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Education and low-wage jobs: Time for a change

By Tim Libretti

Rather than asking individuals to increase their value, we need to transform how we as a society value the work individuals perform.

Recently when President Obama admonished corporate CEOs to stop complaining about regulations, he roused a sharp retort from the corporate world, accusing him of “not getting it” and not doing enough to remove uncertainties caused by regulations that discourage companies from hiring. While his remarks were arguably nothing more than a gentle yet scolding reminder that corporations have fared quite well coming out of the recession, in comparison to the proverbial “ordinary people” of Main Street, the intensity of corporate blowback underscores just how difficult any political struggle will be to orchestrate meaningful redistribution of resources.

Nonetheless, this tart exchange, an episode of verbal sparring in the arena of class struggle, represents another installment in the unfolding conversation about “income inequality” (a euphemism for class inequality, but “class” is a Voldemort concept that shall not be named in American political discourse, except when invoking the phantom “middle class”).

This topic promises to have staying power as it continues to find the center of national debate.



As if on cue, in the midst of the verbal class struggle between Obama and corporate America, the ratings agency Standard and Poor's issued a report claiming the increasing wealth gap has negatively impacted economic growth and slowed recovery from the Great Recession.

The report argues this gap makes the economy more vulnerable to a boom-bust cycle and slows growth, causing S&P to cut its growth estimates for the economy because of the increasing concen-

T H I S W E E K :

- Education and low-wage jobs: Time for a change
- This is what I see when I drive
- “Put the middle class first” bus tour hits Connecticut
- Derechos de los inmigrantes y las elecciones
- Mercedes-Benz workers form new union local in AL

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tration of wealth among the notorious one percent. Certainly, by no measure is S&P a progressive or left-leaning organization linked to Obama's supposed socialist agenda.

Neither is the U.S. Conference of Mayors, which recently issued a report asserting that while the

We need to transform how we as a society value the work individuals perform.

8.7 million jobs lost in the recession have been regained, the average wage has dropped 23 percent. The report also calls the growing income inequality and wage gap “alarming.”

So, it seems that even corporate America might begin to recognize that its own interests lie in fostering a healthy economy, which means addressing income inequality.

The solutions so often proposed to countervail income inequality, however, are stale, ineffective, and counter-intuitive if one stops to think for two seconds, invoking the ever-popular and indeed mythical narratives of upward mobility and advancement through education that, quite simply, fail to grasp the reality of how our socio-economic system actually works and promote a blindness to the conditions that cause growing wage inequality.

For example, while the Standard and Poor’s study cites spurring educational achievement as a way to narrow the wealth gap and points out that a higher level of education typically translates

into a higher wage, this recycled truism does not recognize that regardless of people’s educational level, as a collective we as a society still need certain work done. We need the cabbages picked, buildings cleaned, products assembled, children taught.

Even if everybody in the U.S. earned advanced degrees, we still need people to do the necessary work that makes our lives possible, which includes the vital work that gets done by those working in low-wage jobs.

Indeed, our beloved narrative of upward mobility merely legitimates low-wage work and economic inequality rather than addressing wage inequality systemically.



Tim Libretti writes for PoliticusUSA.

This is what I see when I drive

By Steve Kloppenburg

I’ve driven into the new world where money is god and quarterly profit the new charity.

As I drive along, I notice the landscape is ever changing. Walmarts and dollar stores sprout from the empty lots, sparked in earlier times by the incessant want of a bargain. We consumed the inexpensive at the expense of well-paying jobs and a decimated economy.

Ninety-nine cent T-shirts as a pathway to poverty. Low-priced televisions to dull our minds to the impending disaster, a nightly fix of propaganda. The corner convenience store where low-wage faceless drones labor under the incessant glare of a fluorescent-lit security camera. But whose security do these cameras look out for? The only credit given here is on a card. No neighbor behind the counter who is a proprietor, willing to wait till Friday for payment on goods needed today.

The inconvenient truth of convenience stores, no grace period, every penny counts and if you don’t have every penny then walk away empty

handed. No milk for the children, formula for the baby. Starvation is preferable to a short cash register. Corporate does not see hunger, just the bottom line.

I’ve driven into the new world where money is god, quarterly profit the new charity. A system devised to benefit the very few with a loyalty to the wealthiest only. The vile narcissism of greed, enforced by corruption and enshrined by propaganda. The untouchables, with a sociopathic awareness of the daily bottom line, always looking for a bargain in the halls of congress, the regulatory agencies and the courts. They stand in the ever shifting sands of their definition of patriotism.

Gracie ran a neighborhood store by my grandmother’s house, always willing to extend credit to those in need, add a few extra pieces of penny candy to a young boys bag of candy, to share her bounty with others.

Say goodnight Gracie, your humanity is a bad business model.

“Put the middle class first” bus tour hits Connecticut

By Joelle Fishman



Greeting the 19-state “Put the Middle Class First” bus tour as it stopped off in Hartford, Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman recalled that the day after the “Raise the Minimum Wage” Americans United for Change bus tour, “we were able to raise Connecticut’s minimum wage so that people would not live in poverty.”

Wyman and Governor Dannel Malloy are in a tight race with Tea Party Republican challenger Tom Foley, who opposes the wage increase is spending millions on misleading and divisive ads.

“We have changed things,” said Wyman. “We have people who will be earning a \$10.10 minimum wage, we have people who have health insurance who didn’t have it before. We now have 60,000 new jobs created under this administration, while Tom Foley only gets rid of jobs.”

Four years ago, in their last match-off decided by only a few thousand votes, Foley angered many public workers with his statement that “we need a Wisconsin moment” in Connecticut.

“If Tom Foley wants to see a ‘Wisconsin moment,’ I’ll pay for a one-way ticket for Tom Foley to go to Wisconsin,” said Wyman. “We need our unions in this state. We need our workers in this state. And we’re going to protect them.”

The tour, which is traveling to states across the country locked in toss-up races for Governor, U.S. Senate and Representative, started in New Hampshire with Rep. Carol Shea Porter and Maine with Rep. Mike Michaud, who is running for Governor.

Leading up to the election, the goal is to focus public attention on the need for economic policies that support workers and their families. These include raising the minimum wage, equal pay for equal work, making college affordable, creating jobs by investing in infrastructure, and protecting Social Security and Medicare.

“Social Security may be the most important successful program this government has ever established,” said Bill Tyszka of the Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans. “Substantial numbers of Americans have a decent quality of life because of Social Security.”

Americans United for Change hopes to help drive home the “clear choice before voters on Nov. 4 between having a Democratic Congress and state government that works for them -- or a Tea Party government that works for corporate special interests like the Koch brothers.”

The goal is to focus public attention on the need for economic policies that support workers and their families.

LOCAL NEWS

LOCAL CONTACT

contact@peoplesworld.org

Mercedes-Benz workers form new union local in Alabama

By Peoplesworld.org

At a news conference Oct. 3, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International (MBUSI) employees and the United Auto Workers - with support from the Daimler World Employee Committee and the German automotive trade union IG Metall - announced the formation of UAW Local 112, a new local union providing representation for workers at the MBUSI assembly plant in Vance, Ala.

The MBUSI plant in Tuscaloosa County is the only Daimler plant in the world that does not currently offer employee representation. Organized by MBUSI employees, UAW Local 112 offers workers the opportunity for a voice in the workplace that aligns with Daimler AG's global commitment to the German principle of "co-determination" between management and employees. UAW Local 112 will represent any interested employees who join the local as members. No employees will be required to join.

"Mercedes-Benz is one of the most storied brands in the history of the global automotive industry, and that's in large part because of the company's workers," said Dennis Williams, president of the UAW. "It's time for the committed and hard-working employees at MBUSI to have the same representation that Daimler employees enjoy around the world. It's the right thing to do."

Derechos de los inmigrantes y las elecciones

Por Emile Schepers

Todavía hierve la ira después que el presidente Obama declarara que retrasará el prometido anuncio de otorgar alivio a los inmigrantes indocumentados hasta después de las elecciones de mitad de período que se realizan el 4 de noviembre. Las personas directamente involucradas con las luchas de las comunidades de inmigrantes señalan miles de personas más serán deportadas debido a este retraso.

A veces uno se pregunta si nuestros políticos saben lo que significa que el sostén de una familia u otros miembros sean deportados. Esas familias pueden ser enviadas a situaciones no sólo de pobreza extrema, sino de peligro mortal, como en las zonas ultraviolentas de Centroamérica de donde proceden los niños migrantes. Si tienen empleos, los pierden. Si tienen casas y están pagando una hipoteca, los miembros de la familia que dejan atrás no pueden mantenerse al día con los pagos y probablemente al final sean expulsados de sus hogares. El daño emocional a los cónyuges y los hijos menores de edad que quedan detrás es desgarrador.

Familiares, amigos, vecinos y compañeros de trabajo de las personas que se enfrentan a la deportación deben seguir organizándose, protestando y agitando. Todo lo que se ha obtenido hasta ahora ha sido gracias a eso; nada sucede sin esa presión, ya sea la aprobación de una legislación en el Congreso o las órdenes ejecutivas de la Casa Blanca.

Sin embargo, también tenemos que asumir una actitud realista con respecto a lo que los políticos pueden o

no hacer. El descontento es legítimo, pero nos guste o no, así es como funciona el sistema político de Estados Unidos y es poco probable que cambie a corto plazo. Los cálculos electorales nunca pueden quedar fuera de la estrategia.

Si los republicanos ganan el control del Senado y mantienen su mayoría en la Cámara, no se ayudará a una sola familia más de inmigrantes y las cosas podrían empeorar. Es probable que ninguna legislación de reforma migratoria progresista llegue a aprobarse en el Congreso hasta después de las elecciones de 2016. El mal que podría acarrear en este y otros temas un Congreso en el que ambas cámaras estén bajo el control de una mayoría republicana es real y desalentador. Acciones muy negativas podrían llegar a ser aprobadas, como sabotear el programa DACA mediante la eliminación de su presupuesto.

Así que hablar de boicotear las elecciones del 4 de noviembre es poco realista y peligroso. Tampoco es probable que en ese corto plazo surja alguna candidatura alternativa que pudiera producir mucho más que una protesta sin importancia.

Por nuestra parte, debemos promover

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523

Email: contact@peoplesworld.org