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to equalize distribution of wealth so that the wealthy can't be wealthy anymore, but I think it's time to simply limit it so that you don't have the world's three wealthiest men owning the same amount of wealth as almost the bottom half of the human race. That's just obscene, and I don't think it's sustainable in terms of healthy economies.

E.G.: Your book highlights success stories, where workers came together, rose up and demanded better treatment, and in many cases won in some respect. What can we learn from successful campaigns? What works?

A.O.: One thing that's worked is that wages have increased. When this campaign started, wages had been stagnant for 40 years. As of 2016, we started to see some increases. American low-wage workers between 2012 and 2016 won for themselves \$61.5 billion in wage increases. To get some perspective, that's 12 times what Congress gave them the last time it raised the federal minimum wage in 2007.

Mexican berry pickers, in a huge 2015 strike, doubled their wages. One way they did that was they walked off the farms and blocked the flow of berries into the United States. And berries are the fastest-growing and most wealth-producing sector of the produce industry.

I think blocking the doors to Walgreens on Black Friday, blocking the Transpeninsular Highway where the berries came into the U.S. and just walking off the job – all of those were successful.

Lobbying with city governments has been extremely successful. City governments are the most progressive in the country right now, and you've begun to get minimum-wage laws. New York passed a regulation last summer that workers are hoping will go global, and that was a scheduling ordinance. It mandated that New York City employers must give their workers two weeks' advance notice of their schedules.

(Oregon passed similar legislation in 2017, mandating retail, food service and hospitality employers with 500-plus workers worldwide give employees their schedules at least one week in advance. This law goes into effect July 1, 2018.)

A program called Jobs to Move America has already made deals with the transit



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH COOKE
Cambodian garment workers Thareth Sok and Vun Em are organizers for United Sisterhood Alliance in Phnom Penh.

authorities in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. In these deals, city governments make agreements with local community organizations and unions when they buy buses, trains and trucks for city fleets. (The agreement is) that they are going to award contracts to companies that agree to make those vehicles in the cities where they're going to be used, to hire local people to be the manufacturing workers, to make these union shops, to hire women, people of color, veterans, ex-cons, and also to pay attention to environmental ramifications. The question is, will it then go to places like Portland, Seattle, other cities where there's a chance that you could make those kinds of deals with city governments? I think that's also an extremely promising strategy, and unlike Donald Trump, who promised to bring manufacturing back to American cities, this movement is really doing it.

Another successful strategy was pioneered by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee in the 1970s, and that is to say you don't just target your direct boss on farm, in a garment shop or in an electronic shop. You target the corporation at the top of the supply chain.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers – tomato pickers – started traveling the

country and protesting in front of fast-food stores and Whole Foods and Walmart. They said, "You guys buy all the tomatoes. If you paid a penny more a pound for tomatoes, awarded farmers who paid their workers a little more, paid a little more to fund inspections, by workers, of safety, and to investigate claims of sexual harassment and abuse and enslavement, you would create a better, safer industry." And indeed, where they started, in the Florida tomato fields, which were described by one federal judge as ground zero for modern slavery, are now some of the best agricultural workplaces in the world.

We've seen that same strategy has won with the garment industry. The Bangladesh Fire and Safety Accord, a consumer-labor-worker alliance, convinced 225 of the largest clothing producers in the world to sign an agreement that said, "We will pay more to make sure that our factories are safe, and that workers' wages go up, and that violence against workers does not happen, and we legally bind ourselves to be sued in our own countries if we break this agreement." In Vermont, recently, farmworkers won the same kind of agreement from Ben and Jerry's.

E.G.: Here in Portland, we've got a

minimum wage that will increase to \$14.75 by 2022. That was considered a big win. I couldn't imagine trying to get by on that – even now – if I were a single mother or even a single person, really, with how high rents are. Do you think by fighting for such small concessions, the movement is failing to combat the root cause, as you describe it, of neoliberalism?

A.O.: I think that questioning neoliberalism, this idea that profit and increasing shareholder value is the highest achievement of collective human endeavor, I think that this movement is questioning that.

I think it's questioning this idea that neoliberalism is essential for freedom. It's asking, what is freedom? For us, freedom is freedom from sexual violence, freedom from hunger. It's free water, free education, and free heating and energy assistance. This movement is, in fact, questioning the underpinnings of neoliberalism. But these are poor people. This movement is the 3.5 billion poorest people on Earth, not the top wealthy few, and not even the middle class, except it does now include, increasingly, educated people. So the fact that they have won victories that we see as relatively small is remarkable.

As someone who's always written about poor people's movements, I'm always asked this question: What did they really achieve? How much did they really win? The war on poverty didn't end poverty in our time, no – but it cut it! The war on poverty cut childhood hunger by half in 10 years. There were significant victories, and I think what we need to do is look at these victories and say that they are a foundation for more. Obviously, as Laphonza Butler, who was co-chair of the L.A. living-wage campaign and president to the health care workers local there, said to me, "Nobody's going to Vegas on \$15 an hour."

But, she said, people who are literally strangled by impoverishment and by the sense that nothing was ever going to get better, the psychological benefit and the emotional benefits, even of these small wages, are important. Because they gave them to themselves, and they see that if we struggle, we can win.

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