

# **ECONOMIC JUSTICE & WORKERS' RIGHTS**

**Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration  
UVU**

**January 22, 2013  
Warner Woodworth**

# MLK'S PERSPECTIVES ON WORKERS

- ✘ We think of him as a wonderful man, but in his day he was seen as a crazy radical, vilified in the press, abused by police, harassed by the FBI, hated by millions of Americans, & murdered in cold blood.
- ✘ A major reason America didn't like him was because he was pro worker & sought a radical redistribution of economic & political power.

## WORKER PROBLEMS TODAY

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- ✘ Corporations emptying worker pension funds
- ✘ Anti-union tactics across America
- ✘ Flat wage increases
- ✘ Management control of workplaces
- ✘ Chicago workers were underpaid by \$!/hr. in 2012
- ✘ Employees lack voice on the job
- ✘ Wage theft increased 400 % nationally (they are forced to work overtime but don't get paid extra)

# MLK'S CRITICISMS OF SOCIETY

- ✘ Saw the need to confront "class issues," which he described as "the gulf between the haves and the have nots."
- ✘ Condemned "economic exploitation" -- slum housing, overpriced food, & low-wage jobs -- "because someone profits from its existence."
- ✘ He was pro-union & partnered with labor in fighting for more worker rights.
- ✘ Felt America needed a re-distribution of

## LOOKING AT TODAY WHAT WOULD MLK SAY?

He would:

- ✘ Be shocked at how inequality as exploded in recent decades
- ✘ Be disappointed how trade unions have diminished
- ✘ Be surprised at the off-shoring of U.S. jobs
- ✘ Be astounded at huge CEO pay
- ✘ Be outraged at economic injustice across the land
- ✘ Be amazed at America's growing

## MLK WAS MURDERED WHILE SUPPORTING MEMPHIS SANITATION WORKERS ON STRIKE

- ✘ For years, the black sanitation workforce had toiled in grueling conditions for Memphis' white ruling class, working with dangerously outmoded equipment & poverty wages.
- ✘ MLK traveled to join their struggle after 2 workers were crushed by huge garbage trucks.
- ✘ The workers went of strike to have a union, safety, & better wages,
- ✘ This became his last campaign – solidarity

# THE ASSASSINATION

- ✘ The night before his murder on April 3, 1968, he told the crowd: “We’ve got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end.
- ✘ Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We’ve got to see it through”



## MORE WORDS IN MEMPHIS

“I’ve been to the Mountaintop Speech” at the world headquarters of a church.

“I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain, & I've looked over, & I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land.”



After the assassination of MLK, Coretta Scott King's family & Rev. Ralph Abernathy led a silent march of 42,000 to support Memphis sanitation workers' strike & honor MLK

# HOW TO BUILD ON MLK'S WORKER LEGACY

- ✘ Pass tight regulations to restore worker pension funds.
- ✘ Foster ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plans) that give labor stock shares, board seats, & are more productive, more profitable
- ✘ Do like Chicago which has just approved measure that will revoke the charter of any business found to be guilty of wage theft = will be a business death sentence.

# COUNTER TODAY'S EXECUTIVE POWER

- ✘ Problem of income disparity (another way to say econ. Injustice...)
- ✘ 2012 Goldman Sach's CEO got \$21 million
- ✘ In recent decades worker compensation grew 5.7%. During the same time, CEO compensation grew by 725 percent.
- ✘ In 1965 CEO earned about 20 times the typical worker. In 2011, the typical CEO "earned" over 200 times the typical worker

# WHAT ELSE WOULD MLK DO TODAY?

- ✘ If MLK were alive today, he would be protesting anti-worker legislature schemes in Wisconsin, Michigan, & Utah
- ✘ He would march with Walmart workers attempting to unionize their stores
- ✘ He would join the boycotts & strikes of fast food stores in NYC seeking a livable wage & health insurance
- ✘ He would sit-in with the Occupy Wall Street movement

# WHAT ELSE?

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- ✘ He would fight against work & jobs discrimination against Latinos.
- ✘ He would seek to increase the compensation of women who on average receive only about 70% of men's pay.
- ✘ He would lobby for a higher minimum wage.

# TODAY'S RALLY SUPPORTING FARMWORKERS AT WENDY'S & KROGER'S IN OHIO



## WHAT MORE WOULD MLK WORK FOR TODAY?

- ✘ He would seek values of economic democracy, diplomacy, human rights, justice, peace, & a foreign policy for the global poor as antidotes to our diseases of unjust workplaces, greed, militarism, & racism.
- ✘ As we celebrate Dr. King's 84<sup>th</sup> birthday, let's rededicate ourselves to building the Beloved Community he envisioned. Dismantling the 3 evils & replacing them with positive structures & policies would be a good next steps

# MLK QUOTES

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- ✘ History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.
- ✘ Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.
- ✘ As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation — either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course.
- ✘ We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

**THANKS!**

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**Q&A**