

the Socialist

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**MAY
DAY!**



editor's note



May Day is a time to think about why good jobs are hard to find, why wages are falling, and why educational choices and our standards of living are being reduced. Why, when CEOs of failing enterprises win multi-million-dollar bonuses, this society can't afford a \$15/hour subsistence minimum wage.

Socialists have said that the problem is the social-economic system of capitalism, in which profits drive production and distribution of goods, and in which the main means of production are owned privately.

Following this issue, *The Socialist* will launch a series of articles on the roots of the post-2008 economic and financial crisis – a crisis for workers and for capitalism, created by capitalism. We will look at socialist accounts of these events and socialist proposals to solve the problems. We will compare them with the accounts and solutions offered by liberal economists such as Paul Krugman and George Stiglitz.

One of our sources will be Richard Wolff's *Capitalism Hits the Fan*. Wolff explains that capitalism has survived previous crises, as in the 1930s and 1970s, by alternating between two policies: reliance mainly on private solutions and deregulation (e.g., the "Reagan Revolution"), and heavier reliance on public solutions (e.g., the New Deal and Keynesianism).

Neither policy solves the fundamental problem of capitalist economic crises generated by workers' inability to buy all that they produce, due to what is taken from them in the form of corporate profits. Wolff argues that relying on "Main Street" capitalism against the "Wall Street" kind is a false solution.

Part of our series will look at long-term inherent trends that generate crisis, speculation, fraud and theft by the very wealthy, such as the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, even as absolute profits rise. We will discuss where the economic parts of the Socialist Party's Statement of Principles and Platform come from, and some alternative proposals that go beyond the limits of capitalist social relations. — *Lynn*

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WORKERS ORGANIZATION OF A BRONX RESTAURANT SHOWS LATINO IMMIGRANT STYLE ORGANIZING

by
DAN LABOTZ

What does organizing among Latino workers look like today? The owner of the Liberato Restaurant in the Bronx, New York found out on April 19th when more than a hundred restaurant workers and their supporters — including a six-piece band — filed into his establishment chanting in Spanish “Exploiters no, workers yes.” One well-dressed group of supporters had entered the dining room earlier as customers. At their table they raised toasts to the cooks, servers, helpers and cleaners and in support of their demands for better treatment. Then, shortly afterwards, dozens of other supporters entered chanting and clapping, as the Rude Mechanical Band (three clarinets, a trombone player, and drummers) played its rhythmic, upbeat music. For two hours afterwards the group continued to demonstrate outside the Liberato, as various labor and left groups gave speeches alternately in Spanish and English, supporters chanted, and the spirited band played on.

The workers, virtually all of them Latino and Spanish speaking, have been organizing secretly for months, and the action on April 19th represented the debut of their campaign which had been coordinated by the Laundry Workers Center, a group that organizes not only laundry and restaurant workers but also tenants in apartment buildings, as well as inspiring a women’s group in one neighborhood. The LWC members involved in the campaign — some of whom have worked at Liberato for seven or eight years — are demanding that their employer sit down and negotiate with them over a long list of alleged problems, including violations of the Wages and Hours Law (requiring workers to labor 70 hours a week without a day off and to work through 10-hour days without a break for lunch), stealing the workers’ tips, and verbally abusing the workers. Flagrant violations of the law such as these are characteristic of the conditions faced by many Latino immigrant workers as well as by other low-wage workers.

How is this experience different from other labor organizing efforts? First, no labor union is involved. The Laundry Workers Center is not a union; it has no offices, no staff, and no distant leadership in Washington. But then, too, it has no treasury, no strike fund, and no research and education depart-

ment. Second, the LWC’s members are nearly all Latino and African-American workers employed at laundries and restaurants and other workplaces that are too small for most unions to be bothered with. Third, the LWC, even more than most workers’ centers, relies on its members’ commitment, and their solidarity, which derives in part from their common experiences not only as low wage workers, but as community members, tenants, and family member.

The Liberato workers are counting on their supporters to give them strength in dealing with their boss. And who are these allies? They are other workers from the Laundry Workers Center’s own workers’, tenants’, and women’s organizations. They are other workers, such as *Jornaleros Unidos* (United Day Laborers), another small, struggling group of low-paid workers who showed up at Liberato. They are activists from the Occupy Wall Street movement 99 Pickets. They are members of various socialist organizations. They are religious supporters such as Pastor Fabian Arias of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church of Manhattan, an Argentine immigrant himself, who, before going off with the crowd to march through the restaurant, offered, not a prayer, but the thought that all religious people believe in the same God and that even those who are not religious believe in our common life and that “we must all take care of each other.” He said he hoped God would favor the workers struggle for justice and also touch the heart of the boss and change his attitude and behavior.

Just as they have done for more than a 100 years, immigrants organize in their own communities where they can speak their own language and often share religious beliefs, although Latino immigrants today may be either Roman Catholic or Evangelical Christians, and, among some Latino groups, there is also a strong anti-clerical tradition. One should leave one’s stereotypes behind. One of the key advisors of the Laundry Workers is a Sephardic Jew from the Dominican Republic. What binds immigrants groups together most fundamentally is their character as working-class communities sharing the same conditions of work and everyday life in the barrio.

Immigrants groups may start their meetings with prayers, with guitar music and singing of movement songs, or with reading from Latin America's great poets such as Pablo Neruda or César Vallejo. Immigrant organizations such as Make the Road New York offer their members information and advice about immigration law, taxes, health, education, and housing problems. They often teach English, sometimes teach trades or give classes on health and safety on the job. The workers' centers, which represent just one kind of immigrant organization, may be affiliated with a church, with a labor union or federation, or with be part of a national network, such as the National Day Laborers Network (NDALON). Often — and these can be mixed blessings — such groups receive financial assistance from foundations, become involved with the non-governmental and government organizations, and offer support to politicians in exchange for their patronage. Few are as independent and grassroots as the Laundry Workers.

Workers centers developed in the 1980s and 1990s in part because unions, sometimes because they were dominated by white men unaware of immigrants' experiences and needs, or simply because they were bureaucratic organizations, failed to respond to immigrant workers' needs. Today, while the composition of some unions has changed, and in some cases the leadership as well, by incorporating immigrant and female leaders, though labor organizations often remain as bureaucratic, hierarchical, and heavy-handed as in the past. They still often focus on organizing the big companies, on blitzing the workplace, getting signed cards calling for a representation election, and winning recognition through the National Labor Relations Board. Today, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) are involved in campaigns to organize fast food workers and big box stores. But such approaches do not necessarily reach the 200,000 restaurant workers in New York City, for example, most of whom work in medium or small sized restaurants, many of which are not part of national chains.

So immigrants like those in the Laundry Workers Center have taken the matter into their own hands. They want the employer to sit down and negotiate with them. They realize this may be a long struggle. The struggle now is the hearts and minds of the workers in the kitchen, in the dining room, and, if necessary, on the street. We their allies are prepared to back them, the other workers, the pastor, and the Occupy activists. And the band is tuning up for the next march.

DAN LABOTZ is a teacher, writer, and activist who lives in Brooklyn, New York. He is a co-editor of New Politics (newpol.org) and editor of Mexican Labor News and Analysis. He is a member of Solidarity and of the Socialist Party and was the party's candidate from Ohio for the U.S. Senate in 2010.

Bearing Witness

by

JEREMY CRAIG

Barely had I gotten lost

When once at left, I felt your ghost.

And shudders trickled up my spine

But stayed for just a tick at most.

So when I turned to mark your frame

Your spectre flickered and dissolved.

And thus I saw my path was clear.

And thus I felt my choice resolved.

JEREMY CRAIG is a proud father of too many children and currently working on a degree in Political Science so he can more effectively smash capitalism.



SOCIALISTS AND THE SEVEN DEADLY TRENDS

by
STEVE ROSSIGNOL

As the Socialist Party celebrates its 40th year of being America's only democratic socialist political party, we enter a new generation of a somewhat different nature than what we experienced in 1973.

On the one hand, our goal is still that of the transformation of American society into a cooperative society based on needs, rather than a competitive society based on greeds. But on the other hand, our task is all the more difficult.

Stepping back and analyzing social and economic trends in this country and the world over the past 40 years can allow the discovery that there are a lot harsher realities out there now than there was when we reorganized the Socialist Party in 1973. The world out there is a lot meaner.

1. Our physical environment is decaying rapidly. Climate change and pollution are leading us to a dangerous precipice from which there may not be a point of return. This continuing poisoning of our biosphere is quite potentially leading to our demise as a species. We all recognize the danger here, but more specifically we recognize who is re-

sponsible, and that it is the same villain we have always faced: a corporate capitalist system that places short-term profit for a few above any sort of long-range concern for the future. We cannot count on our elected officials any more; there is also the continuing trend of public governments being more and more submissive to business interests. Additionally, the failure of the corporate and political leadership to understand the need to shift away from carbon-based energy sources toward cleaner energy sources keeps the environmental decay going.

2. Our political freedoms are decaying. Revelations over the past several months show that we have a government that does not respect individual freedoms or privacy, nor even the privacy of their own international allies. The electronic age seems to have given these "intelligence" agencies the means for taking all of our liberties for granted in the perverted name of "national security." Even our systems of legal jurisprudence, which are constitutionally designed to protect our rights of privacy, appear to have been bullied and compromised by the alleged fear of terrorism. When our

government stoops so low as to monitor the players of online video games or the pornography habits of political opponents, we should realize that we may have entered a point of no return here also; the spy apparatus is now so large and so entrenched that it is unlikely it will ever be dismantled.

3. The trend of decaying political and civil liberties above is coupled with the additional trend of the militarization of our police forces, as well as their increasing arrogance and brutality. Domestic disturbance calls are now being met by heavily armed SWAT teams, and the numbers of police involved in shootings and beatings are on the rise, many involving unarmed Latinos and African-Americans. It seems that once again the course is to “shoot first and ask questions later.” There are increasing reports of police corruption, official repression, and abuses of power. There seems to be a pervasive attitude of disdain that goes along with the badge and the gun, along with that arrogance that there is no need to be accountable to anyone.

4. Just as our police forces are becoming militarized, so our military continues to be involved in policing the entire world. The “War on Terror” appears to be a good Bogeyman on which to augment government spending on increasingly sophisticated and expensive amoral weapons systems. One billion dollars for a battleship. Drone technology that can destroy wedding parties in Pakistan but apparently cannot be used to find missing jet liners. Our historically longest war in Afghanistan continues in spite of all proclamations to downsize and withdraw. Military operations in many other nations of the world continue, despite not frequently making the headlines. This military trend seems to be a persistent factor of US foreign policy, and it continues to be geared towards the interest of the same corporate interests that are destroying our environment.

5. Indeed, the same business and corporate capitalist mentality, which is the root of all our problems, is totally unleashed and out of control. The 1% continue to increase their wealth at the expense of all the rest. Corporate regulation is declining in favor of increasing deregulation and

privatization, and growing attacks on the social sector seem vicious in nature. The new attacks on so-called “entitlements” are merely another way for the business interests to increase profits. The system has gone haywire on a corporate hayride, and our legislators are either paid lackeys of the system or spineless opponents. The class war is being waged, and it is being waged by an organized system that is bent on defeating any sort of moderate defense of the underdog.

6. While the capitalists are well organized, it looks as though the only groups that can effectively stop The System — organized labor — is disorganized and slowly losing any sort of economic clout.

Minor victories are being won and some gains will be made, but as a whole, organizing workers into unions is declining. As the capitalists have moved major manufacturing out of the country, the union backbone of the American middle-class is in decline. In the harsh economic times manufactured by the corporate structure, Labor faces economic pressures from the non-union sector in a race for jobs. Traditional union bases have disappeared, and many people are simply afraid of not having a job. Without an organized union force in this country, there can be no check on the economic abuse of power of business.

7. The loss of an organized work force is reflected within the ranks of The Movement. There has developed a lethargy on the Left even while there is increasing rigor from the Republican Right. Socialism does not have the respectability it once did, and many progressives will avoid the concept out of fear of being branded a “commie” by the right opposition, as demonstrated by the simple if inadequate concept of affordable health care espoused by the Obama Administration. The Left remains fractionalized and passive, even while Big Money stands united and aggressive.

What are the solutions? One wishes we could double-click a mouse and make it all better. But reality tells us it will take a lot more.

STEVE ROSSIGNOL is Archivist of the Socialist Party USA .



WHAT'S NEXT IN THE STRUGGLE FOR HEALTHCARE RIGHTS?

by
DAVID KEIL

As insurance enrollments of previously uninsured U.S. working people rise under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Republicans and Democrats continue to spar over health-care policy. Labor groups and forces associated with social progress advocate truly universal, affordable health care by removing market obstacles to access, including insurance-company and pharmaceutical-industry super-profits.

Is the idea of health care as a human right, often associated with a “single payer” or “national health care” system, emerging as an issue in the near future? Or is the ACA, often called “Obamacare,” a step away from that? How can we move effectively toward decent health care as a human right in the U.S.?

This article will review a range of perspectives, from those of liberals and moderate socialists to radical-minded socialist groups. This may help put in perspective one of the current issues in the news, which is the decision by nineteen Republican-led states to reject the expansion of Medicaid support for poor people, provided for and funded by the ACA.

Thus, while millions of persons previously lacking access to health care are gaining access — about 40% of previously uninsured Kentucky residents are now covered — millions more are still denied access by the spite of right-wing governors and legislators. A million Texans and 300,000 Mississippians are among these.

Liberal columnists such as Paul Krugman and Katrina vanden Heuvel (editor of the Nation) are campaigning on this issue. Vanden Heuvel writes, “It’s time for Democrats to run on health-care reform, not away from it” (Washington Post, 3/25/14). Thus for some, the issue of health care as posed as a partisan issue in which one party is in the right and the other in the wrong.

The labor-union officialdom leading the AFL-CIO has this perspective as well. The AFL-CIO’s web site states, “The Affordable Care Act is a historic milestone” toward guaranteed high-quality health care for all. It points to the danger of repealing the ACA or its key provisions, while also advocating extending access to health care by providing “Medicare for all.”

The views of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are often consistent with those of the AFL-CIO leadership. DSA’s emphasis is to ask its supporters to contact their Congress members to sponsor single-payer legislation. The DSA web site contains a history of the effort for national health

insurance by Gerald Friedman of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. It points out that the ACA discussion has reflected a move to the right by both Democrats and Republicans. The legislation that Republicans and Fox News today are calling “socialist” matches proposals by Republican Newt Gingrich and the right-wing Heritage Foundation in the 1990s. To obtain Democratic votes for the ACA, the Obama administration “has entrenched the insurance and drug companies as arbiters of America’s health care system,” according to Friedman. Nevertheless, he writes, “the ACA commits the United States to providing universal access to health care ... a great achievement, one to be treasured and nurtured.”

Another opinion source on the left is Portside, often looked to by supporters of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism (CCDS). An article by Rose Ann DeMoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee (CNA/NNOC). DeMoro advocates the single-payer as an alternative to the ACA. She emphasizes faults in the ACA from the standpoint of health-care service users. The Socialist Party has long advocated, in its Platform, a socialized health-care system that would replace private health insurance for profit with an efficient way of providing health care to all, as needed, funded by a steeply graduated income tax. It sees single-payer as a first step toward a comprehensive system that would include “public ownership and worker and community control of the pharmaceutical industry.” Full reproductive health care would be a basic part of such a system.

Stephanie Cholensky, Co-Chair of the SP USA, said in a statement in October, 2013, “The Affordable Care Act enacts long overdue regulations such as preventing insurance companies from denying coverage or charging more because of a person’s sex or because of a pre-existing condition. However, the Act’s benefits to working people fall short under closer scrutiny, as it grants the care they should have had to begin with, but lacks a single-payer option and still leaves an estimated 30 million uninsured. The Affordable Care Act does call for public funding of health care, but these public funds end up in the pockets of the wealthy at

the end of the day, making it hardly different from other corporate welfare programs.”

Left currents within the labor movement are similarly highly critical of ACA. Mark Dudzic, of the Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare, writes that the ACA having the effect of increasing inequality between union and non-union workers, in part because it was “deliberately designed to continue to treat healthcare as a commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace and primarily covered through employment-based private insurance plans.” He refers to a section on health care in Steve Early’s book, *Save Our Unions*, that explains how unions in the U.S. designated health care as a contract benefit, not a right, decades ago.

Strong criticism of the ACA can also be found in *Labor Notes*, a publication by union activists that has existed for several decades. A concern by a March 2013 article by James McGee is that, “Because the Affordable Care Act (ACA) tilts the playing field to disadvantage multiemployer plans, this decades-old gain of the labor movement may be irreparably damaged.”

The Green Party of the U.S. offers a negative view of the ACA, whose benefits a former Green Party candidate said “are thoroughly offset by numerous defects and continued deficiencies that can be readily remedied by legislation that expands Medicare to all Americans.” Green Party 2012 standard bearer Jill Stein has predicted the collapse of the ACA.

Likewise, an article in *Socialist Alternative* states that ACA is not the answer that working and poor people had hoped for. “Designed to convert the 47 million uninsured Americans into paying customers for the insurance and pharmaceutical corporations, Obamacare adds unnecessary costs and layers of complexity for patients and health care providers. ... Insurance does not guarantee affordability. It guarantees profits to the insurance corporations.” *Socialist Alternative* is a group that ran Kshama Sawant’s victorious campaign for Seattle City Council in fall 2013.

An article by Gary Lapon, published by *Socialist*

Worker, argues, “The ACA isn’t a bridge to universal health care. It is a cul-de-sac, structured above all else to maintain the central role of the health care industry.” According to Lapon, “the ACA has made achieving universal coverage much more difficult.” *SW* is published by International Socialist Organization (ISO).

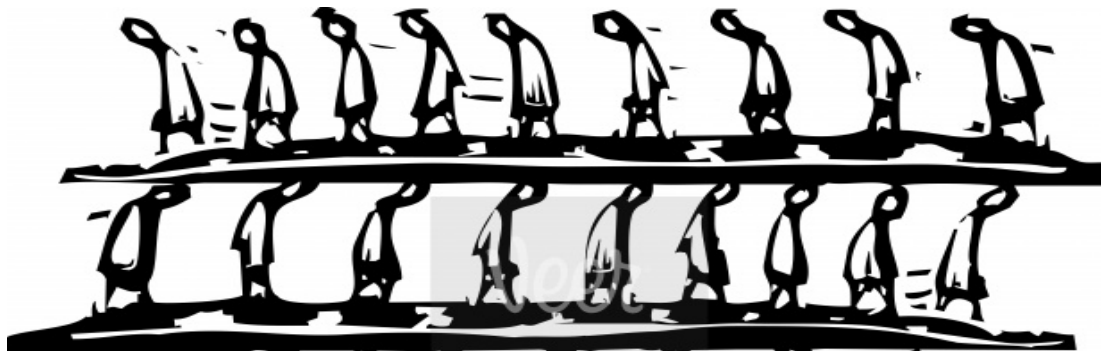
A review of left views on ACA and the struggle for universal health care shows divergent emphasis and analysis. Can labor and socialist activists work together? A first step is to become aware of the differences and to consider them.

How can we move toward health care as a right? One socialist argument would be that the Democrats, like the Republicans, are tied by a thousand financial and other connections to the profit-making health-care industry. Writing to them, lobbying them without money in hand, or addressing public appeals to them may accomplish little.

What will make a difference is more likely to be the mobilization of large numbers of people in the streets. To do that, the unions would have to loosen their ties to the Democrats and take a more independent course as suggested by *Labor Notes*, the Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare, and others.

Socialists can advance that by consulting together and waging local struggles, with allies, aiming toward nationwide mobilizations. The mobilizations could begin, for example, with defensive efforts like the Moral Mondays in North Carolina or with protests against the exclusion of poor people in some states from Medicaid.

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OUR LAND BUILT ON THE BACKS OF LABOR

A Sermon
by
AJ SEGNERI

In 1999, my friends and I took a trip to New Mexico to backpack for two weeks in the southern Rockies. On this particular backpacking trip we visited various sites along the trail, and one of the sites was a coal mine where tours were offered. When we met the tour guide, he provided us coal miner helmets and we all walked into the dark abyss of the mine. As we walked the football field length of the mine, we came across equipment that was unchanged by time. We listened to the stories of the conditions miners faced: such as fires, falling rocks, and methane leaks. They risked these hazards so they could earn a paycheck for the amount of coal they hauled out. At the end of the tour, our guide told us to turn off our helmet lights and walk back out of the mine so that we could fully appreciate what these men did when their helmet lights went out.

What I experienced out in New Mexico was just a small piece of what has happened in our history. Our nation was built by workers who literally broke their backs, who poured sweat and blood to provide the basic needs for their families just so we can live comfortably. I would like to put this into a historical context.

On June 25, 1867 in California, Chinese workers left their work project laying tracks for the Trans-Continental Railroad, demanding \$40 a month instead of the \$35 a month they were receiving, plus a reduction in hours. This should also remind us of

the painful memory of slavery, when men, women, and children were tortured, given poor working and living conditions, and no pay for their work in the fields or around the plantations.

To bring this history closer to home, I am reminded of May 5, 1886, when 14,000 Milwaukee Iron workers demanded an eight-hour workday. They organized in the city, and then struck. Then Governor Rusk ordered the national guard to shoot to kill any of the workers who came onto the premises of the factory. Seven people, including a 13-year-old, died that day.

In her book “Trapped,” Karen Tintori described a chilly Saturday on November 13, 1909, when 500 men and boys — some as young as 11 — were working in the Cherry Mine in Cherry, Illinois. They were paid based on the amount of coal they could send to cities like Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. That afternoon, the mineshaft caught on fire and collapsed on the workers. Only a few survived. This disaster was not only the biggest labor tragedy of its time, but also the inspiration for compensation and child labor laws in this country.

Earlier you heard the statement from the workers during the Pullman Strike. That event was one of many labor battles our city endured. From the 19th Century Haymarket Strike to the 21st Century Chicago Teachers Union strike, our city has been out front and center on labor issues. Events that occurred in our town also led to the enactment of

federal legislation and agencies to monitor organizational behavior.

Over the course of history, people have come together to fight for better policies within their work place. They've, formed coalitions with other organizations, and even taken their fight to Washington DC to demand changes in federal policies. These efforts have led to an 8-hour work day, increased wages, better benefits, better working conditions, and much more.

So, with those victories we ought to be satisfied, right? No. History is an evolving story, and it still continues today. We still have issues to face in our nation. In Immokalee, Florida, a coalition of tomato workers that is made up of Haitian, Latino, and Mayan Indian workers receive low wages just so that fast food businesses, food services, and supermarkets are provided a cheap product. Graduate students are fighting to be recognized as equal employees in academia for the work they do. Nurses who work tirelessly around the clock and are still not getting the respect they deserve from their health care employers.

A few years back, a well-known organizer spoke at an event in Chicago. During his presentation I was inspired by some remarks he made, and I would like to paraphrase his remarks. Please help me out with the on-going theme. During the 1920s during the Great Depression, the cry was "Jobs and Justice!" During the 1963 March on Washington, the cry was "Jobs and Justice!" In the 1990s, when workers in Indonesia, China, and Vietnam struggled in NIKE sweatshop controversies, the cry was "Jobs and Justice!" It is now 2013 where Occupiers, union organizers, and other activists are still crying out "Jobs and Justice!"

WELL, WAIT MINUTE. HOW LONG ARE WE GOING STAND OUTSIDE OF GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, PRIVATE BANKS, AND ELECTED OFFICIALS OFFICES WHEN WE HAVE THE POWER TO DO THINGS FOR OURSELVES?

We are conditioned to believe that we cannot do things for ourselves; that we can't speak out about the injustices that occur in our workplaces. But in

2008, workers from then Republic Windows and Doors conducted a sit-in so they could have better wages. Four years later, that they did another sit-in just to keep the factory open. After having enough from the Powers That Be, the workers took matters into their own hands: they bought the factory to form a worker cooperative, which is now called New Era Windows.

Our land was built on the backs of labor by men, women, and children of all demographics. Built from their own blood, sweat and tears just so that we can transport goods across the country, be provided with food at our tables, have facilities to work in, and so much more. The institutions that are causing these problems are doing more harm than good to their workers. While some are profiting, others are trying to figure out how they are going to stay in their homes or if they are going to have food for the week. Where is the quality of life for the workers? Where is the sense of responsibility to take care of those that are doing the work? Where is the sense of accountability of those businesses that are over-working and under-paying its employees?

All of us in this room can make a difference. How? By promoting personal responsibility on those who are not providing the best for their workers; by fighting for economic justice; and by speaking out against those in power. We must be ready to strike, to demonstrate, to boycott, and if all fails, to rebel -- for this is the great power exemplified by working-class history.

If not, then we need to learn from those in history who had enough and were beaten down physically, emotionally, and financially when they were denied a living wage, humane working conditions and benefits.

I would like to end with a quote by one of the great organizers, Cesar Chavez: "The fight is never about grapes or lettuce. It is always about people."

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