

Workers and Environmentalists Unite!

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When there are zero jobs available, any job will do. This fact has been exploited by corporations now re-labeling themselves “job creators,” since being a job creator in a time of depression brings a religious status similar to a rain god during a drought. Democrats and Republicans have lavished eternal praise on the “job creators” and in consequence have created a political atmosphere that is rabidly pro-corporate “job creators” and anti-everything else.

In practice this means that ANY new law or regulation that hinders the power or profits of “job creating” corporations is instantly attacked as a “job killer.” This type of logic is good for bumper stickers and Tea Parties but bad for those who suffer under the giant power of corporations, including working people, the unemployed, the self-employed, and the environment.

For example, in Oregon a statewide measure was passed to increase taxes on corporations and the wealthy to deal with the state’s budget deficit. The tax money was to be used to save social services and prevent layoffs. Before it became law the measure was attacked viciously by a newborn, well-funded group calling itself “Oregonians Against Job-Killing Taxes.” The message was simple: if you tax the wealthy and corporations, they will punish you by leaving the state and taking their jobs with them; better to simply accept their absolute power and sing their praises while reducing their taxes and destroying environmental regulations that impede their profits.

Obama recently surrendered to this philosophy when he reneged on a promise to adopt stricter air quality standards around ozone pollution (against the recommendations of scientists from his own Environmental Protection Agency). Less ground-level smog would prevent thousands of deaths while reducing lung and health issues in general, cutting health care costs by billions. But the interests of the corporate “job creators” won out in the end. The Huffington Post reports:

“The White House has been under heavy pressure from GOP lawmakers and major industries, which have slammed the stricter standard as an unnecessary jobs killer...Obama said his decision was made in part to reduce regulatory burdens [on corporations] and uncertainty [for corporations] at a time of rampant questions about the strength of the U.S. economy.”¹

How did corporate America react?

“Thomas Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce [a giant corporate lobby group] said the move was “an enormous victory for America’s job creators, the right decision by the president and one that will help reduce

the uncertainty facing businesses.” (September 2nd, 2011).

This dynamic is now the new normal. The same logic was used after the Gulf Coast BP disaster, when Obama temporarily banned offshore drilling in response. But this practical and necessary measure was instantly attacked as a “job killer” and Obama quickly changed his tune and ended the ban. Dangerous deep-sea drilling continues and politicians and the media alike have hushed-over the issues until the next disaster occurs. The incredible shock and outrage that working people voiced over the BP oil spill has been ignored in favor of the interests of the “Job Creators.”

Not only was the BP disaster ignored, but some corporations used it to their benefit. Since deep sea drilling was dangerous, some corporations admitted, better to focus on the ever-expanding realm of land drilling for natural gas. As the excellent documentary Gasland shows, drilling for natural gas (also called Liquefied natural gas, or LNG) is causing catastrophic environmental damage while the Obama administration has repeatedly encouraged its expansion as an alternative to “foreign oil.” The Environmental Protection Agency has virtually ignored this now-gigantic industry as corporations like Halliburton pump hundreds of poisonous chemicals into the ground and air for their personal profit.

Corporations also won out when it came to environmentally-sane logging strategies in the Pacific Northwest and the horrifically-destructive act of Mountain Removal for the mining industries. Yet another recent victim was the Canadian Tar Sands pipeline that Obama agreed to, which will run from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, carrying oil that was especially destructive to mine. In all these cases the corporate “Job Creators” attacked the so-called “Job Killers” for wanting to impose regulations that would help prevent environmental disasters.

In addition, corporations quietly sidelined Obama’s campaign promise to set the first-ever limits on the specific pollution blamed for global warming. At a time when most working people are educated and deathly afraid of the near-term effects of global warming, the President has simply stopped talking about the issue. Any respectable climate scientist will tell you that unless massive environmental changes are made very soon there will be unstoppable climate change that will have dire consequences for all humans, not just the ones most immediately effected in areas devastated by droughts, flooding, and other extreme weather patterns.

All working people have an interest in ensuring that their children and grandchildren can live a life without such carnage. Some, however, are tricked into thinking that the immediate need for jobs overrules any consideration for the environment, since not eating today is more important than a global environmental crisis that will strike tomorrow. In reality there is no such contradiction. Now is actually the perfect time to brush this corporate-created myth aside and demand what is sorely over-due for both working people and the environment.

It should be painfully clear to even the most reality-blind politicians that the private sector has no interest in creating jobs; they are quite content sitting on their mountains of cash until wages fall low enough — due to massive unemployment — for them to hire more labor. Working people cannot afford the patience or the low wages. The jobs’ crisis demands that governments on the city, state, and federal level create jobs’ programs similar to the programs enacted during the last great depression. But not just any jobs will do.

Given that our society is facing an energy crisis and a related environmental crisis, only a green job program will do. This means not only fixing dilapidated bridges and roads, but investing massive amounts of money in alternative energy — solar, wind, hydro, etc. — while improving and expanding alternative forms of transportation — high speed trains, buses, electric cars, etc. It also means massive investments in home and building weatherization, recycling infrastructure, public education campaigns, research and development for alternative energy, and a variety of other measures that will help fundamentally change our culture’s relation to the environment, all of which will create massive amounts of jobs.

Obama’s stubborn refusal to do anything of substance for labor, the unemployed, and environmentalists creates an opportunity for these groups to work closely together for a better world. Because politicians are refusing to respond to society’s most pressing needs, new tactics need to be employed. Lobbying politicians and organizing small rallies cannot have the same effects they once did.

Only a sustained campaign with massive mobilizations has the possibility of achieving the united goals of the labor and environmental movements. The demand for a federal jobs program that builds an alternative energy infrastructure and other green public works has the ability to inspire millions of people to act. To fund such a program demands must be made to drastically increase taxes on the wealthy and corporations, since they now have all the money, thanks to the expanding tax breaks for the rich and corporations over the past thirty years. The era of issue-based activism has come to a disappointing end. To properly address either the jobs or environmental crisis all working people must unite in huge numbers with inspiring demands.

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Note

1. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/02/obama-halts-epa-regulation-smog-standards_n_946557.html

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