

Organized Labor in America Today. “Workers get the Best Democracy Money can Buy”

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Labor Day once had meaning. Workers had reason to celebrate hard won rights. No longer. More on this below. The day is commemorated on the first Monday of September. It's been so since 1882.

In June 1894, it became a federal holiday. It was when workers had few rights. Management controlled things. Labor was systematically exploited.

It took many years of organizing, taking to the streets, going on strike, boycotting management, battling police and National Guard forces, and paying with blood and lives to win rights.

They included an eight-hour day, a living wage, employer-paid benefits, and passage of the 1935 landmark Wagner Act.

It established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). It guaranteed labor the right to bargain collectively on equal terms with management. It did so for the first time.

Erosion followed. War on working Americans decimated organized labor. Hard won rights were lost.

Membership has been in steady decline from its 1950s 34.7% post-war high. It remained constant through most of the 1970s.

In 1979, it was 24%. In the late 1980s, it was 16.8%. It's currently around 11%. It's the lowest rate since 1916.

Private sector unionization stands at 6.5%. It's the lowest rate in over a century.

The business of America is business. America is corporate occupied territory.

Political Action Committees, lobbyists, well-connected consultants, and business-friendly think tanks exert enormous influence.

In 1938, Franklin Roosevelt said:

“The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself.”

“That, in its essence, is fascism – ownership of government by an individual, by a group or by any controlling private power.”

Today it's worse than ever. Monied interests run things. Democracy in America is fantasy. Its criminal class is bipartisan.

Politicians are bought like toothpaste. Worker rights are systematically smashed. They're heading toward disappearing altogether.

Public sector unionization stands at 35%. Since 2008, hundreds of thousands of government jobs were lost. States and municipalities slashed services and payrolls.

Last year, it largely affected public assistance programs, administrative and support services, public schools and state universities.

Unions did little to fight back. They're corporate occupied territory. Corrupted union bosses and politicians sold out to management for personal gain.

Bargaining collectively with bosses on equal terms no longer exists. Battle lines are drawn. Public and private sector worker rights are threatened unless mobilized resistance saves them.

According to economist Jack Rasmus, trade unionism in America today "is on the road to nowhere." Decades of decline now accelerate.

Since the late 1970s, "union labor in the USA has been steadily in retreat...industrially and politically," says Rasmus.

If current trends continue, trade unionism may disappear entirely in another decade. "Union labor is at a strategic impasse," Rasmus believes.

He's unaware of any "broad-based, grass roots discussion and debate within (its) ranks (to stem) its precipitous decline."

It represents failed organization strategy. Traditional collective bargaining lost clout in terms of generating living wage jobs, healthcare, other important benefits, hours worked, and retirement benefits.

Inflation adjusted wages for full-time workers have been stagnant since the late 1970s. Wages for all union worker categories today are lower. According to Rasmus:

"...When union unemployed, involuntarily part time employed, millions of union workers who have left the labor force, those who prematurely took disability to avoid layoff, those pressured to take early retirement packages that prevent them from working and pay less, etc., are all factored in - union wages may actually be lower in adjusted real terms than they were even three decades ago."

At the same time, offshoring, technological change, so-called free trade agreements, and other anti-labor initiatives lost up to 10 million union jobs.

Vital benefits eroded or disappeared entirely with them. Pensions were destroyed.

Increasing amounts of healthcare costs shifted from employers to workers. Obamacare provisions assure union negotiated employer healthcare coverage will end entirely within a

few years.

Workers will be on their own for what's become increasingly unaffordable.

"Both pension and healthcare bargaining are destined to fade from the workplace in the not too distant future." says Rasmus.

Labor's ability to influence enactment of worker-friendly legislation has been declining for decades.

Democrats are as anti-labor as Republicans. Workers are increasingly on their own. Welcome to low-wage America.

High-pay/good benefit jobs are offshored and lost. Low-pay/part-time/temp/low of no-benefit ones replace them.

Millions live from paycheck to paycheck. Most have little or no savings.

They're one missed payday from possible destitution, homelessness, hunger and despair.

Most jobs pay poverty or sub-poverty wages. Households need two or more to survive.

Real unemployment exceeds 23%. It makes finding one hard. For millions, finding living wage ones with good benefits is impossible.

Obama's job creation claims are more fantasy than real. He's more jobs destroyer than creator.

He's beholden to monied interests. He prioritizes cutting corporate taxes. It does nothing to create jobs.

Real unemployment persists at Depression era levels. Nothing is done to change things.

Workers deserve social justice. Bipartisan complicity denies them.

Class warfare rages. Neoliberal harshness is official policy. Inequality grows exponentially.

So-called economic recovery is fake. It's absent on Main Street. It's only in corporate profits, financial gains and greater than ever super-wealth.

Most US households struggle. From 2007 to 2012, real median household income declined from \$55,600 to \$51,017.

The entire fabric of America changed. It did so for the worst. Three decades ago, an auto assembly worker earned \$30 an hour or more plus good benefits.

Today it's \$15 an hour for new workers with greatly eroded benefits heading toward elimination altogether.

Industrial America like it once was is gone. Workers today face conditions replicating 19th century harshness.

Democrats like Republicans make low-wage labor a centerpiece of their economic policy.

Industrial hubs are shells of their former selves. Detroit symbolizes America's decline. It lost a fourth of its population.

Once mighty Motown resembles a ghost town. It's dying. It's bankrupt.

Over half its working age residents have no jobs. Most others have rotten ones. They don't pay enough to live on.

"Gary Indiana lost 22% of its population." St. Louis 20%. Flint Michigan 18%. Cleveland 17%.

Industrialized countries alone enjoy developed economic status. Offshoring manufacturing reverses the development process.

Doing so shows a nation in decline. High-paying/good benefits/full-time jobs are disappearing in plain sight.

Rotten ones replaced them. America is being thirdworldized.

It's increasingly a nation of low-paid/unskilled clerks, food preparers, waitresses, bartenders, dishwashers, maids, cashiers, cab drivers, hosts and hostesses, amusement park attendants, movie theater ushers and ticket takers, farm workers, home care providers, and non-professional medical ones.

Economic development depends on "capital, technology, business knowledge, and trained" skilled workers, Paul Craig Roberts explains.

"US capital and technology are being located abroad..." Skilled US workers are disappearing. De-industrialization is the new normal.

America is a shell of its former self. So is trade unionism compared to its heyday. It's fast-tracking toward vanishing altogether.

Labor Day commemorates US worker struggles. Trade unionism's main one is survival in a nation beholden to capital.

Corporate giants control things. Workers get the best democracy money can buy. The state of today's America is deplorable.

It's being systematically thirdworldized. Unemployment, underemployment, poverty and despair are today's growth industries. A race to the bottom defines things.

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Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

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