

# Trumka tells Netroots Nation it's time for new industrial policy for a globalized world

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AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka laid out a 21st century U.S. economic policy July 26 before a diverse crowd of more than 1,000 political activists attending Netroots Nation.

Netroots Nation is a progressive organization that provides an online campus for exchanging ideas and learning how to be more effective in using technology to influence public debate.

Restoring the nation's middle class in part means returning to a "real economy"—one in which we make things, rather than move around complex financial products, Trumka said. Strengthening U.S. manufacturing must be part of the process to reverse five decades of stagnating wages.

"We have to think big and we have to go big," he said. "We have to let go of this notion that we can't compete in this world. We can compete. Other countries are already doing this and so can we. We can't get left behind."

Speaking as part of a panel on Building a Progressive Economic Vision, Trumka outlined the need for the nation to invest in infrastructure, implement fair trade policies, change U.S. tax policies, enact comprehensive immigration reform, and reform broken labor laws.

The full panel included consumer advocate Elizabeth Warren, Florida Democratic Rep. Alan Grayson, Center for Community Change Executive Director Deepak Bhargava, Green for All's Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins and National People's Action Executive Director George Goehl.

## CORRECTIONS

In the July 16 issue of the Northwest Labor Press, an article about the new union contracts at Daimler's Portland truck plant contained several inaccuracies.

In the contract with members of Machinists Lodge 1005, Daimler agreed to pay a pension surcharge that will total 75 percent by the third year of the contract, or \$577.39 a month — not \$769.85 as reported. The latter figure is the company's current pension contribution.

Also, the article seemed to suggest that retiree health care obligations are the biggest factor in the company decision not to close the Portland plant. Actually, it's the pension obligation that is the overriding factor.

In the "Local Motion" feature that lists union election activity, the Labor Press incorrectly reported that Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) lost a certification election at First Student in St. Helens. It was Teamsters Local 58 that was seeking to represent that unit of school bus drivers, not OSEA. The vote was 16 to 22, and the unit remains nonunion.

Trumka pointed out how the United States is falling behind other countries in creating green technology. While our nation is building 500 miles of high-speed rail, China has begun construction of 5,000 miles and is outspending the United States 2:1 on green technology, making it even more urgent for the United States to invest in green jobs and high-end manufacturing infrastructure now before it falls further behind.

For those who say we can't afford to make these investments, Trumka explained how we can do it with a financial speculation tax that encourages capital to invest in concrete things and discourages unproductive speculation or paper pushing for a quick buck, all the while raising more than \$100 billion. Trumka made it clear that lawmakers must not reduce the federal deficit at the expense of creating jobs.

Next up, Trumka described the need for an integrated trade policy. The nation can't focus solely on increasing exports, but must focus on net exports. "We can't open our markets to other countries who won't open theirs," he said. "We can't support countries that murder trade unionists. All we want is to compete on a level playing field and to do that we must have fair trade policy."

Third, Trumka laid out what lawmakers must do to modify tax policy:

"We need a tax policy that encourages people to produce and manufacture things in this country, not reward those who outsource and produce things abroad," he said. "We have to close the loopholes that allow corporations who have record profits to use gimmicks to avoid paying their fair share of taxes."

Fourth, Trumka spoke in favor of comprehensive immigration reform and made it clear that every AFL-CIO union has endorsed a five-point plan for immigration reform. "Current U.S. immigration policy has allowed corporations to create a permanent underclass of workers who they can take advantage of," Trumka said.

And finally, just as corporations have taken advantage of immigrants, they have skirted, exploited and violated labor laws that empower workers to form a union and bargain for a better life. The good jobs of the past were good jobs because workers organized and fought for fair wages and benefits, he said.

"Without labor law reform, corporations will continue to take advantage of workers and no matter how much we invest in our economy, how much we increase our productivity, our wages will remain stagnant and we will continue to fall behind."

After laying out this five-part plan, Trumka concluded with a call for coordinated action. "We knew this wasn't going to be easy. It's going to take a concerted effort by a lot of us over a long period of time to fix our broken economy. I'm up for it, and I look forward to fighting with you."



## Giddy-up little doggie

An apprentice electrician lineman competes in the 17th annual Lineman Rodeo July 24 at PGE Lineman Station in Gresham. More than 80 lineman from Oregon, Washington, and Idaho participated in events such as the raw egg climb (up a 45-foot pole), hurt-man rescue, and insulator replacement. The competition is fun, but competitors are serious about safety and keeping their skills sharp. The rodeo — considered one of the most challenging in the nation — is sponsored by IBEW Locals 125 and 659, Pacific Power, Portland General Electric and Clark Public Utilities. All concession profits from the event were donated to the Oregon Burn Center. This year, Pacific Power matched that amount for a total donation of \$2,305.91.

## Value of minimum wage lower than in '56

The federal minimum wage is so low today at \$7.25 an hour, says the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, that it's lower than the minimum wage of 1956, which was \$8.02 adjusted for inflation.

Oregon and Washington are ahead of the curve, with Oregon sitting at \$8.40 an hour, unchanged from 2009. Washington's minimum wage is \$8.55.

Today, four out of six occupations employing the largest number of work-

ers nationwide — including retail salespersons, cashiers, and food preparation and serving workers — have a median wage that is lower than the minimum wage of 1968, adjusted for inflation (half make less than the median, half make more), the Let Justice Roll campaign noted.

It would take \$10 to match the buying power of the minimum wage at its peak in 1968.

"The minimum wage was enacted during the Great Depression to put a floor under workers' wages and increase buying power to boost business and economic recovery," said Let Justice Roll Director Holly Sklar. "The fall in worker buying power is a big reason we're in the worst economic crisis since the Depression and a big reason we're having so much trouble getting out of it."

Let Justice Roll, a coalition of more than 100 faith, community, labor, and businesses, is calling for minimum wage increases to make up the ground lost in buying power.

"Income has been redistributed from the bottom and middle to the top," Sklar said. "The share of national income going to the richest 1 percent has more than doubled since 1968. We can't build a healthy economy with the greatest income inequality since 1928 and a minimum wage lower in value than 1956."

Critics oppose minimum wage increases in good times and bad, claiming they increase unemployment. Research, summarized in the report, "Raising the Minimum Wage in Hard Times," updated July 24 at [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org), shows that increasing the minimum wage does not increase unemployment.

## Workers' off-duty conduct sparks lively discussion at LERA meeting

More and more employees are finding themselves disciplined for off-duty conduct. Seventy-five people attended a breakfast program advertised as "When Worlds Collide" on July 13 sponsored by the Oregon chapter of the Labor Employment Relations Association (LERA).

Questions came rapid-fire while two labor law attorneys discussed various scenarios and the discipline that could be appropriate.

Employer-side attorney Dennis Westlind of Stoel Rives LLP offered that discipline, including termination, can be in order if there is a "nexus" with the workplace. "If it has an impact on the business, if it has an impact on the employee's ability to work, or if it affects other employees' ability to perform their work," an employee can be disciplined, Westlind said.

Union attorney Sarah Drescher from the law office of Mike Tedesco agreed. She added that there is a presumption that off-duty conduct is an employee's private business, unless it impacts in these areas. She added that public employees are held to a higher standard

than private-sector employees regarding off-duty conduct.

Much of the discussion related to new social networking activities, such as Facebook, which have caused more employers to find activities that could potentially harm their businesses. These are often things they never would have seen before.

Westlind said in relation to Facebook, that people can't count on information staying with a few of their "friends."

"If it becomes public, it is a game changer," he said.

Drescher also spoke of the need for employers to continue to follow due process, and to draw the nexus back to the employer by showing harm to the business in order to successfully discipline or terminate an employee.

LERA is an organization that brings labor, management, neutral, and academic leaders together to improve labor-management relations.

The next program will be Sept. 23 on "The Art of Closing the Deal." The program will include experts on the do's and don'ts of successful negotiations.