



RANDALL ENOS

LABOR

FROM PAGE ONE

the work ethic while concocting and implementing policies and programs to put people out of work or to underemploy them at part time jobs, with lower wages and without life support benefits like health care or retirement funds.

A leading scholar of the social consequences of unemployment reports that a 1% increase in unemployment causes:

- a 5.7% increase in murders;
- a 4.1% increase in suicides;
- a 4% increase in prison admissions;
- a 3.5% increase in admissions to mental hospitals;
- a 1.9% increase in overall mortality rates.

Unemployment is deadly. Winpisinger again: "On purely macroeconomic grounds, planned unemployment is indefensible. Each one million unemployed workers costs the U.S. Treasury \$30 billion in lost revenues, subsistence unemployment compensation and welfare payments. Simultaneously, the private sector is robbed of \$100 billion in goods and services not produced, as it loses the purchasing power of those millions unemployed."

We need a national policy of full employment. We tell farmers not to plant while people in this country and the world are malnourished. Tens of thousands of building trade workers draw unemployment, while homeless people fill our streets and young families can't find adequate housing. We subsidize plant closings and the liquidation of our manufacturing base, while millions of our fellow citizens need jobs and wages to buy the goods those plants can produce. What's wrong with this picture?

There is plenty of work to be done: low-cost housing, energy conversion, airport construction, urban mass transit, services for seniors and children and the handicapped, rebuilding our inner cities, to name a few. Too many of our workers are languishing on unemployment, welfare, soup lines and homeless shelters.

Full employment would not only address those needs. Wages for the working poor would rise to a decent level. Most of the nation's 32 million citizens living in poverty would be able to remove the stigma of welfare, food stamps, unemployment compensation from their lives. Potential union members would have less to fear about losing their jobs for union activity. The unions could demand more than modest contract settlements which don't keep pace with inflation, and they could halt the skid of real wages. Workers would not be afraid to speak out against environmental, health and safety hazards and violations at the worksite. Class, ethnic and racial conflicts would all but disappear in a full-employment economy. In short, full employment would mean an end to keeping workers, unions and minorities in their places and at each others' throats.

Of course full employment would mean that those at the top of the economic pyramid would have to share some of their power and wealth. That is why they resist, using their hired guns in university economics departments and think-tanks to tell us that full employment can't be achieved. If it can be achieved in democratic socialist countries like Norway and Sweden, it can be achieved here if we have the will.

Labor law reform is necessary to combat increasing employer hostility to unions. The elements of reform should include:

- Companies should be required to bargain with unions once a majority of eligible employees have signed authorization cards, with no elections required. (This is the law in Canada.)
- Serious penalties for firing union supporters, including the right to sue.
- Companies should be required to permit union organizers into non-working areas like lunchrooms.
- If management intimidation occurs, the company can be required to bargain with the union if 30% of employees sign cards.
- Unions should have equal campaign rights: if an employer propagandizes during company time, the union can demand equal access.
- There should be compulsory arbitration of initial contract disputes.
- Government contracts or assistance should be denied to NLRA violators.

-- There should be a prohibition against hiring permanent replacements for striking workers. (This is the law in Canada; several provinces even prohibit hiring of temporary replacements.)

-- The law should allow secondary boycotts in support of organizing-drive strikes.

Richard Rothstein, writing in *The American Prospect*, says, "The unions' campaign for labor law reform, now just beginning, should accelerate. Privately, AFL-CIO leaders could direct clear signals to (Labor Secretary Robert) Reich and his commissioners that flirtation with ineffective substitutes -- like works councils -- should end. President Clinton and his political advisers need to awaken to the political dangers of a non-union America, and define labor law reform as frankly stimulating union organizing success. If a liberal political program is going to be enacted in America, union organizers are first going to have to be able to say, 'Bill Clinton wants you to join the union.'"

A key argument for labor law reform is that workers need a *voice*. They are immobile compared to capital. *Voice* contributes to the dignity and autonomy of individual workers. A meaningful grievance procedure is good for everyone.

Barriers in current law in some states which prohibit union members from sitting on corporate boards should be removed.

Unions need to be allowed to bargain about issues like new technology, transfers of work to non-union subsidiaries, mergers, shutdowns and relocations.

Winpisinger lays out additional items for a labor agenda:

ONE BIG UNION

A look at fledgling labor unions in the early 1900s shows that while it is the A.F.L. that remains prominent today, the more radical Industrial Workers of the World most truly represented the interests of the industrial working class.

For one thing, the I.W.W. was more inclusive and more tolerant than the A.F.L. The A.F.L. and many of its affiliated unions did not readily accept African-Americans, immigrants or women. Blacks were relegated to "Jim Crow locals." And while Samuel Gompers, the A.F.L. leader, encouraged women to aid their striking husbands in Ladies' Auxiliaries, he had little to say about them as organizers and agitators.

The I.W.W. built itself on the premise of inclusion and boasted a diverse membership. An I.W.W. pamphlet read, "If you are a wage worker, you are welcome in the halls of the I.W.W., no matter what your color. By this you may see that the I.W.W. is not a white man's union, not a black man's union, not a red or yellow man's union... (The I.W.W. is all) the working class in One Big Union."

Women were an integral part of all I.W.W. activities, and many, such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Mother Jones were among the union's best organizers. In 1909, Flynn was elected to the General Executive Board, a position which no woman would hold in the A.F.L. and A.F.L.-C.I.O. until 1980. Although some male chauvinism existed, the I.W.W. supported birth control and planned parenthood.

How is the issue of inclusion important? Bosses would often use racial and ethnic divisions to discourage solidarity. After the steel strike of 1918-19, an independent commission found a company memo that was distributed to strike-breaking agents: "We want you to stir up as much bad feeling as you possibly can between the Serbians and Italians... Call up every question you can in reference to racial hatred." Meanwhile, blacks who had been alienated by the A.F.L. acted as strike-breakers and scabs. The strike failed, dampening organizational efforts for the next 20 years.

--GABRIEL BARON EBER

Gabriel Eber was a senior at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, New York, when he wrote this essay last year for a contest sponsored by the New York Council for the Humanities, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. "The Quest for Social Justice" was the theme and 275 of the state's high schools participated. The winners received college scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$5,000.

-- Repeal Section 14(b) of Taft-Hartley, the "right-to-work" or "open shop" section.

-- Political action to preserve what is left of the Roosevelt/Johnson legacy -- unemployment benefits, OSHA, educational opportunity and job training, food stamps, civil rights, human rights, voting rights, senior citizen rights and trade union rights. Fight to expand universal health care and child care.

-- "Agitate, educate, mobilize, organize," Winpisinger says. "Point out every flaw and injustice. Expose every coverup and corruption. Promote every measure of equality and justice."

-- Build coalitions, a new progressive alliance between unions, minorities, women, students, environmentalists, churches and citizen action groups. Build bridges to the community.

-- Recover the Democratic Party from the neo-liberals and fiscal conservatives. Get involved in local and state party politics. Redefine the Party platform and select candidates who will support it.

-- "We must adopt a comprehensive economic and social program to Rebuild America," Winpisinger says, by adopting the social democratic models found in Canada, Europe, and to a lesser extent, Japan.

-- Emphasize the overwhelming power of Corporate America and the Business Roundtable; expose the social irresponsibility of "respectable" conservatism and the anti-democratic, moral bankruptcy of the rightwing.

-- Campaign finance reform. Federal elections must be publicly financed. Continued corporate domination of the government will not permit it to operate in the public interest. Elected officials now spend a large portion of their time raising funds for the next election. They are beholden to their large contributors. Let's make them beholden to their constituents.

Winpisinger writes that "our...program must provide a vision of hope based on four economic rights: the right to guaranteed employment, the right to guaranteed real income gains, the guaranteed right to organize on the job and to bargain collectively, and the right to be involved in economic decisions which effect their jobs and their lives....Under these four broad rights we can distribute all the specific issues we're concerned about: education, job training and retraining, public ownership and investment, the new technology, economic restructuring, fair taxes, fair trade (not free trade), repeal of Taft-Hartley 14(b), plant closing policies, secure retirement and pensions, economic planning and campaign finance reform."

We must put America back to work. Unemployment is the scourge of our economy. It is an awful waste of our most valuable resource, our citizens' labor. It brings with it a host of expensive social problems. When unemployment rises, so does the incidence of child and spouse abuse, alcoholism, homicide, as well as the economic costs.

"We must confront the reality of corporate power and force it to serve the interests of all the people, not just the wealthy," Winpisinger writes.

The Democratic Party must not stand merely for a short-term economic upswing, but for social and economic justice. We need national health insurance, improved unemployment

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