting for asylum seekers in Dungavel described the rates of pay as a “national shame” while the SNP said it was “appalling” and accused the Tory Party of exploiting vulnerable people.

The [latest accounts](#) for GEO Group UK Limited reveal the company made a profit of £911,877 for the year ended 31st December 2017. It made a loss of £2,265,531 in 2016.

Detainees at Dungavel can work up to 30 hours a week doing jobs such as cleaning toilets, hairdressing and gardening.

A [report earlier this year](#) revealed that people received just £130,919 for 128,742 hours worked between November 2014 and April 2017, prompting condemnation of UK Government policy and a claim of “slavery”.

GEO Group is one of America’s top private prison firms. Along with affiliates, it contributed more than half a million dollars to then-candidate Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign and his inaugural committee, according to [Federal Election Commission data](#).

GEO’s UK subsidiary is called [The GEO Group UK Ltd](#). GEO Group previously held other UK detention centre contracts. The firm ran Campsfield in 2006-11, and Harmondsworth in 2009-14, but lost these contracts to Serco and Mitie respectively.

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TOUFIQUE HOSSAIN, DUNCAN LEWIS SOLICITORS

[Toufique Hossain](#), director of public law at Duncan Lewis solicitors, represents clients in Dungavel and is challenging Home Office policy through legal action.

He said: “It should be a source of national shame that our government is allowing private companies like the GEO Group to outsource their responsibilities to detainees for £1 per hour.

“Not only this, the Home Office has banned detainees from earning a penny more. Detainees are having to cut hair, clean floors and scrub toilets among other things, during their detention, as they struggle to afford toiletries and phone credit to speak to the outside world.

“We are challenging this disgraceful policy in the Courts so that the Home Office are forced to uphold the basic dignity of working detainees.”

SNP MSP for East Kilbride [Linda Fabiani](#) said: “This is appalling – Theresa May’s government is not just condoning the exploitation of vulnerable people at Dungavel Detention Centre while a private company makes a serious profit – these revelations show that her government is the one doing the exploiting.

“The Scottish Tories should be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the rest of us against the Westminster Tory government’s callous approach to immigration detention and cruel treatment of vulnerable people. They should be demanding their colleagues in Westminster honour their promise and shut down Dungavel.”

A Home Office spokesperson said: “The longstanding practice of offering paid activities to people in immigration detention centres has been praised by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons as it helps to keep them occupied whilst their removal is being arranged.

“Whether or not they wish to participate is entirely up to the detainees themselves, but the numbers of detainees volunteering for paid activities across the detention estate is evidence that the jobs are popular. This practice is not a substitute for the work of trained staff.”

Police inspectorate calls for time limit on immigration detention



The organisation responsible for scrutinising police in Scotland has backed a call for an end to the indefinite detention of immigrants.



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A spokesman for The GEO Group UK Limited told The Ferret it operates Dungavel on behalf of the Home Office and that the “maximum percentage profit margin” is set out in its contract with the UK Government, with the profit reported annually.

The statement said: “Dungavel, in common with all other UK detention services, is required by its contract with the Home Office to offer detainees the opportunity for voluntary paid activity. Rates of pay are determined by the Home Office.

“Detainees do not need to pay any of the normal day to day living costs of people in the community. The work detainees undertake does not contribute to our profits. Detainees working are not a substitute for our own directly employed staff.

“We are paid to employ an agreed staffing complement to operate the centre. The voluntary paid activity scheme for detainees is paid for at the equivalent of the Home Office rate of £1 per hour within the fixed fee contract for operating the centre.

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Dungavel is required by its contract to provide 64 paid activity places each day, The Geo Group Ltd continued, adding that detainees may choose to work up to a maximum of 30 hours per week, or not at all.

“We usually have a waiting list, a spokesman said. He added: “The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland report of its inspection of Dungavel highlights how important it is to provide meaningful activity for detainees to participate in and to help occupy their days and maintain their mental health. Inspectors were pleased that opportunities for paid activity are made available for detainees.

“The practice of making voluntary paid activity available to detainees has also been praised by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons. HMCIP reported that Dungavel provides a good and supportive environment for detainees and has done excellent work to mitigate the inevitable stresses of detention.

“The report mentioned that in confidential discussions with inspectors, detainees themselves were positive about their treatment. The average length of stay for detainees in Dungavel is about 45 days.”

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