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Is new trade pact “NAFTA on steroids?”



By Rev. Jim Conn

Unless you've spent the winter lost on the Pacific Crest Trail, you know that middle-class incomes have slipped again. In fact, everyone's wage is down except for the top ten percent. Median incomes for the bottom 20 percent fell four percent; for the middle by six percent, and hourly wages have barely kept pace with inflation.

Why? Conventional wisdom says hordes of unemployed workers could return to the market place at any moment. That makes current employees afraid to change jobs to find higher incomes, or they are fearful about also joining the ranks of the long-term jobless. But there is a better reason for stagnant wages that mainstream commentators seldom mention - free trade agreements.

The Reagan Administration's infamous attack on unions, and its deregulation of industries from trucking to airlines, put middle-class jobs at risk everywhere, because those industries' pay scales were backed by the power of organized labor. Then so-called New Democrats under the Clinton Administration joined with Republicans to adopt NAFTA - the North American Free Trade Agreement - and more good manufacturing jobs (again, many of them union) fled across the border. American companies seized the opportunity to set up maquiladoras - manufacturing zones just

south of the Mexican border - and shut unionized factories here. Suddenly everything from car parts to jeans came from low-wage locations, which created work in Mexico, but also massive dislocation, even as it closed jobs here.

The high-tech boom created a mythology that dominated the business pages for a decade. Americans no longer needed to make things - we'd invent and design them, and somebody else would make them. Apparently nobody noticed that this

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system neither grew the economy nor ended lousy jobs - it just paid less for tedious tasks. I can remember when a good working-class job in Los Angeles earned \$30 or \$40 or even \$50 an hour. Now it pays \$15-20. In the last five years 65 percent of jobs created in this country pay \$20 an hour or

A good working-class job in L. A. used to earn \$30 to \$50 an hour now only pays \$15 to \$30 an hour.

less. People are either making a lot of money or no money.

Now comes another “free trade” deal. Known as TPP - the Trans-Pacific Partnership - it links some Western Hemisphere nations to Asia. Some of us think it is NAFTA on steroids.

Proponents - including the president - claim TPP will create 600,000 jobs and stir the economy from its torpor. But even such free trade agreement fans as the Washington Post fact-checked the claim and concluded that it would likely create no jobs. Zero. Nada. Michael Hiltzik, business columnist for the Los Angeles Times, thinks it likely grows neither the economy of the U.S. nor of the other nations involved.

Beyond that, TPP carries some insidious side-effects that could do a lot more damage. One element allows multinational corporations to sue national, state and even local governments in international courts of arbitration for environmental or financial regulations that curtail their current practices. Raising the minimum wage, mandating a skull and crossbones on a pack of cigarettes, or limiting air pollutants could end up

not in local courtrooms but in some obscure office far, far away.

All of this is being negotiated in secret. The media only know some of these details because of leaks. Actually the elite of wealth and power probably know a lot more because they discuss these kinds of things over drinks at Davos and other power hangouts. Furthermore, the president wants this agreement “fast-tracked,” which means voted on by both houses of Congress within 90 days, no amendments and no filibuster.

Asleep yet? That’s exactly what the people who negotiate these kinds of deals want so you won’t notice that another nail has been put into the coffin of organized labor and the American middle class. It’s another reason why the hotel workers, retail clerks and truck drivers are fighting for better wages for jobs that can’t be shipped overseas. It’s why all of us fight to protect the earth on which and through which “we live and have our being,” as St. Paul put it.



Rev. Jim Conn is a minister of Ocean Park Church.

Danny Glover to young workers: you are making history

By Earchiel Johnson

An enthusiastic crowd of young trade unionists and allies from more than 40 states and Puerto Rico cheered as Danny Glover came on stage at the AFL-CIO’s 2015 Next Up Summit.

Glover, who has been a leader in the struggle of Nissan workers in Canton, Mississippi to win union representation, spoke passionately to the young trade unionists here about the struggle in Mississippi.

He spoke of how Nissan has been willing to do almost anything to stop the union - from the hiring of large numbers of high-turnover temporary workers to the giving out misinformation and intimidating workers when they try to organize.

Glover, a member of the Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television Artists (SAG-AFTRA) and an activist since his college days at San Francisco State University, has been involved over the years in numerous battles for civil rights, worker rights, and student rights.

Glover reminded the young trade unionists

about the ability of youth to shift entire movements. “They came down specifically to Mississippi and changed the whole temperature of the civil rights movement. That is what young people do.”

A coalition of workers, students and civil rights leaders have been organizing for the right to have a say on health, safety and to end the abuse of workers at their plant, Glover said.

He criticized Nissan for trying to build what he called “a temporary economy” within which temp workers are employed to cut costs even though they do the same work as full time workers - basically for half the wages.

He said the company is being hypocritical when it says that to stay competitive it cannot afford a unionized plant in Mississippi, explaining how in Japan, France, Britain and South Africa Nissan has recognized the right of workers to have a voice on their job.

If they can work with unions there, he said, there is no excuse for Nissan to refuse to recognize the right of its workers to organize a union.

If Japan, France, Britain and South Africa can work with unions, Mississippi workers of Nissan should have the right to organize a union.

Illinois union battles Rauner over fair share fee

By Mark Gruenberg

A coalition of 26 unions, led by AFSCME District Council 31, has banded together to battle Illinois GOP Gov. Bruce Rauner's order eliminating state worker unions' rights to collect even "fair share" fees from so-called "free riders."

In a lawsuit filed in early March in St. Clair County Court in Belleville, just outside St. Louis, the union coalition said Rauner's order not only violates the state constitution but a 31-year-old state "fair share fee" law as well.

Rauner responded by denouncing "corrupt union bosses" and asking the U.S. District Court in Chicago to rule for his order. The union coalition is fighting that, too. Rauner also ordered his state comptroller to put the fair share fees - \$3.75 million yearly - into an escrow account. The comptroller refused, citing a legal opinion from the state attorney general, but Rauner ordered executive branch agencies to withhold the money anyway.

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court majority ruled that Illinois home health care workers and personal care workers - some of whom AFSCME represented - are not state employees and thus did not have to even send in fair share fees to the unions, AFSCME and the Service Employees, that represent them on the job.

In that ruling, Justice Samuel Alito hinted that



he would look favorably on a case tossing out fair share fees for all public workers, not just the "hybrid" workers, half-public, half-private, in the home health care and personal care fields.

The unions represent some 40,000 state workers, including the 6,300 free riders. The suit says Rauner is purposefully attempting to weaken the unions. "Rauner has usurped the constitutional power of the legislative branch in promulgating an executive order that effectively repeals" the 1983 law, the suit says. "The executive power is the power to faithfully execute the laws enacted through the legislative process, not to refuse to implement" them.

Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael Carrigan said Rauner intends to hurt "the men and women who do the real work of state government...first responders, nurses, caregivers, and corrections officers.

Besides AFSCME, SEIU and the state federation, unions suing the governor include the Teamsters, the Illinois Nurses Association, the Laborers, the Bakery Confectionery Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers, the Operating Engineers, the Machinists, the Bricklayers, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, the Carpenters, the Electrical Workers, UFCW, the Painters, the Plumbers and Allied Trades, and two police associations.

The unions represent some 40,000 state workers, including the 6,300 free riders.

Jesus “Chuy” Garcia campaigns in L. A. for support

By David Trujillo

Latino progressive candidate and Cook County Commissioner Jesus “Chuy” Garcia came to L.A. to raise money for his run-off election for Mayor of Chicago. Chuy’s grassroots and working-class vision, along with a broad based people’s campaign, has forced the current corporate and Wall Street candidate, Mayor Rahm Emanuel, into an important and historic run-off election.

The 58-year-old Garcia, a popular grassroots Latino candidate, ran a forward-looking campaign that rallied middle and low-income voters to the polls with his anti-corporate agenda.

His campaign put the blame on Wall Street for the city’s budget mess, targeting Emanuel’s corporate giveaways, which created massive cutbacks and job losses. He took Emanuel by surprise. Emanuel’s campaign had outspent Garcia’s campaign 12 to one.

Garcia’s strong working-class background had a profound impact on Chicago voters. His father worked in the fields picking fruit in Texas and California. Later he would be elected as the current County Commissioner with long ties to Chicago’s working-class communities.

The large Latino audience in L.A. strongly supported his comprehensive immigration reform.

He asked the audience to join him in making history with this groundbreaking campaign. If elected, he would be the first Latino mayor of Chicago. A special appeal was made for sustained financial backing and he stressed the need for a strong voter turnout. His campaign raised over \$200,000 in L.A., with commitments still coming in.

Copiloto de Germanwings estaba de baja médica

EFE Grandma.cu

El copiloto del vuelo de Germanwings, que se sospecha destruyó deliberadamente el avión estrellándolo en los Alpes franceses, escondió a la empresa los detalles de una enfermedad que padecía, informó la fiscalía de Dusseldorf, al oeste de Alemania.

Andreas Lubitz tenía una baja médica por enfermedad vigente para el día de la catástrofe, que había roto y ocultado a la empresa. Sin embargo, fuentes de la fiscalía negaron que en los registros realizados en su domicilio se hubiera encontrado una carta de despedida “ni indicios que apunten a un trasfondo político o religioso” para su proceder, señaló EFE.

Sí se encontraron, según un comunicado emitido el viernes por ese departamento, documentos que demuestran que estaba en tratamiento médico.

El hecho de que entre los documentos encontrados hubiera “bajas médicas rotas, actuales e incluso vigentes para el día de los hechos”, indica que el afectado “ocultó a su empleador y a su entorno profesional” su enfermedad.

La fiscalía alemana mostró además que el análisis del material incautado puede llevar aún días y que, en cuanto haya resultados, se informará debidamente tanto a la opinión pública como a los afectados y a las autoridades francesas que dirigen la investigación.

Hasta el momento, se sabía que el copiloto de Germanwings había interrumpido durante unos meses, en el 2009, su formación y se había especulado sobre una posible depresión, pero se incorporó nuevamente hasta

ingresar en Germanwings, filial de bajo costo de Lufthansa, en el 2013.

El popular diario alemán Bild aseguró en su edición del viernes, citando al “entorno de Lufthansa”, que el copiloto había sufrido “episodios de profunda depresión” y que atravesaba una crisis de pareja.

El copiloto causante de la tragedia en el vuelo 4U 9525, procedente de Barcelona y con destino Düsseldorf con 150 personas a bordo, empezó su aprendizaje a los 14 años en un club de aviación local e ingresó en la escuela de Bremen de Lufthansa en el 2007.

Lubitz, de 27 años, vivía entre su domicilio familiar de Montabaur, en el “Land” de Renania Palatinado, y su vivienda privada en Düsseldorf, en el vecino Renania del Norte-Westfalia.

Ambos domicilios, el familiar y el propio, fueron objeto el jueves de largos registros policiales, en que se incautó abundante material, inclusive una torre de ordenador y objetos privados, aunque no hay información oficial al respecto.

Por otra parte, quienes conocieron a Lubitz lo describen como un hombre afable del que no se albergaba la menor sospecha de que pudiese hacer daño a nadie. Sus amigos y vecinos lo han descrito como un “hombre tranquilo”, incluso “divertido”, que disfrutaba con su trabajo.