

# #1452 Worked to Death: Pandemics Expose the Power of Labor

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast, in which we shall take a look at the current wave of strikes and labor movements through the lens of pandemic economics and the history of businesses abusing workers. Clips today are from *Democracy Now!*, *In the Thick*, *The Takeaway*, *Planet Money*, and *Pitchfork Economics*, and with members-only clips from the *Strange World of Econ* and another from *Planet Money*.

## Striketober: Labor Militancy Grows, U.S. Workers Walk Off the Job & IATSE Members Get Tentative Deal - Democracy Now! - Air Date 10-20-21

[00:00:29] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** We begin today's show with what a number of people are calling "Striketober," as workers across the United States in a wide variety of industries are walking off the job. Thousands have gone on strike at food plants operated by Kellogg's, Nabisco and Frito-Lay over work hours, pay and benefits. Last week, more than 24,000 Kaiser Permanente healthcare workers in California authorized a strike. Now 10,000 United Automobile Workers members at John Deere are also on strike, saying they were forced to work overtime while the company made record profits. The list goes on and includes more than 1,000 coal miners on strike at Warrior Met in Alabama, as we've covered here at Democracy Now!

This comes as the union representing television and film production crews averted a strike of some 60,000 workers just hours before a midnight deadline Saturday, when it reached a tentative agreement with an association of Hollywood producers representing companies like Walt Disney, Netflix and Amazon. The tentative deal brings members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees higher pay, longer breaks and better healthcare and pension benefits. Some members say the deal doesn't go far enough, and about 40,000 members from 13 Hollywood locals must still approve the pact.

These are two IATSE members in Los Angeles — costume maker Yuan Thueson and Thomas Pieczkolon, who works in sound production — in a video by More Perfect Union.

[00:02:08] **THOMAS PIECZKOLON:** We take one break at six hours on the contracts that our unions negotiated long ago. They're trying not to actually have us break, because, for them, if they don't break us for lunch, they pay a meal penalty. Those meal penalties haven't been updated since the mid-'80s. For them, it's pennies. They can make us work 10 hours, 11 hours straight and pay four to five meal penalties, but it doesn't affect them at the end of the day when it's Amazon and the show has a \$300 million budget.

[00:02:34] **YUAN THUESON:** We see the big companies producing big budget projects, and we know that they're popular, they're selling, and people are watching it. But our crew who's working on those projects are getting paid like \$5 to nearly \$10 less an hour, just because it's new media.

[00:02:53] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** For more on this U.S. strike wave, we're joined in Pittsburgh by Alex Press, staff writer at Jacobin, where one of her recent pieces is headlined "US Workers Are in a Militant Mood." She's also host of a podcast about Amazon workers called Primer. In a few minutes, we'll also speak with a John Deere worker on strike in Iowa, and we'll talk with a representative of the taxi workers who are going on hunger strike in New York. But first let's look at this strike that was averted, the IATSE workers, 60,000 of them.

Alex Press, can you talk about IATSE and then go broader to Striketober?

[00:03:34] **ALEX PRESS:** Sure, yeah. Thanks so much for having me, Amy.

This is a big story, as you said, based on sheer numbers, right? Sixty thousand IATSE members voted nearly 99% in favor of authorizing a strike, and 90% of eligible members cast ballots in that vote. That would have begun a strike on Monday that — had they not reached that deal late on Saturday night, that strike would have been the largest one in the private sector in the United States since one by 74,000 workers at GM in 2007. The numbers on that strike authorization vote reflect a charged-up, mobilized membership.

The reason for their sense of urgency, their willingness to risk losing a paycheck going on strike, is motivated by what was said in that video by the worker: the schedule of an IATSE member. Specifically, they're concerned with what's called turnaround times, which is the minimum amount of time a worker has

from when she leaves work to when she is expected to be back. IATSE has secured 10-hour turnarounds in this tentative agreement, which is progress for some members who had nine hours, but many members already had 10. And it's important to remember that in this industry, 12- and 14-hour days are the norm, but 18-, even 20-hour days are not unheard of. So it's really important that workers have the time to commute home, to eat, to spend time with families and to get a good night's sleep, before having to commute back to work. Workers are saying, "You know what? I've had 10 hours. It's not enough. We want 12."

You know, the other thing people should keep in mind here is that the agreement is called tentative for a reason, right? Unions are democratic institutions, and it's up to the membership to decide whether they're going to ratify that agreement. These are definitely members who have concerns around other things, like funding for pensions. The raises you mentioned for many members are only 3% a year, whereas currently inflation is 5%, though for the lowest-paid IATSE members, they've gotten a very significant raise. You know, this is a story to keep an eye on, right? The vote is not happening tomorrow. Members have to see the full details of the agreement, and then they'll vote on it and discuss it amongst each other.

As you said, though, there's a broader moment going on right now. There's the strike at John Deere, and you're going to have a worker on who's on strike. That's great. And there, too, the workers, you know, rejected this contract, this tentative agreement, overwhelmingly, because Deere has seen immense profits, most profitable year on record. Their CEO got a 160% raise. And meanwhile, John Deere presented the workers with the ultimatum that they would have to actually accept concessions. John Deere asked them — told them that new hires would not have pensions anymore.

And again, you know, these are illustrative of a moment where workers are willing to fight back, right? They understand they have more leverage right now. The labor market is tighter than usual. It's harder to replace them if they go on strike. And they're not willing to accept bad deals. And where they already have bad deals, if they're in unions, they're willing to try to fight to get what they've given up before back.

[00:06:14] **JUAN GONZALEZ - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** Alex, I wanted to ask you about the impact of the relative newcomers to the industry, to the film and video industry. I'm talking about — it used to be just the old Hollywood studios, but now we have these giant digital companies — Netflix, Amazon and Apple — that are pouring billions into the production of content. How have these new forces affected the labor conditions? Obviously there are

more workers, but how have they affected the overall labor conditions of the industry?

[00:06:51] **ALEX PRESS:** Yeah it's a couple things. First, they've sort of sped up the amount of work that's happening, right? Everyone knows that plenty of people during the pandemic were at home binging Netflix, right? These streamers, as they're called, these streaming platforms, just have an immense amount of demand for content. They're trying to churn it out. And that then is translated to the workers themselves, who are constantly sort of being moved from project to project.

And importantly, the way that it is allowed for them to have worse working conditions, to be sped up, as it were, as we might say in the labor movement, is that these companies have different agreements with IATSE. In 2009, they struck a deal with IATSE when these were still experiments, right? Netflix was just barely out of the time of being something that was mailing you a DVD at home, right? These were not the enormous behemoths they are now. And there was an agreement struck that said workers would need to be more flexible here. I think the wording was that these are uncertain economies. And that deal was agreed upon, that said — also in that agreement, said when things have changed, if these companies prove profitable, both parties will recognize that, and this agreement will change, right? And there's been this demand from the workers that — it's obviously the time is up. These are now the dominant players in the industry. I mean, Amazon, Netflix, these are the new power. And so it really doesn't make a lot of sense for them to be able to not contribute as much to pensions, to pay workers less, things like that.

[00:08:15] **JUAN GONZALEZ - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** Yeah, and, generally speaking, there's been a lot of talk about the labor shortage right now, the increased leverage that workers, whether they're unionized or not, have in demanding better conditions. But there's also been — there was an article in today's New York Times talking about the number of workers who, as a result of the pandemic, no longer feel they need to be chained to a 9-to-5 job. Could you talk about how the labor movement itself is being transformed as a result of the pandemic?

[00:08:50] **ALEX PRESS:** Yeah, absolutely. We see this reflected — right? — even among nonunion workers, in what people are calling the “Great Resignation.” The numbers came out from the Department of Labor recently that showed that in August almost 3% of the U.S. workforce quit their jobs, so about 4 million or so workers, which is an enormous number of people who are saying, “You know what? I'm sick of this. I'm leaving.” A lot of those workers

are trying to switch industries. A lot of them are finding better deals, or trying to. They're trying to navigate the labor market themselves.

But it really reflects a sort of reevaluation of priorities, right? I mean, workers I speak to all the time, across various industries, say that their experience during the pandemic showed them that it's not worth it to risk your life and the health of your family for a job, for an employer who doesn't treat you well, who might be willing to kill you, who might not take the right protections that you need to protect yourself from COVID. And workers have said — especially, I mean, IATSE is a great example of this, but also those workers in the food manufacturing sector who have been on strike because they were being worked 80 hours a week. They said, “You know what? A good life consists of family, of free time, of pleasure. It does not just consist of work. And if that's not a deal that's on offer, I'm not keeping this job anymore.”

## **Take Your Job and Shove It Part 1 - In The Thick - Air Date 10-26-21**

[00:10:00] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** Lauren, help us break all this down. What is driving these workers to stand up and ask for more now?

[00:10:09] **LAUREN KAORI:** So, basically, during the pandemic, a lot of people stopped working. They were laid off, they were... decided not to work. The number of Americans who are... people in the country who are working vastly shrunk, and as things have slowly opened up, the number of employers seeking workers has outpaced the number of people who are interested in going back to work.

So, you end up with what is, sort of, like, a tight labor market where workers have more leverage than they have in recent years, or, like, in recent history, to, sort of, demand more from their employers.

So, this takes, like, several different forms. One of the most common things we're seeing is people are quitting their jobs.

So, for one month, I think it was, 4.3 million workers in the U. S. quit their jobs. That's 3% of the entire U. S. workforce. So that's huge amount of people quitting their jobs.

[00:11:03] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:**  
That's a big number.

[00:11:04] **LAUREN KAORI:** Yeah. I think that's an all-time record.

[00:11:05] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:**  
Wow.

[00:11:06] **LAUREN KAORI:** And they're doing that because, for one, they're fed up; a lot of people are risking their lives for minimum wage during the pandemic. You know, people in fast food, people who are deemed essential workers, and they have, you know, opportunity now to seek out other jobs. So, maybe that's because they got stimulus checks, or are on unemployment, they have a little more wiggle room.

So, that's going on on the one end. A lot of those workers aren't unionized; a lot of those workers are in hospitality, and restaurants, and fast food, where they don't have unions.

On the other side, you have a small amount of workers who are in unions, who saw their contracts expire this year, and they're also fed up. Right? They also have been working insane hours during the pandemic. I was talking to a striking worker at Kellogg's, who said they hadn't had a day off for 200 days, including weekends.

[00:11:57] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:**  
Wow.

[00:11:57] **LAUREN KAORI:** They're working 16 hours shifts. And so they're also fed up. And they're seeing their companies make, like, we just mentioned about John Deere, like, huge profits. I think billionaires, during the pandemic, got 63% richer.

So, like, companies are doing really well, they're not getting raises. They're also seeing like workers and fast food get raises. And they're seeing people, not, maybe in the John Deere industry, but people around them being, you know... restaurants offering more money. And they're saying, you know, "Wow, we're fed up too." And they're sort of inspired to go on strike.

And so I think you've seen a lot of workers walk out at large companies. And I guess, I wouldn't say there's quite a strike wave yet, but we're seeing a lot of

strikes being authorized, like gigantic strikes being authorized. So it could end up being really huge.

I think what we're definitely seeing is, like, increased militancy and enthusiasm, like you're talking about on Twitter, and Instagram, and, you know, even coming up with this name "Striketober.". So that's of the backdrop.

[00:12:56] **MARIA HINOJOSA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** They learned from Madmen. Get a catchy phrase.

[00:12:58] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** It could be like "Strikemember." I'm trying to think of the next month, November.

[00:13:03] **LAUREN KAORI:** "Strikemember!" Ha ha!

[00:13:04] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** I don't know.

Luis, what about you? What do you think are some of the conditions that are impacting people to "Take this job and shove it?" Sorry. I just totally dated myself.

[00:13:14] **LUIS FELIZ LEON:** Yeah, no. I mean, as the rich got into motion, you know, riding their Peloton bikes in the worst months of the pandemic, you know, workers got into gear for a different kind of motion across the country. That's what we're seeing.

[00:13:27] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** Damn, that's a line!

[00:13:28] **LUIS FELIZ LEON:** You know, like Lauren just mentioned, you know, there are thousands of workers, farm equipment workers, across Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, and Colorado, and Georgia, that have walked off their jobs, joining thousands of serial workers in Michigan, Tennessee, Nebraska, Pennsylvania; their... coal miners have been on strike in Alabama approaching eight months; nurses in Buffalo, New York, and Worcester, Massachusetts. And thousands more waiting in the wings, you know, to go on strike.

I would agree with Lauren that we're not quite at the moment of a strike wave. To give you a comparison, in 2019, there were 425,000 workers that went out on strike. Right now, we have about 24,000 workers that went on strike for Striketober. Right?

So it's a small number of people that are out on strike. But there is a generalized sense, you know... the spirit of militancy is in the air, and that's what people are picking up on. So that's why 30 million workers have quit their jobs from January to August. And why not? Right? Like you said, Julio, like, "Take this job and shove it."

[00:14:37] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** That's basically the attitude.

[00:14:39] **MARIA HINOJOSA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** I love this though. The spirit of militancy is in the air. Look, at the end of the day, many of these workers who are fighting to unionize are also fighting for their own safety. And that's what people don't realize, is, like, any of the good working conditions in this country are a result of workers fighting for it.

I just got back from Mississippi, as it were, the middle of the summer I was there. And, just, the working conditions, the freezing cold, the numbness, the repetitive, the feeling like you can't say anything because you're undocumented.

And I can't even tell you how many labor horror stories I've been hearing, just from people that I know. Labor transportation horrors, food preparation horrors, employment agency horrors.

So, for the immigrant worker, in fact, like, this notion of striking? "Impossible!" It's, " Can we even own our voice?"

So Luis, can you talk about some of the implications of these labor strikes when it comes to undocumented? And many of them are essential workers?

[00:15:49] **LUIS FELIZ LEON:** Absolutely. I mean, I live in New York, as you know, and we saw during the pandemic, Los Deliveristas Unidos, which, kind of, coalesced into a movement at the height of the pandemic. Many of the workers themselves hail from places like Guatemala, and Mexico, and from places like Bangladesh. And they're still organizing. They just recently won, you know, access to the bathroom. Can you imagine that in the 21st century?

You know, Senator Schumer is trying to divert some of the funding from... from the federal level to create rest stops for them, so that they have a place to rest in between deliveries.

So, we saw workers really take to the streets and make demands. I mean, Lauren herself covered a lot of the stories during the pandemic, of workers at

fast food restaurants, and other places, just walking out. Or at poultry plants, just shutting things down over safety concerns.

I myself reported for The Nation magazine on a story in Gainesville, Georgia, where six poultry workers died from a chemical leak accident, working at a poultry plant. Many of them were undocumented.

When you read the stories, and I spoke to families, they refer to names different than the ones that were printed in the paper, because they were, you know, they were known by these other names, assumed names that they worked under, which the company was fully aware of, and exploited, and took care to use that to their advantage, to blackmail them in case they reported any safety irregularities, and so forth.

Right? So yes, the conditions that undocumented workers have faced have always been horrendous in this country, but workers have always risen up, and they have always found a way to fight back.

And they have done that. I mean, I was a high schooler in 2006, and I participated in the big marches in response to the Sessenbrenner Bill.

[00:17:40] **MARIA HINOJOSA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** The pro-immigration marches.

[00:17:42] **LUIS FELIZ LEON:** Yes. Yes. So there has always been that thread of deportation, of like, severe consequences for... for daring to stand up for your rights, and to demand dignity and respect.

But people have always met that challenge. And I think we saw that during the pandemic. The only thing that I think is crucial, and that is why we need a revitalized labor movement, is that sometimes these actions happen at the individual level, which Lauren referred to when she talked about, you know, the people that have quit their jobs, and have said, "Fuck this shit. I'm not going to take it anymore. Go fuck yourself." And we see that on Reddit all the time. There's people who posted on Reddit when they quit and their resignation letters.

But the difference is when workers are organized, right? That's when they can really marshal their collective power to make real changes.

# A Look at the Worker Shortage in the Food Service Industry - The Takeaway - Air Date 10-28-21

[00:18:29] **SARU JAYARAMAN:** I think owners definitely struggled during the pandemic. I would say the struggles of workers were crisis level, before the pandemic and with the pandemic, people lost their homes, lost their, you know, ability to feed their children. I mean, the struggle and crisis got so much worse. But, but listen, during the, before the pandemic, as you said, we had this direct legacy of slavery in our industry.

You know, at emancipation, the restaurant lobby won the ability to hire newly freed slaves, not pay them anything, and have them live entirely on tips. And so they created this very unique system in America, we're the only country that does it. Allowing restaurants to pay little or nothing and having workers live on tips.

And so we went from \$0 at emancipation as an attempt to hire black people for free, all the way up to the ridiculous \$2.13 an hour today. And even before the pandemic, you're talking about an overwhelmingly population of women struggling with the highest rates of sexual harassment and poverty of almost any industry in the US. Well with the pandemic, these workers first, many of them were not able to access unemployment insurance; two thirds of the workers we surveyed, and we surveyed 250,000 workers after the pandemic shutdown, two-thirds told us they couldn't get unemployment insurance because in most states they were told their wages were too low to qualify for benefits. And when they did go back, they found that tips had gone way down because sales were down and harassment and hostility had gone way up. And I could say a lot more about that, but that combination really became, frankly, life-threatening. And you saw mass exodus last year itself.

[00:20:13] **MELISSA HARRIS-PERRY - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** Before we get to the question of the harassment, can you explain just one tick more on the unemployment insurance issue?

[00:20:21] **SARU JAYARAMAN:** Sure. Yeah. I mean, it was, it really wasn't, that was a really a moment of epiphany for so many workers. Because when you get a wage of two or \$3 an hour, as it is in 43 states, 43 states, including blue states like New York and Illinois, and Massachusetts have a sub minimum wage, that's a direct legacy of slavery.

So you're talking about you know, anywhere from \$2 to \$5 in most states, New York, the wages, 66% of the wage, all a direct legacy of slavery. Well, these workers, you know, they lived most of their income, the vast majority of their income was from tips, that small wage, that some minimum wage was so low. It often went entirely to taxes and they were living off their tips. And when they went to go apply for unemployment insurance, most states told them, it looks like you earn too little to qualify for benefits. It looks like you didn't work enough hours.

At the start of the pandemic, you know, when the pandemic shut shutdown occurred about 6 million restaurant workers lost their jobs. That's one in four Americans who lost their jobs was in the restaurant industry, when the pandemic shut down the economy last March. And we heard from so many workers. One was a woman named Sarah May from Michigan, worked in a small dive bar in a small town in Michigan, and told us that she had religiously reported her tips to the IRS. The wage in Michigan is \$3.52 an hour. But when she went to apply for unemployment insurance, she was told that her employer never reported her tips. And it looked like she had just earned that \$3 wage. And so in total, it looked to the state of Michigan that she had not actually worked full time. She had not worked enough hours to qualify for benefits. So she couldn't get state unemployment insurance. Then when federal unemployment insurance came out, it was supposedly not based on your income, it was to be just on loss of a job. She was told she'd be eligible for that. But because it came through the state of Michigan system and she was marked as a denial by the state of Michigan, she was never able to access those funds.

And so this is the incredible, outrageous irony of the moment. Here you have some people claiming, oh, these workers are lazy, staying home, collecting unemployment insurance. When the truth is a huge majority of these workers never received it or received very little because their wages were so low. And it was at that moment, that was the beginning of the exodus. We heard from so many workers at that moment last spring: wait a second; if the government is telling me I earn too little to qualify for benefits, like everybody else who's been working full-time or more than full-time, then probably I earn too little if the state is telling me that, and I should never have put up with this sub-minimum wage to begin with.

And so when we did the survey you mentioned, this May, surveying 3000 workers and, you know, 54% of those who remain in the industry -- and mind you, so many left last year -- but this year, 54%, more than half of those who remain in the industry, say they're leaving. And 78%, nearly eight and 10 say the primary thing that's going to make them stay in the industry or come back to

work in restaurants is a full minimum wage with tips on top. So there has been this just moment of epiphany. Wait a second. If everybody's saying I earned too little, the government is saying I'm I earn too little to get benefits, and then on top of that, you want me now to enforce social distancing and mask rules and COVID vaccination card rules on the same customers from whom I'm supposed to get tips to make up my income. But even with those tips, I'll never be considered earning enough to actually qualify for benefits for everybody else. Honestly, I'm done. And you can take this job and shove it.

[00:24:04] **MELISSA HARRIS-PERRY - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** All right. Talk to me, expand on that, that aspect that is the requirement of front-of-the-house workers to enforce the masking rules. What is maskual harassment?

[00:24:16] **SARU JAYARAMAN:** Yeah. Well, I mean, it's, first of all, it's important to note that our industry had the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry in the United States prior to the pandemic. We work closely with professor Catherine McKinnon, who is, many people know, legendary law professor who really coined the term sexual harassment and spent her life trying to make it illegal in the United States. And she did research with us and she, in her words, the rate of sexual harassment in our industry among tipped workers, dwarfs all other sectors, including the military, because you have this workforce that is overwhelmingly women that must tolerate inappropriate customer behavior to feed their families in tips. And the connection to the tip minimum wages is very clear when you look at the seven states that got rid of the sub minimum wage many decades ago -- California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Minnesota, Montana, and Alaska -- require full minimum wage with tips on top, have for decades, not only have higher small business growth rates, lost fewer restaurants during the pandemic, but also have one half the rate of sexual harassment in the industry because their women can count on a wage from their boss, like every other worker in every other industry, they don't have to put up with as much from male customers. They're not as dependent on the tip. And it was that power dynamic between women's servers and male customers that got so much worse with the pandemic, because with tips way down, because sales are down and now this added responsibility to tell customers, put on a mask, sit six feet apart. Now I need to see your COVID vaccination card. You know, the, the power dynamic of, I need to get tips from these very same people, resulted in really a very ugly situation in which we heard from thousands of women, I am repeatedly asked on every shift by male customers, take off your mask so I can see how cute you are before I decide how much to tip you. Take off your mask so I can see the pretty face of my server before I decide how much to tip. And what was truly intolerable in the past, you know, outrageous, humiliating, now became a matter of life and death. And so naturally many people said, that's it, I'm done. I, you know, you are asking me to expose myself and my

children and my family to the virus for the opportunity, for the chance at earning an income, when I can go work in another industry and at least get the minimum wage or more from my employer without having to expose myself in this way for the chance to get a tip.

## **Take Your Job and Shove It Part 2 - In The Thick - Air Date 10-26-21**

[00:26:43] **MARIA HINOJOSA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** You know, when you have lost, right, you have... [a Spanish phrase] then you will fight. And so, the core of the labor movement is also many of these immigrant and undocumented workers, right?

[00:26:55] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** Yeah, it is. And then we talked about, you know, the pandemic, think what's happened, is, this has been always the case. Right? And this is the reality.

But the pandemic has completely shined a massive light on this. Because these things weren't happening because of coronavirus, this was happening before. But now, because it's a matter of life and death, people start realizing, "Wait a minute! Wait, I signed up for this?" Right?

And so, that's where the labor movement is starting to move. And it's actually not just happening in the United States. I mean, in November of last year in India, right? 250 million workers, farmers, and allies-- think about that: 250 million people went on strike against the Modi government's attack on farmer protections, making it the biggest organized strike in history. Right?

And let's just step back for a second. Did anyone see those front page headlines in U. S. Media? Anybody?

[00:28:00] **LUIS FELIZ LEON:** Not, not in the major papers, no.

[00:28:03] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** Yeah. You know, Luis was like, "They... people were on the Peloton and getting their Grub Hub, you know. And making sure that the delivery guy showed up."

So like, when you talk about essential workers... but this was the largest.... think about that: 250 million people! And some of these protests are still continuing today in India.

But the other thing about all this, speaking about media coverage, there's this notion of a quote-unquote "labor shortage," that there not enough workers, but what's really happening is what we've been saying, that this pandemic has given folks the leverage they need to demand better for themselves.

So Luis, after what we've seen since 2020, what lasting changes do you think are going to be happening, or do you expect, when it comes to workers' rights in this country? Are there going to be changes, or is this just, " Oh, you know, once we pass this, like, we're going to be back to the status quo."

[00:28:59] **LUIS FELIZ LEON:** Yeah. I mean, I I'm hopeful that the honorific of "essential " is actually realized organizationally, and workers begin to see themselves as workers, and form unions, construction, poultry plants, and so forth.

But there are also a lot of workers that are members of worker centers, and that's a crucial layer of the labor movement. That's important to recognize, that they do a lot of the organizing that goes unrecognized.

So these domestic workers that I mentioned at the outset, that were going to go on strike, they work with very rich families. And what they're trying to do is, band together, and say, "Look, we're going to demand, all of us, collectively, \$20, or none of us is going to clean your house." Those are the kinds of solidarities that we need to build so that we can have a multi-racial working class movement in this country.

I like to say that solidarity needs to be experienced in order to be believed. And what I mean by that, is that people need to see you out there doing the work, standing in solidarity with fellow workers, and I hope that that happens.

I think that... what I would caution, is that we have moments where people... there are these big upsurges, and then they dissipate. The energy... it doesn't leave anything really lasting. So I hope that that doesn't happen. Los Deliveristas is a model of workers that are continuing to organise, are expanding, figuring out, "How do we bring in folks that speak Bengali into this organization of predominantly Indigenous workers from Mexico and Guatemala, whose second language is Spanish? Like, how do we have that conversation?"

[00:30:38] **MARIA HINOJOSA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** That's-- I don't want to say, "The new face," it's like what's happening next, and now, in terms of the labor movement.

But this country... I mean, that's why I was, like, "Watch those movies..." because this country is built on the back of the labor and workers rights movements, that are tied to immigrant rights, that are tied to the movement for black lives, because you know, everything in this country over here was built with free labor of black people, and indigenous people-- let's just be clear: it was free extracted labor, [Spanish phrase], oh, how easy, that suddenly, you know, you have all the riches of, you know, legacy money, but it was built on black and brown backs. So these movements have always been tied, over 150 years ago...

So, lauren, how have the movements for racial justice and immigrant rights in fact helped to shape and transform the labor movement as we know it? And do you really, you know... you were like, I don't just cover immigrant workers, but is there a sense, like... they are the bloodline of what's next in the labor room?

[00:31:45] **LAUREN KAORI:** Yeah. I mean, I think, like you said, it's... it's important to know the ways in which immigrants and people of color have been excluded from a lot of these movements.

Like, the National Labor Relations Act itself, the, like, law that allows us to unionize excludes domestic workers and farm workers. And so does the Fair Labor standards Act. Like, those workers don't get overtime pay or minimum wage guarantees.

And, like, you mentioned, of course, also, the unions themselves have a long a legacy of racism. You know, the AFL, which is now the AFL-CIO, once banned African-Americans and racial minorities for joining. And that was, like, the big house of labor at the time.

You know, I would also say it is impossible to talk about labor history and activism without talking about race and, you know, MLK, the day before he was assassinated, he was out at the Memphis sanitation strike in 1968. The United farm workers in California has a long history of, you know, mixing racial justice and economic justice, the labor movement.

[00:32:50] **MARIA HINOJOSA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** I think I'm a product... like, when I'm like, that is what [Spanish phrase], it is what brought me to consciousness here was, in fact, United Farm Workers under Martin Luther King. And they were both, in the essence, tied to racial injustice and labour.

[00:33:04] **LAUREN KAORI:** Yeah. Most recently, in Alabama, where a lot of people were paying attention to, earlier this year, in April, the first Amazon warehouse to have a union election in the history of the U S was in Bessemer, Alabama. And the messaging around that union drive was extremely, you know, focused on racial justice. More than 80% of workers at that facility are Black. And I believe over two thirds of Amazon's warehouses are people of color.

There are, you know, a ton of ties. And I just think, you know, even the labor movement itself, like, union drives themselves, can be framed as racial justice, because we have evidence that black workers who are unionized are paid 14% more than their non-unionized peers; and Latino workers were unionized get paid 20% more than their non-unionized peers. And this, you know, goes over into health care benefits, stuff like this.

So to your last question about, you know, is this the future? I think a lot of people are saying, "This is the future of the labor movement, because this is the part of the country that's growing. This is the people who are feeding us, the people who are the working class in this country, and they will continue to grow."

[00:34:13] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - CO-HOST, IN THE THICK:** You know, and... it comes down to... well, we talk about a lot. [Spanish word or phrase] media representation and creating your own lane.

So, I just need to call out a feature that we've done on Latino rebels this year. It's called "Rise up, Foo'!" Rise up fool, right? And Tuti Alvarez, who's a truck driver from Chicago, one of the best writers I know. And he interviews Latino and Latina organizers in labor right now. That's all he does. And says, "You know what, if we're going to change the representation and union membership, we have to show these faces of people doing the work and just start interviewing."

And people in the labor movement are like, "Wow, I didn't know that there were so many Latinos and Latinas in the labor movement!"

But Luis, take us home on this. multi-racial organizing. I know you've talked about it throughout the show, but what do you think is, sort of. The future? Like, where is that future? Where do we see it specifically? I know you mentioned the Deliveristas in New York, but how are the connections being made to lead to more change?

[00:35:11] **LUIS FELIZ LEON:** Yeah. I mean, I think one way that we can see that is by fighting for internal democracy within unions. So, within the auto workers, there's a vote, a referendum, so that members can elect their own leaders.

So, I was in a meeting about two weeks ago with autoworkers in Silao, Mexico, and auto workers in Detroit. And when Detroit workers went on strike, the Silao workers supported them in Mexico. And right now there have been some labor reforms in Mexico that have allowed, they used to call them, [Spanish phrase] unions because they were part of that Institutional Revolutionary Party, basically, they were controlled by them, and there were top-down. So we have right now a movement for democracy within unions.

One fact that I like to point out is that there are 14 million union members. Of those members, Black workers represent the higher share, 12.3% white workers, 10.7, Latino workers, 9.8, and Asian workers, 8.9.

So this means that we must... as much as we fight the boss, we must also fight for democracy within our union, so that they are reflective of the interests of the membership that they're there to serve.

## **Nice work week, if you can get it - Planet Money - Air Date 10-27-21**

[00:36:27] **DAN HAMERMESH:** You may not think that time has a cost, but it does, because whatever you're doing right now, you could be doing something else, and you've made the choice to spend this hour talking to me. You're doing it, presumably, because you get paid for the pleasure of my company, OK?

[00:36:43] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Dan says that some of the leading economic thinkers of the last century expected the gradual shortening of the work week would just keep going. None other than John Maynard Keynes, one of the most important figures in economics - and imaginary friend to the show - famously predicted that we would all be working a 15-hour work week by 2030.

[00:37:03] **DAN HAMERMESH:** Now, the man's long since dead. I don't want to make fun of the dead people, but unless something happens in nine years or so, he was really wrong.

[00:37:11] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Dan says your buddy Keynes' prediction that we'd all be working dramatically less appears to have been particularly wrong when it comes to the U.S. The U.S. has diverged from the world's other wealthy economies since the late 1970s, when it comes to how many hours employees work each year.

[00:37:29] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** And how much of an outlier are we in terms of our workaholicism?

[00:37:33] **DAN HAMERMESH:** Well, if you take hours per year, at this point, we're probably 1,800 and some hours per worker per year. The next country, which is the U.K., would be about 50 or 60 hours less. Places like France and Germany would be hundreds of hours less.

[00:37:49] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Now, Dan points out workers in Europe are generally still working 40-hour weeks. But over the course of the year, employees end up getting more time off overall because they have a lot more paid vacation.

[00:38:01] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** And at the end of the day, Dan says the difference between working hours in the U.S. and other wealthy nations is political will. The democracies in Western and Northern Europe have given workers more paid time off, such as sick leave and parental leave, as well as creating more new holidays. But in the U.S., things have been much slower to change.

[00:38:22] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** What has changed?

[00:38:24] **DAN HAMERMESH:** In one word, nothing, darn it. [Laughter] That's exactly the problem. Nothing has changed.

[00:38:29] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Dan argues that the vast majority of companies might be hesitant to cut employee hours because it could put them at a disadvantage with their competitors. And Dan says they're afraid of how it could affect the bottom line.

[00:38:41] **DAN HAMERMESH:** I don't see how, if people work less, we're going to keep total productivity as high as it currently is. In other words, doing that has a cost.

[00:38:51] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** That cost might come in the form of decreased productivity, so a company might have to serve fewer customers or make fewer widgets. Or the cost could come from having to hire more people to keep call centers open and assembly lines humming like before. And those costs could be even steeper in a tight labor market like we're seeing right now.

[00:39:09] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Of course, companies can save money when they cut hours. In manufacturing, for instance, less time on the factory floor would mean fewer expensive workplace injuries, less burnout and less turnover. And we know constantly replacing your workers can be expensive. These are some of the trade-offs that companies are having to make as they experiment with a shorter week.

[00:39:31] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Basecamp, Shopify, even Shake Shack have all tried out versions recently. But how permanent or widespread those experiments will become is still up in the air.

In the case of Natalie Nagele's company, Wildbit, she says they've thrived working a four-day week, and she was able to keep paying her employees what they made during five days a week, though she did have to hire a few more customer service folks because most of their clients were still stuck on the 9 to 5 grind.

Natalie does admit the company probably hasn't grown as rapidly or produced as many new products as they might've, and she says that's probably made it less attractive to some of the more traditionally ambitious - you could say work-obsessed - potential new hires from the tech world.

[00:40:11] **NATALIE NAGELE:** I am positive that there are people who do not apply to come work for us because of our culture, because we are not a hustle, you know, really, scale-your-career-quickly kind of place.

[00:40:22] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** But Natalie says all these trade-offs are part of a broader decision she's made to put her company's long-term sustainability above short-term growth. And so far, it's working. The company's been growing steadily. Her employees generally love having an extra day each week, you know, to have a life - run errands, take care of family, try out a hobby. And Wildbit has become a poster child for companies who are rethinking work.

[00:40:47] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Would you describe yourself as an evangelist of the shorter work week, or how do you think about what you do?

[00:40:53] **NATALIE NAGELE:** [Laughter] You know, I think I'm an evangelist of changing the way we perceive work generally, right? I think the thing that I love so much about four-day work weeks is it's a tangible change in behavior that feels like a, "Oh, I'm just going to lob a day off." But to do it well, we actually have to change so much about the way we work.

[00:41:13] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** But labor economist Dan Hamermesh says that what works at a small software company won't necessarily work for a huge swath of workers in industries like manufacturing, food service, health care. And that means that a fragmented movement to spread the four-day work week one company at a time isn't likely to move the needle on the U.S. economy as a whole - unless, of course, the government sets a new standard for working hours like it did during the Great Depression.

[00:41:40] **DAN HAMERMESH:** I just don't think it's going to spread very widely unless it's mandated. And thus, again, we need this kind of change through policy, although I'm despairing of a democratic institution's being able to do that in this country.

This is very depressing. I'm very depressed.

[00:41:56] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Why are you depressed? Why is this depressing?

[00:41:58] **DAN HAMERMESH:** I'm depressed - I would like the world to be better, OK? I mean, I spent all my life, or my adult life, 55 years now, doing economics, partly with the aim of thinking of things that might make people A, understand the world better, and B, do things to make the world better. And I just don't see very many changes happening along these dimensions that, in my view, would make the world better. So that's why I'm depressed, OK?

[00:42:21] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Aw, poor Dan. Dan points out that the last time the United States government was able to pass major legislation about how we all work was during the largest economic crisis the world had ever seen.

[00:42:32] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** But right now, of course, we find ourselves in another moment of unprecedented economic upheaval. And it seems that a lot of the old rules about how we work are once again up for negotiation.

[00:42:44] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Before the pandemic, for example, employers were real stingy about remote work. Now, some big companies might be working from home forever.

[00:42:52] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** There's also the so-called "Great Resignation." A record number of Americans - millions every month - are quitting their jobs because of things like burnout and low wages and long hours.

[00:43:03] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** And union membership is rising for the first time in decades, and labor is beginning to flex its muscle. At least 19 strikes were started in October.

[00:43:11] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** People have been calling it Striketober [ph].

[00:43:12] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** And it's becoming clear that a lot of how we work just isn't working.

[00:43:19] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Now, it's important to remember the last time the U.S. came together to standardize the work week, it came with this whole smorgasbord of other changes to work life - a minimum wage, child labor laws, overtime, safety protection. Shortening work hours for the country would be a huge undertaking. And to pull it off, we'd also likely need fundamental changes to health care, child care, family leave.

[00:43:43] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Because the work week - eight hours a day, five days a week and the weekend - is the frame for everything else. It sets the cadence of our lives - for now.

**Right-to-work is bad for workers (with  
Shane Larson) - Pitchfork Economics with  
Nick Hanauer - Air Date 9-24-21**

[00:44:06] **DAVID GOLDSTEIN - CO-HOST, PITCHFORK**

**ECONOMICS:** We have lower wages for union members and non-union members in the Right-to-Work states.

We have fewer benefits, healthcare, pension, retirement, et cetera. We have greater inequality in these states. We have much higher levels -- we haven't talked about this -- but of discrimination, workplace discrimination, charges in these Right-to-Work states. Surely when politicians fight for these, when these passed in the states, they must be arguing that there's something in the benefit of workers. Well, what is the pro Right-to-Work argument that seems to carry the day? And what, it's more than two dozen states now.

[00:44:50] **SHANE LARSON:** Yeah, we're up at about 26 states now. They claim that it brings jobs.

[00:44:54] **DAVID GOLDSTEIN - CO-HOST, PITCHFORK**

**ECONOMICS:** How?

[00:44:55] **SHANE LARSON:** That the things will move there and they will create jobs. But again, Facts don't lie, contrary to what Fox News wants you to believe.

But the research from EPI and others have shown that the Right-to-Work laws have no impact on job growth. I mean, they went and looked at Oklahoma which I think it was in the early two thousands, late nineties, early two thousands when they passed a Right-to-Work law. And they looked at the job creation before the law passed and after the law passed. And that there was no significant increase in jobs. In fact, manufacturing jobs actually declined in Oklahoma after the Right-to-Work law passed. And you know what? You don't have to take my word for it. There's a great YouTube video out there. A video that's been posted on YouTube, but it was a video of the governor of West Virginia, governor Justice, who signed into law a Right-to-Work law in West Virginia. And he, in a moment of honesty, was caught on camera in a town hall zoom session this last year saying, really, and truly, let's just be brutally honest. We passed the Right-to-Work law in West Virginia, and we ran to the windows looking to see all the people that were going to come. And they didn't come. We've absolutely built the field in a lot of different places thinking, build the field and they'll come, and they didn't come. Right-to-Work does not create jobs. And it's proven.

[00:46:23] **DAVID GOLDSTEIN - CO-HOST, PITCHFORK**

**ECONOMICS:** One of the things we like to say in our podcast is, and we talk

about this in regards to the minimum wage, which is when workers have more money, businesses have more customers and hire more workers. It's a virtuous cycle. Well, Right-to-Work. It sounds, as you're explaining it to me, it's a, it's a vicious circle when workers have less money, businesses have fewer customers and hire fewer workers.

[00:46:50] **SHANE LARSON:** Yep. That's exactly what it is. And the only one who benefits in this whole process are, again, are the CEOs, are the Wall Street investors, are the 1% who are just getting richer, as workers fall further and further behind in this country.

[00:47:04] **DAVID GOLDSTEIN - CO-HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** So the House has passed the PRO [Protecting the Right to Organize] Act, which would eliminate this "right to work for less" provision. It's not the first time the House is tried to do it. But the Democrats sort of control the Senate at the moment. What needs to be done to get this through Congress?

[00:47:23] **SHANE LARSON:** I'm so glad you asked that question.

So the first step is we have 50, on paper, Democrats in the US Senate. Of those 50 Democrats, 47 of them have co-sponsored the PRO Act, are public supporters of the PRO Act. Two of them have been indicating that they will vote to bring the bill to the floor. They'd like to see some changes to it, but they support the PRO Act, the goals of the PRO Act. And that's Senator Mark Kelly from Arizona and Mark Warner from Virginia.

So the two of them have not co-sponsored, but they have indicated that they support the PRO Act should come to the floor. They'd like to see some changes, work on some changes, but would support passage of the PRO Act.

That leaves us with Kristen Sinema. All roadblocks seem to originate with Kristen Sinema these days. And the interesting thing is, one of the most frustrating things for us in labor is, is that she will not meet with labor. She is not having conversations with labor. Her staff are not having conversations with labor. And I'm talking about Arizona labor, her constituents. But she has been reported, and the videos are out there, of meeting with business groups to talk about the PRO Act and to raise concerns about the PRO Act.

But we're hopeful that, you know, in Alaska, the Republican Congressman in Alaska enthusiastically supported the PRO Act. Alaska is one of those states that has a very high union density. And Republicans, believe it or not, even in Alaska, get it. Senator Murkowski, Lisa Murkowski has not come out against

the PRO Act. And so there's been a lot of conversations with her. We're hopeful she may support it to give us that 50th vote. We're hopeful that Kristen Sinema will see the light of day and we'll come around.

But even if we get those 50 senators, we still have that damn filibuster standing in the way of real progress for working people. And so we have got to not only get 50 Democrats or 50 senators on board with the PRO Act, but we have got to change the Senate rules to be able to get this done.

Now we're hopeful that some of the provisions of the PRO Act may make it into the budget reconciliation process. We believe that there's a very strong case to be made, and Bernie Sanders is one of those that's been working so hard on this, along with Sherrod Brown from Ohio and Bob Casey from Pennsylvania, and others to get provisions into the reconciliation act, for example, the penalties piece that we started off talking about. That as a revenue raiser for the government, of increasing those penalties.

So we are very, very hopeful that it's not the transformative change that our labor laws in this country need, but there are things that can be done through the budget reconciliation, especially in terms of the penalties piece, or preventing corporations from deducting their expenses. You know, right now we are subsidizing corporations for running their union-busting campaigns.

[00:50:03] **DAVID GOLDSTEIN - CO-HOST, PITCHFORK ECONOMICS:** That's over \$300 million a year in deductions because that's what they're spending to bust unions.

[00:50:10] **SHANE LARSON:** Yup. And right now we subsidize that by allowing them to deduct that from their taxes. So that's why corporations, like T-Mobile actually paid nothing in federal income taxes, because one of the things they've been doing is deducting their union-busting expenses that they've spent over the last decade to stop the workers there at T-Mobile from joining CWA.

So we believe that's another tax code change that could be made through the reconciliation process, that we no longer as taxpayers are subsidizing corporations for running union-busting campaigns.

**"Worked to Death": IATSE Film Crew on "Rust" Walked Off Set to Protest**

# Conditions Before Shooting - Democracy Now! - Air Date 10-26-21

[00:50:40] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** This is Democracy Now! I'm Amy Goodman, with Juan González, as we look at the tragic shooting death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins during the filming of *Rust* last Thursday on a set in New Mexico. It's drawing attention to cost-cutting decisions and overall safety in the film industry.

Yahoo News is reporting the gun that killed Halyna had been used by crew members just hours beforehand for live-ammunition target practice by some members of the crew, who used the prop guns, including the gun that killed her, to shoot at beer cans — a practice often called “plinking.”

The film's lead actor and producer is Alec Baldwin. He later shot the revolver after he was reportedly handed it by the first assistant director, David Halls, who told him it was a “cold gun,” meaning it was not loaded with live ammunition. A search warrant says Baldwin was reportedly rehearsing a scene for the film and, quote, “pointing the revolver towards the camera lens” when it hit Halyna Hutchins and director Joel Souza.

Meanwhile, prop maker Maggie Gaul, a member of IATSE — that's the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees — Local 44, told CNN she had worked with the assistant director, Halls, in 2019, and said he failed to hold safety meetings or follow protocol when it came to announcing the presence of firearms on set. CNN also reported Halls was fired in 2019 from his position as assistant director on the movie *Freedom's Path* after a gun unexpectedly discharged and injured a crew member.

All this happened after some of the unionized IATSE below-the-line crew members had walked off the set of *Rust* earlier on the day Halyna was killed to protest their housing, payment and working conditions. A source told Yahoo News a walkout would usually shut down the film's production for a couple days, but New Mexico is a “right to work” state, so producers were able to hire nonunion replacements and continue working on the film. A couple hours later, Halyna was killed.

For more, we're joined by Dutch Merrick. He's past president of IATSE Local 44 Hollywood Craftspersons in Altadena, California. He's been a prop master and armorer for over 25 years.

Welcome to Democracy Now!, Dutch. Thanks so much for getting in touch with us. You are an armorer, and you can explain what that is. And explain what you understand happened on this set, going — in the context of these negotiations that IATSE is having nationwide, 60,000 members, partly around issues of safety just like this.

[00:53:18] **DUTCH MERRICK:** Good morning, Amy. Thank you so much for having me.

This is one symptom of an existential crisis in Hollywood. Hollywood handles — we handle firearms every single day. I work on big shows where we have machine guns firing, 10, 20 people firing machine guns at once, and it happens safely. We literally fire millions of blank rounds every year. And it's a very safe process. It's carefully regulated. We go through permits and training.

The armorer handles the gun from a locked-up safe. They take it to the set. They're very careful about inspecting the weapons at all times and make sure they're clear. And they only load them just before we go. And only the armorer touches them. They hand them directly to the actor. And they get the scene.

In this instance, the first assistant director was handling the gun. We're trying to figure out why that happened. And the guns clearly were mishandled and not locked up, and allowed to use for actual gunfire shooting, which is — I've never heard of that in my 25 years in the business. It's unconscionable that you would take your movie guns and put live ammo in them ever, ever.

The crew was — the camera crew walked off the morning of, because the conditions had become so deplorable. They had gone three weeks without a paycheck. They were having to work 14-plus hours a day with inadequate turnaround to get home. When I started in the business 25 years ago, I was putting in 12-hour days, knowing that I was cutting my teeth in the business and it would only get better from there. But it's only gotten worse. Our workers routinely face 16-plus-hour days, day in and day out, putting in 80- to 100-hour weeks. And the producers only have to pay a minor penalty if they want to work our crews through lunch. That penalty hasn't risen in ages. Often, shows now, to satiate the growing hunger for entertainment and the increasing quality and to produce it in a shorter time, they're pushing our workers to work straight through lunch and work entire days, and then pay them a minor penalty. And it's grinding our workers to the bone. And with this contract that's come up, every worker that I've talked to, with few exceptions, is not happy with it.

[00:55:26] **JUAN GONZALEZ - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** But, Dutch, I wanted to ask you precisely about that, the impact of the growth of streaming videos, of companies like Netflix and Hulu and Apple. What has been the impact on the working conditions as a result of, basically, this vast commodification of more and more video production?

[00:55:47] **DUTCH MERRICK:** Yeah, the hunger — you know, the pandemic put into high relief that people not only — they don't wait for 7:00 on Thursday night to see Seinfeld once a week. They get a show they like, and they binge-watch 13 episodes in a sitting. There's a voracious appetite for content that Netflix and Amazon and Hulu and others are feeding. So the competition is fiercer than ever.

We have trouble finding enough crew to populate these shows, just to fill the jobs, finding trucks and equipment and stages. Everything is overbooked. We're literally in overdrive to fulfill the need. When Netflix was buying existing content and recycling old series, that was one thing. But now they're creating brand-new content. And we're grateful for the work, but we're, frankly, getting worked to death to just meet the demands.

## **Economic History: The Black Plague — The Great Economic Leveler - Strange World of Econ - Air Date 5-26-17**

[00:56:33] **NARRATOR, STRANGE WORLD OF ECON:** Regardless of how the Black Plague originated and spread, the devastation it caused in both Europe and the neighboring Islamic world is undeniable. Experts estimate that the plague killed 25 million out of the total population of 80 million in Europe during the period 1348 to 1351. England and Wales were hit particularly hard with almost one half of its population lost to the plague. Italy has been estimated to have lost about a third of its population.

The Islamic world was not spared by the black plague as one contemporary Muslim writer wrote, "Civilization, both in the east and the west, was visited by the destructive plague, which devastated nations and cause populations to vanish. The entire inhabited world changed." reliable estimates for the middle east are hard to come by, but mortality in Egypt or Syria is commonly put at a comparable level to Europe.

While the plague by any measurement was a horrific event, there was some upside for the lower stratosphere of society. The rapid decline of human lives during the plague made human labor much more scarce.

The Black Plague was devastating to the human population, but had no effects on land or physical infrastructures. With less human labor around, landowning nobility faced the question of who would work their lands. Faced with a possibility of a painful death, laborers from the bottom rung of society were less inclined to work for a pittance and demanded lower rents and higher wages in order to be enticed to work. One contemporary writer reported, "Such a shortage of labor is ensued that the humble turned up their nose had employment and could scarcely be persuaded to serve the eminent for triple wages." The situation was similar in the Islamic world, as one historian noted: "Artisans, wage workers, porters, servants, grooms, weavers, laborers and their like, their wages multiplied many times over. However, not many remained since most of them died. A worker of this type is not found except after strenuous searching."

Landowners and nobility across England had to compete with each other to convince the remaining laborers to remain, or to poach laborers from each other. English workers demanded and received meat pies and ale as part of their compensation. Rents too had to be lowered, to entice the few remaining tenants to stay. Income from renters declined by 20 to 30% in the first half of the 14th century in England.

As a result of lower rents and increased wages, many noble families throughout Europe were struggling financially. Belton knights declined from around 3000 to 2,400 by 1400 and 1,300 by 1500. However, noblemen across Europe didn't sit idly by as their fortune shrank. They quickly rallied the local government to take action to protect the pre plague status quo, especially when it came to wages. In 1349 England, the crown passed the Ordinance of Laborers. "Since a great part of the population, and especially workers and employees (servants) has now died in this pestilence, many people observing the needs of the masters and the shortage of employees are refusing to work unless they're paid an excessive salary. We have ordained that every man or women in our realm of England, whether free or unfree, shall, if offered employment consonant with their status, be obliged to accept employment offered. And they should be paid only the fees, liveries, payments, or salaries, which are usually paid in the part of the country where they are working in the 20th year of our reign, 1346, or in some other appropriate year, five or six years ago. No one should pay or promise wages, liveries, payments, or salaries greater than those defined above, under pain of paying twice whatever he paid, or promise to anyone who feels himself harmed by it."

However, the threat of legal liabilities paled in comparison to the threat of non-existence presented by the Black Plague. And the ordinance was routinely ignored as one English nobleman noted: "The workers were so above themselves, and so bloody minded, that they took no notice of the King's command. If anybody wish to hire them, he had to submit to their demands for either his fruit and standing corn would be lost, or he had to be pandered to the arrogance and greed of the workers." France attempted similar wage limiting legislation, but was equally met with failure.

Other European nations, in particular Eastern European nations -- Poland Prussia, Hungary -- resorted to coercion and threat of physical violence in order to restore their pre plague status quo. The nobilities in these countries increase the labor obligations of laborers with labor dues, cash payments, and the restrictions of freedom of movement. Prussia, Bohemia, Russia, Lithuania, and Poland prohibited tenants from leaving without permission or without paying a large fee or all arrears or except at certain times, or in some cases at all.

Some of these countries also forbade other noblemen from poaching tenants from each other. Tenant debts and other obligations were used to keep tenants tied to the land. For the laborers in Western Europe and certain parts of the Islamic world, who benefited from the increase in real wages and living conditions as a result of a scarcity in labor due to the plague, they enjoyed luxuries that they previously lacked, such as increased meat consumption. Wealthier peasant labors increased their meat consumption, along with the number of calories consumed. An average citizen of Cairo might consume 1,154 calories per day, including 45.6 grams of protein and 20 grams of fat during the pre plague early 14th century. But by the 15th century, the average citizen of Cairo ate a more generous 1,930 calories, including 82 grams of protein and 45 grams of fat.

Increased wealth of the laborers resulted in inflation, as one contemporary noted: "In spite of there being plenty of everything, it was all twice as expensive. Household equipment and foodstuff, as well as merchandise, hired labor, farm workers and servants. The only exception was property and houses, of which there is a glut to this day."

Real wages peaked in the early to mid 15th century in many European cities. However, real wages began to slide from about 1500 onwards, as Europe and the rest of the world began to recover from the horrors of the plague. Experts estimated Europe's population grew from 60 million in 1400 to 81 million in 1500, with England's population growing as much as 50% during the 15th century.

Rapidly increasing population reduce the scarcity of human labor, thus resulting in a slide of real wages. However, laborers in London, Amsterdam and Antwerp were able to maintain their real wage gains throughout the early modern era. In Western Europe, the scarcity of labor due to the plague was enough of a shock to overthrow the notion of a medieval serfdom, as labor is demanded mobility in employment and better tenement agreements -- tenement agreements that eventually only required the payment of rent and did away with labor services.

## **Nice work week, if you can get it Part 2 - Planet Money - Air Date 10-27-21**

[01:03:01] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:**

Forty hours a week, eight hours a day - it seems as old as work itself. But actually, the 40-hour week is a pretty recent invention. And now, dozens of companies and even whole countries are cutting it down to size, just as the pandemic has us rethinking some of the most fundamental things about the way we work.

[01:03:21] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Today on the show, how we got stuck with the eight-hour day and the 40-hour work week, and what it might take to change it.

[01:03:31] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:**

There is nothing particularly ancient or mystical about the 40-hour work week. When you think about it, our idea of work itself is pretty new - if by work, you mean getting paid to do a job for someone else.

[01:03:44] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Now, for the overwhelming majority of human history, you worked to live. Hunter-gatherers didn't exactly clock out from hunting and gathering. And when you worked as a farmer, you were baling hay and weeding fields in the summer. But in the winter, there wasn't always a lot to do.

[01:04:00] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:**

Historian Benjamin Hunnicutt says the explosion of working hours came with the start of the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s. All of a sudden, workers had bosses who expected them to work from dawn until dusk, often six days a week. And he says it was actually these grueling hours that led to the birth of the American labor movement.

[01:04:19] **BENJAMIN HUNNICUTT:** The first demand of organized labor was 10 hours, the 10-hour Movement - Boston house painters. And they made a concerted effort and were successful, to a certain extent, to obtain the 10 hour a day.

[01:04:31] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Hunnicutt says the push towards the 10-hour day for everyone else took most of the 19th century. The movement included work stoppages and strikes by skilled workers, and executive orders shortening the workday for federal workers, and large-scale labor strikes like May Day. By the end of the century, a lot of different kinds of companies had adopted a 10-hour day.

[01:04:52] **BENJAMIN HUNNICUTT:** It was a economy-wide process; cause the working hours to reduce from dawn to dusk to 10 and then to eight. At the turn of the century, the eight-hour day comes in with a rush.

[01:05:04] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** This is around the time we see the birth of so-called "Scientific Management," when people like Frederick Winslow Taylor started studying how to make work more efficient - you know, productivity reports, time-motion studies. Business leaders were taking notice...

[01:05:19] **BENJAMIN HUNNICUTT:** ...And decided that people who were working 10 hours - surprise, surprise - got tired [laughter], the fatigue factor. After eight hours, the worker is not as productive, especially on, you know, a high-speed assembly line - makes more mistakes and so forth. So it makes sense to reduce working hours from 10 or 12 to eight.

[01:05:43] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Speaking of assembly lines, in the 1920s, the eight-hour workday wins a surprising champion in the form of Henry Ford. Now, Henry Ford, who pioneered the assembly line, sees the eight-hour day as a way to increase efficiency and profitability. He realizes that if he switches to eight-hour shifts instead of two long shifts at 10 or 12 hours, he can run three shifts in a day, and that means he could run his factories around the clock.

[01:06:10] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** And just a few years after Henry Ford adopted the eight-hour day, there was a whole litter of copycats who thought their businesses might be improved by shortening the work week. Several other industrial leaders said, "We see your 40-hour work week, and we raise you - by which we mean we'll lower you."

So Kellogg's - of, you know, Tony the Tiger fame - cut their hours to 30, which they kept in place for decades. Goodyear Tire dabbles with it. But workers were still essentially at the whim of their employers and whatever schedule their bosses thought would make the company most profitable.

[01:06:44] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** That was until - what else? - the Great Depression. You know, my grandmother, Alexi, used to say that the Great Depression changed everything. And in the case of working hours, well, she was definitely right.

Ileen DeVault is a labor economist at Cornell. She says that the American Federation of Labor, the umbrella organization for unions at the time, saw the Great Depression as an opening for a federal policy creating a shorter work week.

[01:07:09] **ILEEN DEVAULT:** The AF of L suggested that the solution to the high levels of unemployment during the Depression was to cut back the hours of labor without changing wages. That was their key. And they said that would spread the work among more people.

[01:07:29] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** And support for this idea went way beyond the unions. Mainstream politicians started pushing for shorter hours. And a bill mandating a 30-hour work week actually passed the Senate in 1933, at a time when both houses of Congress and the president were all in the same party. We were so close to a national 30-hour work week. But President Franklin Roosevelt was pushing for a lot of other things that would make work safer and fairer and address the enormous unemployment crisis.

[01:07:58] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** Now, labor unions did not get the 30-hour week, but Roosevelt delivered on a much bigger promise - the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

[SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING]

[01:08:08] **FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT:** Except, perhaps, for the Social Security Act, it is the most far-reaching program, the most far-sighted program for the benefit of workers that has ever been adopted here or in any other country.

[01:08:21] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** This is probably the biggest victory in the history of American organized labor. Alexi, I will let you tell the folks what is in this important piece of legislation.

[01:08:32] **ALEXI HOROWITZ-GHAZI - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** OK, this thing's got some bangers. It established the minimum wage, gave us the weekend - though not the Canadian pop star. It bolstered child employment standards, and it required employers to pay overtime to employees who worked more than 44 hours a week.

[01:08:47] **SONARI GLINTON - HOST, PLANET MONEY:** And then, two years later, the law was amended. Employers would have to pay overtime over 40 hours. That right there, that's where we get eight hours a day, five days a week. The 40-hour work week becomes the law of the land.

But as Benjamin Hunnicutt says, after a century of progressively shorter and shorter work hours, nobody thought things would get stuck at 40 hours. The assumption was that the work week would just keep getting shorter.

## **Please clarify various stats on law enforcement and incarceration - Bud from Boise**

[01:09:16] **VOICEMAILER: BUD FROM BOISE:** Hi, Jay, this is Bud from Idaho. Just listening to your "Copaganda" episode, and there's a few conflicting statements in there that nag at me; not that I think any of them are untrue, just taken together, they bother me.

One is, that, the United States has 5% of the population and 25% of the incarcerated population in the world.

The other statement is that incarceration doesn't really help.

Another statement is that incarceration has been growing.

And then the last statement that really nags at me is that, violent crime in general has gone down.

So where are these all bother me, is that, taken together, someone on the right would say, "Yeah, we're putting people in jail, we're keeping them off the street, and crime is going down."

So it's just hard for me to, uh, put that all together in a, in a way that makes sense to a guy who's on the left, who wants to reduce incarceration, who wants more effective criminal deterrence than, uh, incarceration, because we all do know recidivism is, at least, like, 50%. So that would be one thing that would argue against incarceration.

So, I'm just wondering, is there a, uh, a unifying theory here that you have, especially, you know... we incarcerate more, and crime has gone down-- it's natural to attach those two things together. And the idea that, say, for instance, going to unleaded fuel and having less lead in our environment has contributed more than mass incarceration... it's, kind of, a weak argument. Especially if you're arguing... arguing with someone on the left.

Anyway, uh, any, uh, enlightenment you can get me on, on these, I would appreciate, and I don't know if anybody else is thinking the same way, but sometimes nuance can be confusing. So I hope you can help. Keep doing what you're doing. Thanks Jay!

## Summary 11-3-21

[01:11:18] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *Democracy Now!*, discussing Striketober and the great resignation; *In the Thick* in two parts analyzed what has driven workers to quit and address the racial and immigration status impact on labor organizing; *The Takeaway*, discussed the abuse and harassment endemic to the service industry and tipped wage jobs in particular; *Planet Money* looked at the idea of a four day workweek; *Pitchfork Economics* explained the PRO Act to support labor and the political realities of getting it passed; and *Democracy Now!* drew the connection between poor working conditions, labor struggles, and the on-set shooting involving Alec Baldwin.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips, including *The Strange World of Econ* diving into the history of the economic and labor impact of the Black Plague; and *Planet Money* telling the story of how the 40-hour work week came to be.

And we also just want to add that we've included an article in the show notes that outlined five ways you can support striking workers from wherever you are,

so we encourage everyone to take a look and identify how you can show solidarity.

Now to have 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. Every request is granted, no questions asked.

And now, we'll hear from you.

## **Final comments on the details behind the stats of criminal injustice and incarceration plus why flat-earthers haven't trekked to the edge and looked over**

[01:12:48] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line, or wrote in their messages to be played as a VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at 202 999 3991, or write me a message to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com)

So, thanks to Bud for the question. I'm going to dive into these one by one and... and come to what I think is a decently reasonable conclusion.

Sp, the first statement that he is questioning is, uh, about the 5% of the world's population being in the U S, but 25% of the incarcerated population. And this, of course, is comparing the U. S. to other nations, as opposed to comparing it to itself over time.

And so, I think that speaks to the next quote, which was, "Incarceration doesn't really help." And I think that's when those nation-to-nation comparisons really come in handy, because the incarceration rate in the U S is so high, that you would imagine that, even if there were other factors playing into the crime rate, which there are, that our incredibly high incarceration rate would overcome any other factors, maybe, working against us, and keeping crime rates low. And it is not. So that, that is where those two fit together, I think quite nicely.

And then, "Incarceration has been growing," is one of the quotes that Bud mentioned, and this... I would need to check, and find where that was in the

show. I did a search in the transcript, and couldn't quite find it. And I don't think that's true, it at least not on the national level. So, if someone had said, "Incarceration has been growing,' but there were caveats or specifications or, you know, in a specific place, or whatever, then that may have been said, and could still be accurate. But on the national level, incarceration has not been growing. It seems like incarceration peaked around 2009, and has been on a, sort of, slow glide path down since then. Not... not fast or anything, but you know, a slow descent.

And... and then the last quote is, "Violent crime has gone down." And I completely understand the confusion that that statement could cause. I could say that it's a classic "Correlation doesn't mean causation" kind of scenario. But in this case, there isn't even a lot of correlation, because it depends on what timeframe you're talking about.

So, for instance, the U. S. prison population began to climb sharply in the mid seventies-- that's when it began to pick up. The war on drugs officially kicked in, in the early eighties, and prison populations just went up, up, up, up, up, you know, a very steep curve. But crime didn't peak until the nineties. So we had, sort of, a 20 year experiment with the process of mass incarceration as crime only climbed throughout that 20 year experiment.

And then, to try to flesh out this concept a little bit more, I went and found an article from the Sentencing Project, which, you know, has all the criminal justice facts and details and explanations. And so they write:

"Incarceration has some impact on crime, but the impact is of diminishing returns. Crime rates have declined substantially since the early nineties, but studies suggest that rising imprisonment has not played a major role in this trend. The National Research Council concluded that while prison growth was a factor in reducing crime, the magnitude of the crime reduction remains highly uncertain, and the evidence suggests it was unlikely to have been large.

"Several factors explain why this impact was relatively mild. First incarceration is particularly ineffective at reducing certain kinds of crime; in particular, youth crimes, many of which are committed in groups, and drug crimes. When people get locked up for these offenses, they are easily replaced on the streets by others seeking an income or struggling with addiction.

"Second people tend to 'age out' of crime. Research shows that crime starts to peak in the mid to late teenage years, and begins to decline when individuals are

in their mid twenties. After that, crime drops sharply as adults reach their thirties and forties."

The National Research Council study concluded: "Because recidivism rates decline markedly with age, lengthy prison sentences, unless they are specifically targeting very high rate or extremely dangerous offenders, are an inefficient approach to preventing crime by incapacitation. As a result, the excessive sentencing practices in the U S are largely counterproductive and extremely costly."

So for me, the two big takeaways. When comparing to other countries, other countries get better results with very, very different policies towards incarceration. And then, when comparing the U S to itself over time, the incarceration rate and the crime rate do not correlate. Raising the incarceration rate may have some impact on crime, but not much.

And so, the crime rates and the incarceration rates do not do generally correlate. There are fluctuations in both; there can be a minor impact; but that is not the primary driving force of lowering crime rate.

But with that settled, luckily Bud called back in with a much more important question.

[01:18:38] **VOICEMAILER: BUD FROM BOISE:** Hi, Jay! This is Bud from Idaho again. It's kind of off subject, but your episode about "copaganda" again, towards the end, you were comparing the cult of, uh, flat earthers to the cult of being in law enforcement. And, uh, I'm just curious, as far as the flat earthers, whenever you uh, went down that rabbit hole, and were looking at it, do any of them claim they were ever to the edge? That's something I'd never heard. I have more heard conspiracy theories about how no one's seen the curve. But yeah, it's puzzling. it. I've never heard of anyone being to the edge, and I've also never heard any arguments about why round-the-world cruises aren't really around the world. But I imagine there is something.

Anyway, keep doing what you're doing. Take it easy.

[01:19:25] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Excellent and important questions, Bud. I am happy to answer those for you. I'm going to do it in reverse order, though. So, first, to describe how the flat earth looks to people who believe in flat earth, of which I am not one, I just, uh, checked in on them, and learned... learned their ways for a little while on a few years ago.

So, the Earth is a disc in their projection. The North Pole is in the middle of the disk, and Antarctica is not a continent as we imagine it, it is the ring that encircles the disc. That is how they envision it. So, it's not an island on the South Pole of the planet, it is a ring of ice... which I think they argue, sort of, is what's keeping the oceans in? I'd have to check on that.

So, the round-the-world cruises: they agree that those happen, and you can go in a circle around the world, on a disc; you just aren't going around a globe. That's their envisioning of around the world cruises.

But why have they not taken an expedition to Antarctica, you know, hiked out to the edge and looked over? Um, the answer is-- that they give, at least the one I'm aware of-- is, that secret, international, probably, militaries are preventing anyone from going to Antarctica. If you go, you'll be stopped by a series of warships that will not allow you to get close to Antarctica, so that you can't go to the edge.

And that is part of the conspiracy, and the way NASA, and the UN, and all of the other space agencies of the world, all collectively maintain the falsehood of the globe Earth, for reasons that really begin to break down, because-- they claim it's mostly about money, which I find.. you know, follow the money, it makes some degree of sense, right? But they're talking about how everyone in NASA is helping to maintain this conspiracy so that they can get that sweet, sweet NASA money, which, as anyone who's a fan of space knows, is something like one half of 1% of the U. S. federal budget. So it's not like they're actually getting rich off of it. This isn't like the military industrial complex, although, I dunno, maybe they assume those guys are in on it too. But yeah, I mean, they usually point to NASA and they usually talk about all those billions of dollars that NASA is getting, which, when compared to the actual budget of the country, or the world is an absolute pittance..

So, yeah, it doesn't really stand up to scrutiny. No one should be surprised by that. But, but the answer is, no, they haven't been to the edge because, uh, some, um, shadowy military forces are preventing them from going. So again, thanks for asking. Happy to enlighten anyone on that topic anytime.

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 and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Scott for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together.

Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlet, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show cohosting.

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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, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from [bestoftheleft.com](https://bestoftheleft.com)