

Workplaces change, but labor makes world go 'round

Labor is what makes the world go around.

Our grandparents might not recognize our workplace, because it has been transformed in the past 50 years.

Many Americans still do work on assembly lines, in offices and in fields. But many do not. The office is an ever-evolving concept.

When Labor Day was born in 1883, the holiday was a big deal for workers. And that was an America rife with large factories and their assembly lines. In ways we can hardly imagine, industrialists including Henry Ford and Thomas Edison introduced innovations and new techniques that transformed an essentially agrarian society into an urban one.

Compare old photographs of workers from a century ago with people today and it becomes apparent that Americans ourselves have changed in amazing ways, growing both upward and in circumference. Today, even the poorest among us are better fed and far more advantaged than average citizens were at the start of modern labor movement.

Positive changes don't occur spontaneously. Individual men and women, working with intelligence and tenacity, deserve our gratitude for incrementally making the USA a nation which, for all its flaws, is still the wonder of our age.

While all manner of things have changed, the idea of honoring labor remains an honorable aspect of this nation. Ultimately, those toiling in anonymity are far more worthy of our thanks than the famous captains of industry. Our families exist because of the labor of our parents and grandparents.

Here on the lower Columbia River, the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union was perhaps the most visible of several active organizations that struggled to level the scales of economic and political power on behalf of laborers. It wasn't unusual for multiple men to die each season in the small, open fishing boats of that era. Meanwhile, fishermen vied with salmon packers over a penny or two per pound for the big Chinook that were the foundation of our economy.

The power of local companies and workers ebbed and flowed over the years. In bad times like the 1930s, many companies failed and the jobs they provided disappeared. Firms that survived were often the ones with the best long-term partnerships with fishermen and canning workers. These companies looked after employees and their employees returned the favor.

This collaboration between labor and capital in bringing about success is still robust in places like the communities of the Lower Columbia. The owners of companies on the scale that prosper here understand that good workers are absolutely indispensable. And workers here are close enough to



The fishing boats were double-enders from roughly 1918.

Courtesy of the Clatsop County Historical Society



This photo of cannery workers was taken by Arthur L. Chan, perhaps late 1950s or early '60s.

Courtesy of the Clatsop County Historical Society

the front lines of capitalism to seldom take their jobs for granted.

These partnerships between employers and employees are at risk in the giant corporations that wield so much power in the nation beyond our cherished coast. The thought of companies transferring their real or symbolic headquarters to foreign nations in order to deprive the U.S. of tax revenue should revolt us all. Citizenship — whether by individuals or corporations — is a two-

way street. Those who prosper thanks to the advantages created by our great nation must in turn be willing to help pay for it.

Our economy has been transformed in recent decades. Economic recovery has been uneven, delivering far more wealth to a few, while most Americans work within the context of a globalized labor market that tends to keep wages down. Even so, working

conditions and job fairness are a quantum leap better than they were in our grandparents' time. All Americans living today still benefit from the transformations in labor laws and attitudes that came to permeate 20th-century society.

Although you don't have to look far to uncover derogatory attitudes toward unions, the fair-employment initiatives that were led by organized labor groups are key to everything from minimum wages, bars on child labor, safe work-

The idea of honoring labor remains an honorable aspect of this nation.

ing conditions, employer-provided health insurance and a host of other things we take for granted.

In good times, some Americans consider labor rights and organizations to be sort of expensive extravagances. But even as the overall economy continues to improve, it still behooves Americans and our leaders to empower labor in ways that ensure future economic health, and a balance of power between corporations and everyday citizens.

Families struggle to pay for the education children require for the technologically demanding jobs of the future. Health care, once one of the near-certainties of middle-class employment, remains a source of worry even after implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Personal wealth still is far from recovered to what it was before the Great Recession. For all these reasons and more, it's important we always pay attention to the details of working life. The victories of the past can leak away when we're not watching.

Payday for 'ice bucket challenge's' mocked slacktivists

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

When Americans were giddily drenching themselves with ice water during the "ice bucket challenge" a year ago, the cognoscenti rolled their eyes.

The aim of the ice bucket challenge was to raise money to combat ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, a neurodegenerative ailment that affects some 15,000 Americans and usually leads to death within five years.

But commentators scoffed: One on Time.com declared it "problematic in almost every way." Critics sniped that the challenge wasted water and cannibalized contributions to better causes that affect more people.

The ice bucket challenge was taken as emblematic of "slacktivism," the derisive term for cheap ways to feel good without doing anything meaningful. Critics point to Internet campaigns, the Stop Kony movement and the ice bucket challenge as merely symbolic ways for young narcissists to preen without actually achieving any change.

But now we have evidence that the ice bucket challenge may have worked.

Scientists studying ALS

have reported a breakthrough that could lead to therapy, not just for ALS but for other ailments, too. And they say the money raised in the ice bucket challenge was crucial.

The breakthrough, published in *Science*, was summarized thus: "TDP-43 repression of nonconserved cryptic exons is compromised in ALS-FTD."

Got it?

Here's a translation: The research focused on a protein called TDP-43 that in some circumstances is linked to cell death in the brain or spinal cord of patients. The scientists found that inserting a custom-designed protein allowed cells to return to normal. "That becomes our therapeutic strategy," said Philip Wong, a professor at Johns Hopkins University whose lab conducted the research. He said the research team was now testing gene therapy strategies in mice to see if these can halt ALS symptoms.

If it works in mice, the following step would be to seek to conduct a clinical trial in humans, he said.

The researchers are also hop-



Nicholas Kristof

Armchair activism is preferable to armchair passivity.

ing the therapy will work for a common cause of mental deterioration, frontotemporal dementia, and for inclusion body myositis, a progressive disease that leads to muscle weakness.

Jonathan Ling, a Johns Hopkins scientist who was the lead author of the *Science* article, said the new work might also lead to a diagnostic test (though probably not a treatment) for Alzheimer's.

Ling said the research team was also working with experts on cancer and immunology to see if other proteins might perform similar roles as TDP-43, possibly leading to far broader implications. The ice bucket challenge went viral in 2014, partly because it was so much fun to watch videos of celebrities or friends dumping ice water on their heads. Videos of people in the challenge have been watched more than 10 billion times on Facebook — more than once per person on the planet. (I was one of the 17 million who uploaded a video of my drenching to Facebook.)

The ALS Association says

the ice bucket challenge raised \$115 million in six weeks, and many participants have become repeat donors. Google also reports there were more searches for "ALS" in 2014 than in the entire previous decade.

The research at Johns Hopkins on TDP-43 was already underway, but Wong says ice bucket money helped accelerate the work and allowed the team to conduct some high-risk, high-reward experiments that were critical to the outcome.

"The funding certainly facilitated the results we obtained," he told me.

It's true that slacktivism doesn't always work. The online campaign to "bring back our girls" — the Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram last year — raised attention, but the girls are still missing.

Likewise, Joseph Kony, the warlord, is still on the run despite the Stop Kony movement. But the United States and African countries directed more resources against Kony, and this has had a very significant effect: Killings by his group are down 90 percent since 2011.

So think of armchair activism as a gateway drug. It exposes people to causes and sometimes gets them hooked. And while it doesn't always solve problems, it tends to build awareness of crises — a necessary but not sufficient step to getting them resolved.



Mark Zaleski/AP Photo

Former Tennessee Titans linebacker Tim Shaw is dunked with water as he takes the ALS ice bucket challenge in the second quarter of a preseason NFL football game between the Titans and the Minnesota Vikings Thursday, Aug. 28, 2014, in Nashville, Tenn. Shaw has announced that he has ALS.

In any case, armchair activism is preferable to armchair passivity.

With the ice bucket challenge, there's little evidence of cannibalization that hurt other causes, and it seems to have been revolutionary for this one.

"Across the ALS community, we are probably in our highest time of hope," said Barbara

Newhouse, president of the ALS Association.

So if you endured an ice dunking a year ago — or if you're participating in the 2015 ice bucket challenge, now underway — there's no need to apologize for having fun. Rather: Thank you!

Enough with the eye-rolling. Long live slacktivism!

STEPHEN A. FORRESTER, Editor & Publisher • LAURA SELLERS, Managing Editor
BETTY SMITH, Advertising Manager • CARL EARL, Systems Manager
JOHN D. BRUIJN, Production Manager • DEBRA BLOOM, Business Manager
HEATHER RAMSDALL, Circulation Manager



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873