

# #1400 Fighting Neoliberalism from the Fields of India to the Fight for \$15

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left Podcast, in which we shall learn about the fight against the forces of neo-liberalism, from the protest by Indian farmers against proposed deregulation to the fight for 15 in the US. Clips today are from *The Working Life Podcast*, *OFF-KILTER*, *Pitchfork Economics*, *Why is this Happening*, *Democracy Now!*, *The Red Nation*, and *The Zero Hour*.

## Your four talking points for \$15-an-Hour minimum wage - Working Life Podcast - Air Date 2-17-21

**JONATHAN TASINI - HOST, WORKING LIFE:** [00:00:26] I thought I'd arm everyone in the audience with the four, just four, most important things to say to people to encourage them to make this fight a priority or to take on the uninformed with actual information. Number one: keep this thing in mind. If you made \$15 an hour and you worked 52 weeks a year 40 hours a week, meaning you had not a single day off to spend with your family or just chill, you would make \$31,200. That, my friends, just puts a family of four a tiny bit over the official federal poverty line. And those poverty lines don't really tell us what it costs in real life to survive.

Number two: if the federal minimum wage really kept pace with our productivity over the past four decades, the minimum wage should be actually \$22 an hour. Yeah. The ruling class and owner class basically robbed millions of people of their hard work over many decades. That's a feature of capitalism, not a bug.

Number three: hiking the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would save the federal government money. Did you hear that, all you deficit mongers, all of the fools who run around screaming about government spending except when it comes to denying regular people support, but of course, lavishing money on the Pentagon and big corporations? A higher minimum wage will save the government money. How is that, you say? If people make more money, they won't need as much support from federal safety net programs such as food stamps. And yes, the fact that people talk in a matter of fact way that people working full time have to rely on food stamps to survive in the richest nation in human history should never go unremarked with anything but that is fucked up, immoral and calls for revolution in the streets. People earning more and likely working longer before retirement, if you earn more, people will wait longer actually to start taking social security. That will mean more money into the social security trust fund. And when you earn more, you and your employers pay more in taxes to the federal government.

So bottom line, the various savings, thanks to hiking the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, would end up saving the government more than \$65 billion a year by 2025. And that's according to a very reputable study from the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at the University of California at Berkeley. And you can look it up.

And this is the last one. Number four: raising the minimum wage does not, and this is exhausting because we've had to argue this for years, it does not cause big job losses or even much of any job loss at all. And actually it might even help create jobs. Every credible study going back 30 years shows almost no negative effect to raising the minimum wage.

Oh, yeah, sure. You'll hear about all those fast food joints who won't be able to afford a \$15 an hour minimum wage. It's nonsense. Even if these places would have to raise prices a tiny bit to cover higher wages, it would be pennies on a hamburger or a slice of pizza, nothing people would stop going to their favorite joint to eat because of the price.

And this should be logical to any normal person. Those millions of people who start earning \$15 an hour will all of a sudden have a little extra cash to spend, which will likely mean a boost in jobs overall, or at least it would even out any potential small losses.

## **Inside the Raise the Wage Act, with EPI's David Cooper**

### **Part 1 - OFF-KILTER with Rebecca Vallas - Air Date**

**1-30-21**

**DAVID COOPER:** [00:04:36] The last time the federal minimum wage was raised was July of 2009. Since then, there's been some good things that have happened, and then obviously a lot of bad stuff that's happened. At the federal level, every year you don't change the minimum wage, inflation just eats away at its value. [For] a minimum wage earner back in 2009, their minimum wage paycheck bought a lot more than it does today. We've run some numbers on this. And since then, the value of the federal minimum wage has declined by about 17%. But that actually pales in comparison to the decline in the value of the federal minimum wage over the last 50 plus years, even when we raised it in 2009, we were raising it to a level that after you adjust for inflation was significantly lower than the federal minimum wage was at back in the 1960s. At its high point in the late 1960s, the federal minimum wage was worth the equivalent of about \$10.50 per hour in today's dollars. So what that means is that a low wage worker, a minimum wage worker in today's economy is being paid a paycheck that's worth more than 30% less than someone in that same position a generation ago, which is just outrageous.

So that's the bad news. The good thing that's happened over the last 12 years is that a lot of states and cities have decided to step up in light of federal inaction. We've had a lot of states that have passed higher minimum wages. I think there's seven now that have passed \$15 minimum wages. Not all of them are there yet. They're on their way there. But that's a significant chunk of states and a significant portion of the labor force that's already going to be protected by \$15 minimum wages over the next few years. I think it's about 40% of the workforce is in states that are on their way to 15.

Good action happening at the state and local level. But of course that still 60% of the workforce in places that are not going to 15. And that's why we really need to raise that federal minimum wage so that those workers aren't left behind in the coming years.

**REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF KILTER:** [00:06:31] Hearing you talk about the impact of inflation, right, the villain here, it sounds like it's inflation. The villain is actually the obstruction in Congress that has prevented the minimum wage from being increased at the

federal level that has allowed inflation to eat it up. But just to put a fine point on it, one of the statistics to me that really helps to capture the cumulative damage that's been done because of federal inaction over the course of these almost 12 years, it actually comes from a former colleague of mine, a good friend I want to give a shout out to who's done a lot of work on the minimum wage over the years as well. Rachel West, who is a former economist at the Center for American Progress and now actually working over in the House for Bobby Scott, who I just mentioned, on these issues as a House staffer. She crunched the numbers just a couple of years ago looking at what has been the cumulative earnings loss, how much have minimum wage workers lost in pay since 2010 because of Congress's failure to act. And she found that they've lost over a year's pay due to inflation during that period more than \$15,000 cumulatively. So, just to process, we're talking about for someone making \$7.25 an hour to have lost an entire year's pay over the course of the past 11-12 years. That's what we're talking about here when you describe the impact of inflation on workers' wages.

**DAVID COOPER:** [00:08:00] Yeah, that's right. We did similar estimates and we found that these workers are losing \$3,000 a year, less than they would have made since the minimum wage was raised. So this is a huge loss in their buying power. It makes it harder for low wage workers to go out and buy the things they need. It forces a lot of them to have to turn to public assistance programs more than they would need otherwise. And the other thing that's really important to note about this, particularly in the historical context, is that by letting the minimum wage fall, this has also contributed a lot to the growth in inequality over the last 50 years. Low wage workers, minimum wage workers are significantly farther away from the middle class than they were in the previous generation.

A lot of times we hear folks talking about how the minimum wage is just teens entering into their first job. And we know that's not true, although, and we can talk about that. But even if it were, a minimum wage worker back in the 1960s was paid a little more than half of what a typical middle-class worker in the country was paid. Economists measure this by looking at what's called the median wage in the country, which just means if you lined up every worker in the country based upon their hourly wage and pick the person who is exactly in the middle of what is that person making. Back in the 1960s, a minimum wage worker made about half what that person made. Today, a minimum wage worker at the federal minimum wage makes less than a third of what that person is making. So, we've had this huge decline in the value of those earnings of a person who is in the lowest paid position. Whether they are starting out in their first job or whether they've been in that job for a decade because they haven't been able to find a higher paying one, they are much further away from the middle class than workers in the previous generation. And that's something that we need to fix.

Fortunately, the Raise the Wage Act that was just introduced will do this. And I can talk about how it aims to do that.

**REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF KILTER:** [00:09:47] I want to also pull a little bit on the thread of public assistance because that's such an important part of the picture here as well. You alluded to it, but talk a little bit about some of the research that helps to put numbers to the dramatic share of people who are paid low wages and therefore forced to turn to public supports like Medicaid, like SNAP, formerly called food stamps, because they aren't paid enough at work.

**DAVID COOPER:** [00:10:15] Yeah, there are millions of low wage workers who have to rely on these programs to supplement their income because they're not being paid enough on the job. There was a report that came out just recently, just in the last week, that looked at public assistance utilization among workers in states that aren't going to \$15. And I think the headline number was that basically these workers are getting about \$107B each year in public assistance dollars because they're paying paid wages that are so low. And it's unfortunate because we want these workers to be given all the income that they need. We would hope, however, that most of that income would be coming through their time on the job because a lot of them are working full time or close to it. They're just simply not being paid enough. Many of them are working multiple jobs. And unless we set standards that allow them to actually have a decent life through their labor earnings, they're going to have to turn to these assistance programs that are financed by taxpayers. Those are dollars that are important that those workers need to have, and if anything, the benefits and a lot of those programs are not generous enough. We should expand them. But if we raise the minimum wage, it would generate a lot of savings in those programs that we could then take and put right back into those programs or other public assistance programs to make them more generous, to expand eligibility so that more people can benefit from those programs.

There's so many needs that we have for public dollars right now. Certainly if we could provide some savings by raising the minimum wage, that would be a useful thing to do for the federal government.

## **What's the deal with the CBO report? Part 1 - Pitchfork Economics with Nick Hanauer - Air Date 2-12-21**

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:11:43] And the CBO also warned that there would be an increase to the deficit if the minimum wage were increased. And that one seems especially iffy to me because it's based on the idea that minimum wage will kill jobs, which again, most studies have shown not to be true. And so it seems to me to be built on a faulty premise.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:12:05] Right. 80% of that increase in the deficit that the CBO forecasts is based on rising costs for unemployment and Medicaid due to their job loss forecast, but more so there's a contradictory study out of UC Berkeley that says that the federal deficit will actually decrease by \$65 billion a year due to increased payroll taxes and reduced costs from social services.

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:12:34] That makes sense because if 27 million more Americans are making more money then we're going to stop subsidizing bad employers through taxpayer money spending on social safety net programs.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:12:47] Yeah, absolutely. You can think of a \$7.25 an hour, federal minimum wage as a subsidy to low wage employers and this would take that away.

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:12:58] So just to be clear, I also wanted to point out that the CBO's findings don't really reflect any of the recent research that we've seen on the minimum wage either, correct? I mean, we've seen, especially over

the last couple of months, there've been a whole slew of studies showing how the minimum wage has not killed jobs, created jobs, has lifted people out of poverty, and those studies don't bear any relationship to the CBO.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:13:26] Right. Well, they do in the sense that the CBO has ignored them. I mean, let's understand, this is how this all feeds together, back into each other. These empirical studies of past minimum wage hikes, that's allegedly the data that CBO should be plugging into their models. So when we're talking about these studies where they're using the mean instead of the median, it's of a past studies. They're not using current ones, which are even more positive than some of the past ones so it feeds in on itself. If you find, if these empirical studies find more job losses than future forecasts from CBO should project even more job losses. If they find fewer job losses then you would expect CBO to be projecting fewer job losses in subsequent reports. Weirdly that's not what's happened. CBO has been getting worse and worse in terms of their job loss forecasts since 2014, which again, runs counter to what you just said. The more studies that come out the less of an employment effect, positive or negative, we see. It's somewhere around zero. There seems to be very little effect on employment from hikes in the minimum wage.

None of this gets to why that's the case. Why that confounds Orthodox economic theory? I mean, there's a bunch of reasons, one of which theory could be wrong, but it just speaks to the reality. So just, it's a little weird that they've gone in this direction. They're going in the opposite direction of the consensus of economists.

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:15:08] So Goldie, let's say that my worst nightmare were to come true, and you were to somehow be elected president of the United States and your aid brings you CBO and says we have a hundred percent proof that the CBO report is true. It is accurate, it is exactly what's going to happen. Do you still pass a \$15 minimum wage?

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:15:30] Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, in a heartbeat. I mean, if you take everything they project at face value it's a net positive. It's a cost benefit analysis that is a win for workers. 27 million people see their wages increase, some of them by a lot. The net increase in income across low wage workers is large, substantial, lifts nearly a million people out of poverty. And all of these people who are earning more money will now be spending that back into the economy, which is a second level of fact that this study doesn't actually analyze. So if you're just looking at it straight up, cost benefit analysis, even these numbers, they're good. They say, do the minimum wage.

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:16:20] So one of the things that I thought was really interesting about this number is that we've been talking about the Rand report for a long time here on this podcast, and the transfer of trillions of dollars from the paychecks of American workers to the super wealthy. And one of the things that I noticed about the CBO report is it said that the net pay going to US workers would grow by \$333 billion. So that's the third of a trillion dollars right there, which is pretty good. It's clawing a significant portion of that back to American workers.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:16:51] Right. So we talk about this two and a half trillion dollar transfer of income and wealth annually from the bottom 90% of workers to the top of 1%, mostly the top 0.1%. So you're talking about that 330 billion out of

2.5 trillion, it's not nothing. And that 333 billion number, that's assuming the CBO is correct about its job losses. If it's wrong, we're talking at over half a trillion dollars back into the pockets of working Americans.

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:17:26] And it's directed towards the bottom of the wage scale, which is the people who inarguably need it the most.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:17:32] Absolutely.

## **Inside the Raise the Wage Act, with EPI's David Cooper Part 2 - OFF-KILTER with Rebecca Vallas - Air Date 1-30-21**

**REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF KILTER:** [00:17:33] I want to at this point get into what the Raise the Wage Act would do.

**DAVID COOPER:** [00:17:37] Sure. So, the way that the bill is structured is it would raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 in five steps. So, what would happen is later in 2021, the federal minimum wage would be raised from its current value of \$7.25 per hour up to \$9.50 per hour. Then in 2022, it would go up to \$11 an hour, 2023 it would go to \$12.50, 2024 up to \$14 and then finally in 2025, it would reach \$15 an hour. In years after that, it would be indexed, meaning it would be automatically adjusted each year based upon changes in median wages. And I can say a little bit about that in a second.

But basically it's raised up in this gradual approach. And the reason why we do the reason why it's structured to do that is because everyone understands that a lot of workers, really all workers throughout the country today could use \$15 an hour right now. But raising the minimum wage does force businesses to make some adjustments. And so by gradually phasing in the increases, it gives businesses time to make those adjustments so that they're able to do so without harming their business models and allowing workers to continue to stay on the job.

I mentioned the indexing to median wages, and this is something that I think is really important. I mentioned earlier that there's been this huge growth in inequality between low wage workers and middle wage workers. And by indexing the minimum wage to median wages as this bill would do, what that would essentially say is that each year, however much that median wage went up well, the minimum wage would be adjusted by the same percentage. And what that would do is keep the distance between middle wage workers and low wage workers the same going forward so we never have this huge growth in inequality between low wage folks and middle wage workers anymore.

On the tip minimum wage, what the bill would do is gradually raise the current federal tip minimum wage of \$2.13 per hour, which as you mentioned hasn't been raised since 1991. It's really just an outrageously low wage standard for folks who receive tips. The notion that they can be paid \$2.13 per hour provided they get tips is just unbelievable to me. But what it would do is it would raise that value over the next six years, seven years, excuse me, until eventually it's equal to the regular minimum wage, and at that point tipped workers would be paid the same minimum wage as everyone else. It wouldn't matter what tips they

received. Everyone would get minimum wage, and if tipped workers got tips on top of that, even better.

The bill would also do away with the lower subminimum wage for youth workers, so people who are under 20 years old. And then the other piece that you mentioned is this special exemption for workers with disabilities. Right now, under the Fair Labor Standards Act, workers that have a disability can be paid significantly less than the federal minimum wage. And this bill would finally do away with that.

So again, regardless of who you are, regardless of whether you've received tips, regardless of your age, regardless of any disability, everyone would be subject to the same minimum wage. Which I think is, long overdue.

**REBECCA VALLAS - HOST, OFF KILTER:** [00:20:44] And just a quick addition on the the disabled worker subminimum wage that has been enforced for as long as we've had a minimum wage law and yet has been allowed to continue to exist on the books, this is a vestige of a prior era when there was the impression, a belief that somehow this would be good for veterans to give them lower wages because it would allow more of them to be hired if they were a hard to hire workforce. We're now at a place where what that has become is not just a loophole in wage law that has allowed people to be paid pennies an hour for their labor -- I want to be clear. We're not even talking about dollars in some cases -- some of these workers literally have been paid pennies and hour for their work just because they are disabled, but it has also allowed a sheltered workshop kind of industrial complex to flourish that is incredibly abusive and can be harmful in a number of other ways in addition to low wages to workers with disabilities. So, huge consequences here for phasing out that archaic loophole that is called 14C for folks in the disability space.

Dave, talk about the benefits of the law. So if that's what it will do, if those are kinds of the main features and a little bit of how it works. The economists at EPI have crunched the numbers, you guys always do, and you've updated a lot of this for the for this particular moment as the bill now has been reintroduced and has incredible new legs given what happened in November's election, talk about the benefits of the law and some of the kind of key facts and figures that help us understand how many people would benefit and by how much.

**DAVID COOPER:** [00:22:24] Sure. So, we estimate that if you were to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2025 as this bill would do, approximately 32 million workers throughout the United States would get a raise. And that's about 21%. So, about one fifth of the US workforce would benefit from this bill. We estimate that those workers would receive basically \$107 billion in additional wages by the time the bill is finally phased in, and on a per-person basis, that equals essentially \$3,300 per year in an additional annual earnings once we get all the way up to \$15. That is a huge increase in earnings for a lot of these folks who are only making \$25,000 a year or less. At the current federal minimum wage, someone might only be making \$18,000, \$19,000 a year, so to have an additional \$3,300, that's really going to help a lot of folks. As I mentioned earlier, when you look at the portrait of the folks that would benefit from this policy, a majority of the people that would benefit are women, disproportionately workers of color, about a quarter are parents, so people who really rely on this income.

And by providing that additional \$107 billion in higher wages, that can also benefit the economy more broadly. Low wage workers tend to come from low income households. In fact, we know that if this bill were passed, about 60% of all people who are working who are currently in poverty would get a raise. And those are households that that tend to go out and spend every additional dollar that they receive because they have to just to pay the bills. So if you're giving income to folks who are going to go out and spend it right away, that's going to help stimulate the economy. And I think that's really important when we think about how we're going to recover from the pandemic. Because right now we know the economy is struggling overall, a lot of people are struggling and a lot of businesses are struggling. And one of the best things we can do to help them recover is to make sure that there's a strong consumer base waiting for them as soon as the pandemic is under control. And raising the minimum wage is one way to make sure that we do that.

As I said this is a bill that's going to help to narrow racial pay gaps among black and white workers. As we talked about, it's a bill that's going to really help a lot of essential workers, folks who have been struggling and asked to take on a lot of additional risks over the last year. And finally, this bill will give them some additional compensation.

## **Activism: Call the Senate switchboard at 888-639-5155 and demand your Senators Raise the Wage for workers nationwide**

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:24:44] We don't technically have a formal activism segment for today because Amanda is nearly breaking under the weight of interacting with the American healthcare system lately. However, she knew you'd be informed and angry and would want to know that there is something you can do.

The fight for a \$15 federal minimum wage is happening right now in the Senate as part of the next COVID-19 relief package. Senator Bernie Sanders, the Senate budget committee chairman, is leading the charge, but the threat is coming from within. Conservative democratic senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia says he does not support this essential gradual pay raise for workers, even during a pandemic and economic recession. The Fight for 15 campaign is asking everyone to call their senators and demand they support and put pressure on Manchin to pass what would be the first increase in the federal minimum wage in 12 years. It's worth noting that this is the longest we've ever gone without an increase, and we're already fighting for less than what it should be when adjust for inflation.

So call the Senate switchboard at (888) 639-5155 and demand your senators raise the wage for workers nationwide. You can follow Fight for 15 at @Fightfor15 on Twitter to stay engaged.

## **Modi's "Arrogance of Power" and the Indian Farmers' Protests with Rana Ayyub - Why Is This Happening? with Chris Hayes - Air Date 2-16-21**

**CHRIS HAYES - HOST, WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?:** [00:26:03] What is the source of the protest?

**RANA AYYUB:** [00:26:05] What the farmers are protesting about the fact that here is a leader who has, in a way, like all ordinances that he has passed in the Indian parliament without taking into consideration the opinions of stakeholders, he has brought in an ordinance which basically corporatizes Indian farming. And Indian farming, as it is, is in a dire position. There are farmers who commit suicide in thousands every year. By bringing in these three farm laws, Modi has made sure that these crony capitalists who, as it is, have been benefiting from Modi's largess ever since he has come to power. So there's this term that we coined for Modi, it's called corporate Hindutva. So he plays Hindutva with corporates. It's a combination that he's been repeating since his good old days when he was the provincial minister when Muslims were killed in his backyard while he was a chief minister, and then he would bring about this big business houses; this in Gujarat.

This corporate Hindutva is at play again at the national capital, and farmers, this time, though -- Indians have actually been very meek in the response in early ordinances, whether it was Kashmir, whether it was the citizenship bill -- this time, there's a rebellion. This time it's about their livelihood. And farmers are about one quarter of India's population. It's a rural economy. You cannot just look away from the fact that you are snatching their livelihood and giving it to a lot of corporates. And because Mr. Modi has such a massive ego, he stood on the floor of the parliament yesterday and went on to call the farmers and the activists, in as many words, parasites. That's what he's called them. So, that's his arrogance.

**CHRIS HAYES - HOST, WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?:** [00:27:50] Okay. So, the corporate Hindutva is interesting, cause obviously there's a very strong corollary here in the US, right? We have wings of Republican government that sort of work this way in which there's this kind of nationalist red meat to the base but then these kinds of corporate policies in terms of what they're doing. So, Trump gets elected and immediately he cuts taxes for big corporations.

But what just specifically, you don't have to get too technical, but I've had a hard time getting my head around like what the heck is it that it would lead to more farm concentration? It would allow big farm Agra concerns to buy out smaller farmers? Is that what the issue is with the laws?

**RANA AYYUB:** [00:28:23] So, if the farmers could not sell their produce -- now, we are a country which is dependent on the monsoon; this is especially because most of the crops are monsoon crops. The rain: so, if there is no rain, there are droughts, and for that matter, if there's a surplus, when the farmers are unable to sell their produce, then you can have a third party which can basically come and sell it at a subsidized rate, you know, buy them at a minimal rate which the farmers set, saying, okay, this is . . . we set a bench[mark] to say we are ready to set it at an average rate. What Mr. Modi has done is he has brought big business houses, he has removed those middlemen. So, either farmers go to those corporates and sell them at *their* rates or just get out of the business. So it's basically initializing and getting in the crony capitalists and replacing the middleman from the entire nexus. Now they are saying it's a great thing, removing the middleman. But a grain import nexus does not work like that.

**CHRIS HAYES - HOST, WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?:** [00:29:23] So, what you're describing there is a system of every country in the world has some sort of farm support regulation, precisely because of the fact that agriculture is so weather dependent. It can be so boom and bust, when everybody has a good year, then you flood the market and then you can push the prices down. So there's been recognition across the world that there are ways in which agricultural markets function different than like widget markets. So what you're saying is there was essentially a kind of price support, a floor, that there was some third-party purchasers that would guarantee a certain price to farmers. So they knew they could bank on that price. And then Modi wants to take away that floor?

**RANA AYYUB:** [00:30:02] Absolutely, absolutely. More than that, you have taken this decision without consulting the farmer bodies or without consulting leaders of various farmers groups, because you believe that you have certain economists, agriculturalists who are sitting on your panels who can decide within the four walls what the farmer in the village has to deal with on a daily basis.

**CHRIS HAYES - HOST, WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?:** [00:30:25] So this is something that I've gleaned from the coverage I've read, which is that there's a substantive objection to the policy, and then there's a process objection to the way Modi did it.

**RANA AYYUB:** [00:30:33] Absolutely.

**CHRIS HAYES - HOST, WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?:** [00:30:33] But the substance is, this is a classic -- it reads to me like a kind of classic 1990s IMF neo-liberal reform, that we have to take away certain kind of subsidies, we have to make it more free market in the farming sector. So there's that part of it. But then there's the sort of imperiousness with which Modi -- who has done this on a bunch of stuff, he's quite popular, he has big parliamentary majorities -- he says, this is how it will be. And we've come up with this policy and you guys now have to deal with it and people have rebelled against that.

**RANA AYYUB:** [00:31:00] Absolutely. Absolutely. And under the guise of liberalizing the Indian economy, you are doing this. But unfortunately, one of the reasons why this protest and this revolution, so to say, is so successful because most of the parliamentarians in the Indian parliament represent villages, represent farmers' interests, represent regions that have farmers as their vote banks. So, many of them actually are forced to take up a stand for farmers in the Indian parliament, because, Hey, you cannot. . . For the first time, you have something like this getting a massive support. Unlike in previous times, when you have the citizenship protest, when Modi was only attacking Muslims, now, the Indian parliamentarian would say, Hey, what are our stakes? Muslims are just about 10% of the population. They're hardly many Muslim voters. So why do we care? But in this case, you have to care because that's a huge section of the vote bank of every parliamentarian. And that's an interest you cannot look away from. But away from vote bank politics, this is a fight for the dignity of the farmers. You are telling them that we will set the rules for you without taking into consideration your own opinion. And here is a man who said, Oh, in this country, there are only two people who matter: the farmers and the army men on the border. So, clearly it's all about nationalism vis-a-vis farmers and army men. It's not something that you really are repeating itself on the ground.

# Indian Farmers Lead Historic Strike & Protests Against Narendra Modi, Neoliberalism & Inequality - Democracy Now! - Air Date 12-3-20

**NERMEEN SHAIKH:** [00:32:23] Well P. Sainath, could you talk about this protest, these protests, in the wider economic context in India? Unemployment is now at 27%, which is unprecedented in the country. As we mentioned earlier, almost 60% of India's 1.3 billion people rely on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. In just two years, from 2018 to 2019, over 20,000 farmers died by suicide. Meanwhile, a billionaire, the richest man in India, Mukesh Ambani, has made \$12 million an hour since the lockdown began as a result of the pandemic in March. Could you talk about the broader context of these protests?

**P. SAINATH:** [00:33:18] Well, the entire protests, driven by a deepening agrarian crisis, are very fundamentally tied to the larger structural inequalities that you are pointing to. In just four months of the pandemic, just up to July, not only Mr. Ambani, but the entire bunch of Indian billionaires, dollar billionaires — there's about 120 of them — added 35% to their wealth, one-third to their already considerable wealth, and it's now around \$485 billion cumulatively. Mr. Ambani went from being the richest Indian and the 19th richest person in the world; in the last year, year and a half, he has made it up to rank number four.

At the same time, Amy, there are new papers, studies showing us 76% of the rural population — that is, three-fourths of the rural population — cannot afford a nutritious meal. They cannot afford a basic nutritious diet, even if they spend — even if they spent two-thirds of their income on food. Now, apart from that, even if, say, all rural Indians spent 100% of their income on food and nothing else — no transport, health, education, rent; they didn't spend anything of that — it would still mean 63.3% cannot afford a nutritious diet, if they spent every last paisa they earned, I mean, they got as income. So you're seeing these unbelievable gaps, phenomenal gaps. India ranks fourth or fifth in the list of dollar billionaires in the world, and 129th on the U.N. Human Development Index.

And the pandemic has provided — you need to understand one very important thing about the protests. And for that, you need to understand what kind of mischief was played in the laws. Three major laws have been passed in Parliament which devastate the farmers, and you mentioned them as you introduced the subject. Two days later, when the opposition walked out in protest, they rammed through four labor laws codifying 29 existing complex legislations, and made them into four and rammed it through.

Now, the question is: Why did they feel the need to pass these laws at the height of the pandemic? Mr. Modi had a majority before the pandemic. He has a big majority. He will have it for two, three years after the pandemic. The reasoning was, these blokes are on their knees now. They can't organize. They can't hit back. And in fact, many leading neoliberal intellectuals, economists and journalists, editors, incited the government, saying, "Never waste a good crisis," paraphrasing Winston Churchill, by the way, badly. "Never waste a good crisis. This is India's second 1991 moment" — when we embraced the world of neoliberalism. "This is the time to ram through aggressive, next-generation reforms." And the government, believing that, went for this action, not understanding the resolve of these farmers, who have come back massively at the government.

Just one clause I want to read you from the laws. You will not believe — I don't know. You can tell me if you've ever read laws in a democratic nation which have a clause like this. Not only have they rammed through these laws, you know, on prices, on contract farming, on essential commodities, they have included this clause in one of the most important of these laws. It says, "No suit, no prosecution or other legal proceedings shall lie against the central government or the state government or any officer of the central government or any officer of the state government or any other person in respect of anything" — [read corporations] — I mean, "read corporations" in brackets — "or any other person in respect of anything which is done in good faith or intended to be done in good faith under this act. And no civil court shall have jurisdictions to entertain any suit or proceedings in respect of any matter connected to the actions under this law." Have you read many laws like that in a democratic country?

So, they have taken with the legal recourse of the citizen. And I've been yelling of this that it's not just the farmers who are affected. Nobody else can sue, either. They are dismantling the right to legal recourse. The Bar Council of Delhi, you know, the capital city — the Bar Council of Delhi yesterday wrote to the president of India, saying, "This is an extremely dangerous thing that's happening. You're taking away the fundamental rights of the citizen to move the courts when in distress." So, this is the kind of stuff.

And at the same time, the inequalities are deepening. The unemployment figures, that, Amy, I mean, they have come down as some amount of opening up happens, but people are returning to much worse conditions as workers. We have tampered with the gold standard of labor law, which used to be eight hours a day. Now you can have 12 hours a day without overtime for the last four hours. It'll be at a pro-rate, I think you are having a massive, massive class divide in what's happening with the top 0.01%. Adding phenomenally to its wealth.

And a huge amount of distress at the bottom end.

## **All walls must fall w/Harsha Walia - The Red Nation Podcast - Air Date 2-15-21**

**HARSHA WALIA:** [00:39:53] There's one of the largest uprisings in the world, certainly in the country, and has sustained itself in this immediate context, right? for just through the winter months. And people are camped out surrounding the borders of New Delhi, the capital of India, in resistance to three farm bills.

And I think what's important if I was to summarize some takeaways, the first is that these farm bills in the immediate, what they do is increase private control of the farming sector. And there's already been a long creep of privatization and corporate control of farming in the Punjab. And these three laws just expedited that process, making it easier for multinational corporations to basically exploit and extract both the land and the labor of farm workers. And so that is the kind of impetus for this resistance.

But also it is not a coincidence that these farm bills that impact the entire country and in farming communities across the country, but that the resistance was really focused in the Punjab, because of Punjab has a long history of opposition to the Indian state. Punjab at its

very founding or rather its founding in the Indian state was marked by partition. So Punjab has been marked by one of the bloodiest human displacements in human history already, which was the imposition of the colonially-imposed border between India and Pakistan that fractured the Punjab into two different regions, and really violently forced people on two sides of this artificial border. So it's always been in a struggled relationship to the Indian state, what it calls the center.

And then, decades on, the green revolution, which was really an industrialized revolution that brought in capitalist control and industrial control of the farming sector, that kind of industrial World Bank- funded ex-neoliberal experiment at a global level was pioneered in the Punjab. So Punjab has, the impacts of that are what we often hear about in the news: farmer suicides, substance use crisis, the crisis of landlessness that all flowed from the failed and flawed experiment of the green revolution.

And then in the 1980s, there was a massive counter-insurgency and anti-terror campaign and genocidal campaign against the Sikh community in India as a result of the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi.

And all of these kind of overlapping forces are the contextual kind of factors that have fueled the current struggle against farm bills. And then the other really important context is that the Punjab has one of the largest Dalit communities in India. Dalit communities, being cast-depressed communities who are more likely than cast-privileged communities to be impacted by landlessness and to actually be farm workers and not farm owners.

And so one piece of important solidarity, or one important aspect of solidarity that's been built in the current movement, is the kind of solidarities, as tenuous as they are and as troubled as they are, between farm-owning and farm-working classes, and farm-owning and farm-working casts, and farm-owning and farm-working communities.

So all of these are I think some of the most important aspects of this resistance and really just the direct action that has been imbued, both the organization and the direct action and just the fearlessness that has been imbued throughout this resistance facing downstate violence again in the middle of winter and remaining undeterred. And just suffering so many deaths, their deaths are over 120 farmer deaths in the past two months alone from various causes.

And so I thank you for bringing this up because it's certainly been close to home and close to my heart in many ways.

## **Prof. Richard Wolff: India's Historic General Strike - The Zero Hour with RJ Eskow - Air Date 12-4-2020**

**PROF. RICHARD WOLFF:** [00:43:55] Here are some of the issues. The Modi government is like the Trump government and is like the Bolsonaro of government in Brazil. It has turned to nationalism. Its whole approach has been to divert the public's attention from the deteriorating economy and the fact that in a deteriorating economy, more and more of scarce resources are going to the super rich at the top, and the burden of the decline is shifted onto the mass of people.

This is so dangerous for the capitalist system. There's a separation and division in society that it becomes very urgent to focus the mass of people's upset about what's happening to them on something other than the economic system. Mr. Trump got us angry at immigrants. Mr. Trump got us angry at foreign trading partners like China or Europe or Mexico or Canada, whoever he could think of. The foreigner, the other, the immigrant, in hopes of getting peoples, how should I put it politely, baser instincts to focus them elsewhere. That's what the white supremacy was about, that's what the misogyny was about.

In India, it's a different country, so they played their nationalism a little differently. There the thing to rev up, which Mr. Modi did, was the antipathy between the Hindu Majority and the Muslim minority. To revive all of those terrible parts of the history of that area, of the British colonial regime playing the Hindu people against the Muslim people, at all of that. So he became a Hindu nationalists, attacking Muslims, looking the other way. Becoming famous because he condoned unspeakable crimes against the Islamic minority. So he could rev that and get people all excited about their religious differences so they don't ask why the economic system is in such trouble.

Mr. Bolsonaro does it with his antics, his militarism, his saber rattling, in Latin America, and his copycat approach to COVID, the way he does with Trump. So it is very important that at least in one of these countries, in this case India, the massive people saw through it, weren't distracted, and mobilized enough to produce a general strike of 250 million people against the economic policies of the Modi government. That was made crystal clear. There were demands as part of this strike, for pensions for people that don't have them, approving pensions for those who do have them, cash support during the COVID, which is desperately bad in India. All kinds of demands on the government to do what it isn't doing and should be for the massive people at the same time undoing the "reforms".

By the way, nowadays, the word reform has become the go-to terminology to disguise a reduction in support for people. You dare not say what to do, so it's all about reform. But nobody in India was fooled. So the reason it's historic is that this has rarely been done in India. It has rarely been possible to get all the unions together. It has rarely been possible to get all the farmers together. It has been rarely impossible to get the two groups together and to focus them against the sitting government that has tried everything it could think of to prevent this, including really ugly police repression. It did not work.

And what is being done in India, it may not be covered, but awareness of it will seep into Brazil. It will seep into other countries. The few that have gone in this direction and even here in the United States where the coverage was stunning by its silence. It's going to be standing there as a kind of notion for the working class in the United States to ask itself the obvious question. We've just had four years of among the worst anti-labor, anti working class governments in our history and the labor movement mounted no opposition. The labor movement in the United States itself so divided by the Trump administration. So many were distracted into being angry at immigrants or China or something else that we weren't able to do what the Indians have now shown us how to do. And I think that that lesson will not be lost on Americans either.

**What's the deal with the CBO report? Part 2 - Pitchfork  
Economics with Nick Hanauer - Air Date 2-12-21**

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:49:27] Well, actually, this is really very simple, believe it or not. The math behind this projection is very simple. And that is primarily when they are calculating the number of job losses they project from a minimum wage hike, and by the way this is part of the bias of this, they're always calculating job losses, they're never calculating job gains. They just assume it's going to be a job loss. They're taking something, a figure that's referred to as employment elasticity. And that is the likelihood that an increase in wages is going to result in a decrease in jobs. If you raise the cost of something people will purchase less of it, as that old supply demand curve from econ 101 suggests. And the way that's calculated is elasticity is essentially a ratio of one percentage change to another. It's a ratio of the percentage increase in wages to percentage decrease in employment. And if you get a number like negative one, what that means is for every 1% increase in wages, you will get a 1% decrease in employment, and that is a wash. If wages go up 1% and employment goes down 1% then in the aggregate, there's no gain whatsoever. If the number is above negative one, or is that below negative one? If it's negative one and a half, that means that for every 1% increase in wages, you will see a 1.5% decrease in employment. That is a loss for workers. That means you're actually losing total income. The decrease in employment would be greater than the increase in wages when you multiply the two together.

What the CBO actually determined, we disagree with the number and many, many economists disagree with the number, the number they used was about negative 0.38. What they're saying is for every 1% increase in wages, you get a 0.38% decrease in employment. As a cost benefit analysis, that tells you, just from their elasticity number, that tells you that this is a net positive. That if you then multiply that by the number of workers who are affected and the percent increase in the minimum wage, which in some cases is more than twice, you actually get significantly more income for workers in the whole with a \$15 minimum wage then you get without. Even given the unemployment that, that accounts for.

So even that the worst number, the 1.4 million jobs, that is purely a factor of the elasticity ratio and that, because it is a number that is less than negative one. I don't know if it's a more or less? More than negative one? I don't know how you do, how you say it when you're dealing with negative numbers.

It

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:52:29] depends on how you're looking at it. Right. If you're looking at a zero facing the negatives, then it's more of the negative one.

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:52:36] This is a good thing, because remember the fundamental argument of the opposition is if you raise the cost of employment, people will buy less of it. Employers will buy less of it, that it's a complete trade off. It's an equilibrium system that they have to balance out. And what the CBO, even in this bad number is telling you, is no, they don't balance out. It's a net gain for workers. It's not a net loss it, or it's not equal, it doesn't balance out. So in that sense, I guess you could say the positive spin on it is it could of been worse. It could of been what the textbooks predict, but it's not.

Now, this is where you get into the bias of the CBO. That elasticity number they're using to calculate job losses is totally off the charts compared to what's found in a spate of studies over the last few years.

**PAUL CONSTANT - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:53:29] So it sounds like what you're saying is that they are going into this report with several fundamentally flawed assumptions, the kind of econ 101 stuff that we've talked about on this podcast for a long time, where the assumption is if you raise the minimum wage, then it kills jobs. So they are going in specifically looking for the jobs that would be killed by raising the wage. Is that right?

**DAVID GOLDSTEIN - HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** [00:53:53] Right. And the way they determine that is by plugging in this employment elasticity ratio and then calculating that against the increase of wages and the number of jobs that this would affect, and that is how they calculate the number of jobs that are lost. The question here is how did they come up with the elasticity numbers? And that's where the bias comes in, or you could say it's just subjective analysis comes in, however you want to characterize it. But there've been a number of studies over the years, and there's been a number of meta studies over the years that have looked at these numbers, and when you get and average them together, that lists them all up, there's some subjectivity and trying to pick out the good studies from the bad studies. By the way, just like people do with polling, this is what FiveThirtyEight does when it does a meta analysis of polling numbers, the theory being that will individual polls might have problems, when you average them all together you're more likely to get at the actual truth.

And so what economists have done, progressive economists like Arin Dube, conservative economists like [David] Neumark have done is they've gone through these studies that other economists have done, they themselves and others have done, and they've made some judgment as to which they considered to be the most credible studies. And then they put them all together and they come up with a median number, the median or an average, in which I say, well, if you add them all together, this is the elasticity. Dube, who's done a much broader study, and I think a lot of people consider to be the foremost expert on minimum wage these days, he came up with something very close to zero. That when you average them together it's negative 0.04. If you plugged that into CBO's model, you'd have under a hundred thousand lost jobs out of 27 million people seeing a wage increase. That's really, really good.

When you go to somebody like Neumark, I don't have the number in front of me, but it's closer to negative 0.2 I believe. Somehow CBO gets to something, and by the way, Neumark is the guy we fight with, he is the one big minimum wage economist who we disagree with. He's the bad guy. And somehow CBO gets to an elasticity that's more than twice what even Neumark says it is in evaluating the studies.

And they do this in a number of ways. They don't include certain studies and they include others that others have ruled out. And a good example is when we were studying the minimum wage here in Seattle, multiple studies came out of the University of Washington, as the data came in. They used the early study that was based on the first year or so of data, which suggested that there were very large job losses in Seattle. That they include and that's a bit of an outlier compared to all of the other studies. Weirdly they did not include the final study in which the researchers found, eh, once all the data came in, it looks like it was a net

gain for workers. That there was some job losses for teenagers, but overall, the increase in wages far outweighed the loss of hours or jobs. That's not included by the CBO, but it is included by somebody like Dube and Neumark.

So they made these editorial decisions and then they also did something weird in 2019 when they projected a smaller job loss, they use the median of the studies. In 2021 they use the mean, the average, and the average is higher because of outliers like that early Seattle minimum wage study.

## **Amazon Workers Organize! - Working Life Podcast - Air Date 2-10-21**

**JONATHAN TASINI - HOST, WORKING LIFE:** [00:57:51] The first thing that struck me: Alabama would of been one of the last places I would think that you would want to start organizing Amazon, just in terms of the general political atmosphere. It's a right-to-work state, as it's very lowly unionized, but tell me why I'm wrong about that, number one, and/or maybe take it from the point of view, how was it that this organizing effort arose in that particular place?

**JOSHUA BREWER:** [00:58:16] Jonathan, you're wrong. Is that what you wanted to hear?

**JONATHAN TASINI - HOST, WORKING LIFE:** [00:58:18] There are many people who love to hear people say that about me. So feel free.

**JOSHUA BREWER:** [00:58:22] Add me to the list. It's a fascinating campaign. I mean it as it is a locally-inspired and connected campaign. The campaign came about because workers in the facility came to the union and we are of a strong presence down in that part of Alabama. We have our mid South council is headquartered in Birmingham. Birmingham is right next door to Bessemer. A lot of the folks who worked in the plant know folks who are members of my union. So it was an organic conversation that began.

What's fascinating too, is Bessemer itself, it's maybe not in the same way we think of places like New York or the Michigan back in its heyday, but there is a long a tradition of union families in that part of Alabama. It goes back to the steelworkers and, but also, there are teachers there, there are folks from different walks of life who have a connection to the labor movement or a familial connection to the labor movement.

So workers in the plant were hearing from their relatives, their parents -- it's a relatively young workforce there -- their aunts and their uncles about Oh, one way to solve your problem at work is to have union representation. So it was a very organic effort that came as a result of people wanting to have a voice, recognizing that the RWDSU is a strong voice in Alabama for workers.

And that's how it began. That's really how it got moving, and in some ways there's no better place to be when that happens.

I think another piece of this that's fueling a lot of the energy around the organizing: the workforce there is mostly African-American, a large percentage of the workforce is African-American. And there's a real sense in this moment that we need to be looking at our work

lives, we need to be looking at our government, our social connections in a way that is fairer and treats people more decently and engages people and respects people regardless of race. And, I think there's some of that energy is also fueling this desire on the part of the Amazon workers and in Bessemer. Black Lives Matter has been a part of the conversation, and it should be.

All of these things are intertwined. You can't be for justice in one place and not in another. And so that's why when you open up with a statement by Jeff Bezos and Amazon about \$15 an hour, it just begs the question, Why are you for decency in one place and not in another? Because you're not. That's the reality, you're not. And you're playing funny. And we want to change that and I think we can.

**JONATHAN TASINI - HOST, WORKING LIFE:** [01:00:49] And just to underscore a couple points you made. The first one, about \$15 an hour, I've pointed this out a gazillion times that the \$15 an hour demand is terrific, given where the minimum wage is now, but it should be at least \$22 an hour if you look at productivity, and it also is way below what a good (as good union negotiator) what a good union contract would mean in terms of pay and benefits. So it's really the floor of what we should want.

And you were actually telepathic to my second point that I want to follow up with you on. I wondered whether part of this beginning of the campaign, or at least perhaps the campaign started before the pandemic, but certainly got energy from both the pandemic, from Amazon making money hand over fist, given the fact that people were stuck at home and all of a sudden Amazon's business grew even faster. And in fact, Black Lives Matter, which really took off certainly in the spring when we saw uprisings everywhere. So did you see that kind of all of that combination to your point before?

**JOSHUA BREWER:** [01:01:54] Yeah, there's no question about it. Certainly the pandemic has shown a light on a lot of the problems within Amazon's workplace, and throughout a lot of workplaces in this country. The disparate treatment that people are subjected to as a result of it there's real serious concerns about health and safety that permeate all of Amazon's operations, and we've heard this again and again, I'm not saying anything that's new. And workers are rightly concerned that they don't have the protections and they don't have the safe conditions that they need to survive this moment in time.

And it's scary. It's scary stuff, and how do you address it? How do you address these things? With a collective voice. I That's really the only thing that will ultimately make a difference.

I think the labor movement is challenged because for so many people that has not been a part of their experience, they don't have the personal experience with a union and a collective voice. And so you have to overcome that lack of experience to be able to connect people with you.

**JONATHAN TASINI - HOST, WORKING LIFE:** [01:02:51] Especially, as you point out, among younger people, and that's partly a reality of the attacks against union and partly of the reality of some unions have not done a great job of reaching out to younger workers and here and there.

And so when you think about how do I get justice at my workplace, how do I improve my livelihood? It takes a while for people to think through I need to form a union.

**JOSHUA BREWER:** [01:03:15] No. Absolutely. It's not part of your experience, it does seem like a foreign notion, right? It's hard to overcome that. But when people do understand how it works, I think they see how it could make a difference in their lives. And that's what's happening now.

You mentioned, too, about you have a company like Amazon and, a man like Jeff Bezos and the amount of wealth that they've accrued throughout the pandemic has been astounding and frankly disturbing. And here we are talking about what minimum wages should look like, what should be like, should it be \$15 an hour or should it be \$22 an hour? Well, shouldn't we be talking about the imbalance of power at this point in time, right? You can individually address worker's concerns and you're never actually getting at the real problem. And the problem is an extraordinary imbalance of power between workers and their employers. And what's happening here in Bessemer is we're trying to change that balance of power so that workers have the ability then to actively engage in their conditions and pay with their employer, and not just have to have it dictated from above that it's "This is all you get, and then you should thank us later because we're such good people that we did this for you." You're not doing anything for anyone. These are the folks, the workers are the ones who are making this company so much money. Look, it made Jeff Bezos the wealthiest man in the world.

## Final comments on the results of our disinformation headline contest

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:04:29] We've just heard clips today, starting with the Working Life podcast giving four talking points in favor of the fight for 15. Off Kilter in two parts discussed for the proposed Raise the Wage Act. Pitchfork Economics explained why even if the unreliable CBO scoring of the Raise the Wage Act were correct, it would still be a net win for workers. Why Is This Happening with Chris Hayes explained the origins of the Indian farmer protests. Democracy Now examined the disaster capitalism at play in India. The Red Nation podcast spoke to the passion behind the protests, and the Zero Hour had on Professor Richard Wolf who highlighted the nationalistic tactics being used in India to distract away from the failures of capitalism.

That's what everyone heard, but members also got bonus clips from: first, Pitchfork Economics explaining in a very nerdy, very detailed way why the CBO scoring of the Raise the Wage Act is misrepresenting the likely impact of the bill would have. And the Working Life podcast discussed the movement to organize a union within Amazon.

For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and are part of the transcript for today's episode so you can still find them if you want to make the effort. But to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support) or request a financial hardship membership because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information and every request is granted, no questions asked.

Okay, now we are foregoing voicedMails for today to hear the result of the new game experiment I launched last week. The target of the game is to write a misleading but true headline. So, I gave three stories, just plain, vanilla stories without manipulated headlines.

And we're going to hear some of the submitted misleading headlines that came in. The first story was about the Biden administration taking aim just as Obama did at closing the Guantanamo Bay prison. Some prisoners have now been there for 20 years having never been charged with a crime. But closing the prison still wouldn't necessarily mean releasing any of those prisoners, just moving them to somewhere else.

So, our first misleading the line is from John.

**HEADLINES:** [01:06:56] Biden Administration to Free 9/11 Terrorists from Guantanamo

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:07:00] John's really keeping it classic with that one. Technically, I would say that this may slip past misleading into downright false, unless a publication trying to get away with that headline wanted to make the argument that they're technically being freed from Guantanamo. They're not in Guantanamo anymore; they just happened to be on a transport headed to a new prison.

The second story I suggested was about the administration looking to remove work requirements from welfare programs. So, let's hear this headline from Zach the theologian.

**HEADLINES:** [01:07:35] Socialist Biden Plummets Country Further Into Deficit By Handing Out Your Money to the Lazy

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:07:41] Again, this may have tipped over from wildly misleading into actually factually inaccurate. I think it is fair to say that Biden is factually not a socialist, but you can totally imagine a publication arguing that no! It was just flowery language that we're using to make a point. It's not that we think he's actually a card-carrying socialist, but he's supporting a program that is socialized and anyone who supports program like that is a socialist, so he is. Or they could go with the classic that came up in the 2011 retrospective episode. This headline was not intended to be a factual statement. Other than that minor quibble though, this hits on so many great points. These are all excellent misinformation strategies.

So, the first is extreme language, just obviously going for the emotion. From beginning to end. Deficit scaring. This is not so much a tactic but a specific talking point that is brought up over and over again, and it is completely misleading. So, you could call it, misrepresenting data or twisting data, something along those lines, because the reality is that it is a fraction of the budget, so to call it plummeting into deficit and so forth is obviously misleading. Referring to it as *your money* is a great way to reinforce ideological ideas about the nature of taxes. And then of course calling the recipients lazy: excellent demagoguery scapegoating, all intended to anger the reader. So, just really, all throughout -- excellent work.

Our third story was about changes to the rules about asylum seekers being allowed across the border from Mexico, and I got this headline from Dan.

**HEADLINES:** [01:09:43] Biden's plan to release over 25,000 migrants concerns Texas border residents: one resident interviewed says these people aren't being properly vetted for safety!

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:09:53] And this one's tricky. It uses a manipulation tactic I didn't even mention. This one is called featuring extreme or uninformed voices. Hy ask an expert when you could get an unhinged opinion from an uninformed

person who fits your narrative? It's a great lesson in being aware of the sources. A piece of reporting is relying on and related to the uninformed or extreme perspective is the pseudo expert. So, this is when someone is interviewed and is referred to as an expert but they don't actually have a track record on the subject. And so that's a real nefarious bit of misleading.

Lastly, this headline came in from Corey and it actually addresses all three of the stories.

**HEADLINES:** [01:10:47] As Americans suffer, Biden shifts focus to end of Guantanamo Bay and welfare requirements. The new administration aims to fulfill promise of relocating 9/11 terrorist collaborators, allow previously barred foreigners to enter US, and remove welfare work requirements.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:11:05] Again, this one is subtly quite genius, I think, and there's a lot to pick through, to the whole framing of "as American suffer" is frankly, it's quite a master stroke. It's clearly true that Americans are suffering, but it's also completely irrelevant. It's also true that the administration is putting a huge focus on relieving that suffering. So in this case, that tactic would be called shiny object distraction. When a media outlet wants to specifically distract from one story and shift attention. So, pretending that one or more stories is distracting from a major story like American suffering is actually a great way to distract from the major story.

The major story could be the Biden administration is doing lots of various things to try to relieve suffering. But if you frame it as, but look over here, look at these things you don't like, then the implication, which doesn't have to be true and they don't have to say it explicitly, is Biden is ignoring all of the suffering so that he can do these things that are going to make you angry. That's why it's a masterstroke. Then, classic referring to 9/11 terrorist collaborators is inflammatory language which is great to make people angry, but it specifically conveniently cuts out all of the non-9/11 terrorist collaborators who are also stuck at Guantanamo and just focusing on a narrow slice and ignoring the rest is a classic framing.

And then this one, I really liked. This one is the subtle one. Allowed previously barred foreigners to enter the US, and this is playing on people's status quo bias. People tend to think that if a rule is in place, then it should be in place. If people are barred from entering, it's probably because they should be barred from entering, and there's probably a really good reason for it. So, that framing is entirely accurate and yet completely misleading. It creates this idea in people's minds these people were barred and now they're coming, and it is entirely in the 'scare people' type of framing. So again, entirely accurate, yet completely misleading and that is the real art of this game.

So, all those headlines are fake. They were sent in by listeners. That's just a game we're playing to learn the tactics at play here. But this week I came across a really great example of a totally true yet entirely misleading headline in real life. So, this is about the ongoing Jeffrey Epstein story. And this particular story is about how a 60 Minutes producer just wrote a book or it just came out or it's being teased and it's claiming that this producer spoke to Galane Maxwell, friend of Jeffrey Epstein, about finding tapes of Trump having sex with underage girls. And this was happening during the 2016 election. The producer was saying like, look, this guy might become president. That would be terrible. We have to get this story out. And Galane Maxwell, who did not want Trump to become president according to this book, still refused to help find the tapes. She also said she didn't know where they were, but

she refused to help find them because then the media, she said, knowing how the media works, would also have to find and play the tapes of Bill Clinton in the same scenario which she feared would hurt Hillary Clinton's chances in the election more than Trump's. She thought, Clinton's ahead. Trump's behind. This story doesn't need to come out. The takeaway is that the clear implication is that there exist tapes of both men in Jeffrey Epstein's collection. So, that's the story. And here's one relatively reasonable headline: Galane Maxwell "admitted Epstein had secret tapes of Trump and Bill Clinton." But here's one that is both true to the story and yet entirely misleading. Epstein Madam wouldn't help find tapes of Bill Clinton because it would hurt Hillary's 2016 run. The end. Classic. Carefully carving out the information you don't want to share, only shouting from the rooftops the information you do want to get out there. Both accusations are inflammatory. But to only present one of them, there is no other option than to say you're intentionally seeking to mislead people by only mentioning Bill Clinton and entirely ignoring Trump in the headline. Now, as is often the case with these outlets that have these very misleading headlines, the story will mention Trump so they can say, look, , we're a real media organization. We're doing real reporting. We mentioned Trump in the article. And yet they know that most people don't read past the headline, and that's the angle they want to get across to their readers.

So, now that you know how to play, I'm going to do another round. Here's some headlines. You can pick one or more of these stories just as you heard people do today and write one or more wildly misleading yet truthful headlines.

So here's the first one. US officially rejoins the Paris Climate Accord. Of course, that's been in the works for awhile but now it's official. The second is South Carolina governor signs bill banning abortion of fetus after heartbeat is detected. And the third is Biden approves major disaster declaration for Texas. Wildly misleading yet true headlines for one or more of those stories. And keep in mind the misleading angle doesn't have to be right wing. It may be the harder to get yourself into the mindset, but if you're really want to stretch yourself a little bit, you can try to figure out a way to make a misleading left-wing headline that is trying to mislead people to the left while still being true.

Again, some good disinformation techniques you may want to employ: mischaracterization or twisting or cherry picking of facts, clickbait headlines, manipulation of data or statistics, appeals to emotion stoking polarization, or as we heard today, featuring extreme voices or shiny object distraction, all those are great as always keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com).

That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic design, web, mastering, and so on. And thanks to all of those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at [bestoftheleft.com/](http://bestoftheleft.com/) support as that is absolutely how the program survives. Now everyone can support the show and earn rewards by telling everyone you know about it using our Refer-o-Matic program. If you refer just five friends, you get our amazing and super secret Best of the Left artwork for your smartphone or tablets. Everyone who has seen it can't stop raving about it. Of course, details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes, on the

blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen. So, coming to from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly things entirely to the members and donors to the show from [bestoftheleft.com](http://bestoftheleft.com).