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Speak Out Now

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We Should Work To Live, Not Live To Work

While the US economy has grown nearly 60% in the last few decades—bringing in record profits for corporations—workers' wages have remained stagnant at best. Nationally, workers earn a median income of \$44,500, not much more than what we made 40 years ago when adjusted for inflation. Meanwhile, CEO's of some of the biggest corporations are being paid an average of 361 times more than what their workers make! The recent \$1.5 trillion tax cuts that promised would translate to higher incomes for us instead went to the corporations and the rich.

And those jobs we hear are being added to the economy every month and lowering the unemployment rate? They tend to be mostly service jobs that pay little, have unstable schedules, and come with no benefits. The U.S. is the wealthiest country in the world yet people have to work more than ever. We spend more than two thirds of our lives working. And, for increasing numbers of workers, working 40 hours a week is not enough to survive on. We find ourselves working longer hours or taking on multiple jobs just to get by.

After we clock out at the end of the day, our work is still not over. For those of us with kids, it means having to pick them up from school or childcare. Making dinner or lunch for work the next day involves meal prep and cooking time. Add this on top of any other errands we need to run and before we know it our whole day has passed us by. It's no wonder that after a long day of work, many of us have little time, energy, or motivation to do anything else—it feels more like we live to work rather than work to live.

The drive for productivity threatens our wellbeing. The U.S. has one of the worst track records on health and safety for its workforce. In 2017, there were 5,147 reported work-related deaths. That's an average of 14 workers dying every day! This is in addition to the over 4.6 million workers that are injured on the job every year. Most of these injuries and deaths are preventable, caused by well-recognized hazards.

When it comes to receiving basic benefits, we again fall short. Many don't even get benefits. Those of us that do are often given basic packages that require us to pay high premiums, co-pays, or deductibles. Health care costs keep rising, putting many of us that are uninsured or underinsured at risk of financial ruin should a serious medical need arise. Unlike other parts of the world, we don't have guaranteed health care, paid time off for illness, family leave, holidays, or vacations. The dream of retirement is becoming less reachable as the retirement age gets pushed back further and many don't have pensions or anything to retire on.

As the cost of living continues to skyrocket, working people are getting squeezed even more. The lack of affordable housing is pushing more of us to live farther away from our workplaces, forcing us to commute long distances to just to get to work. The pressure of working and living under these conditions has a significant impact on our quality of life. Spending our lives at work or traveling to and from work takes away much of our personal and leisure time, which are essential to our overall wellbeing. This can have negative effects on our health—it's not uncommon for workers to suffer from fatigue, sleep deprivation, stress, depression, and other health problems.

Still, as busy as we are, we manage to find time to do the things we enjoy doing like spending time with our family and friends or exploring our other interests. This is life as it should be.

We have begun to see workers standing up to reclaim their lives. Across the country teachers have mobilized, demanding better conditions for themselves and their students. Health care workers, hotel workers, workers in Amazon warehouses and elsewhere have gone on strike.

It's efforts like these that show we don't have to live our lives this way. By organizing ourselves collectively, we have the power to change our circumstances.