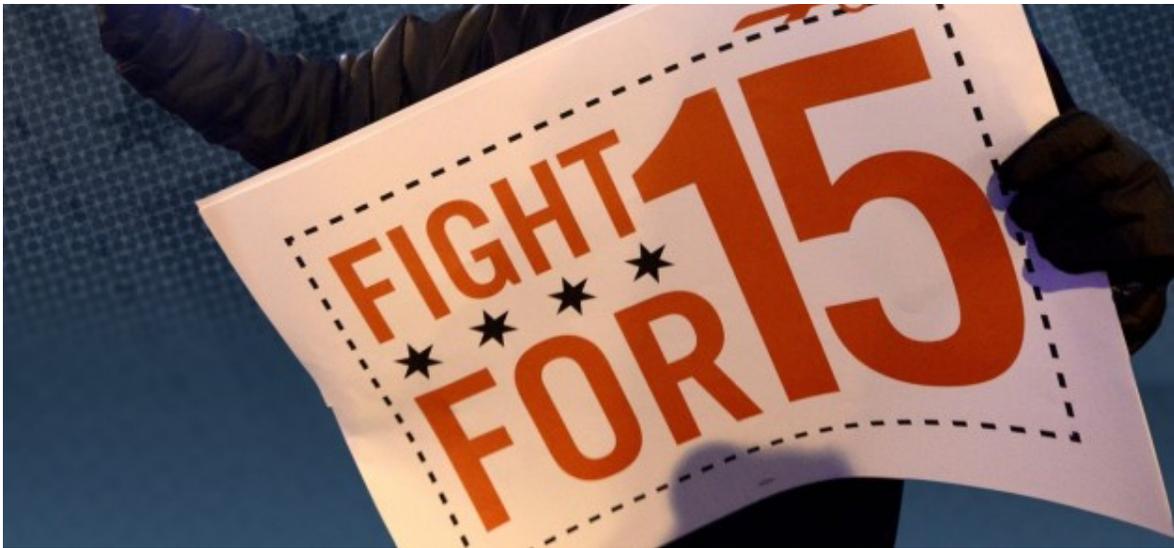


HUFFPOST POLITICS

Bubble Up Economics & How History Will Remember the Fight for \$15

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Millions of working people - our neighbors, our coworkers, and our friends - made historic gains as New York and California moved toward a \$15 minimum wage. We are fighting from the ground up - from city - to state - to hopefully the nation - for something so simple: to be able to put food on the table once again. Low-wage workers who have taken to the streets will be remembered as the spark that ignited a wave of improvements for working people that we will see if we continue the fight.

One hundred and fifty years ago, no one thought it was possible to get beyond the gritty, back-breaking work of the factories. But eventually, because working people put themselves on the line and the community got behind them, those jobs transformed into the coveted middle class manufacturing careers that put food on the table, kids through college, and allowed people to retire comfortably.

Similarly, three years ago, fast food and retail work was largely seen as dead end with no hope for a better future. Fifteen dollars per hour minimum wage was unthinkable, but today it's unstoppable. Again, workers — 82% who are people of color — put themselves on the front lines; they risked getting their hours cut in retaliation, being fired, or even being deported.

While the working class heroes we see in old photographs may look different than those leading the movement today, they share a courage and resolve that has allowed both to persevere.

Putting it in context, the Fight for \$15 is historic, not just in how it will transform the lives of millions of low-wage workers, but how it will transform the expectations, hopes, and dreams of all of us just like the wave of improvements after the Industrial Revolution did. We will remember this time in textbooks as how working people sparked a movement of workplace improvements in the face of a growing Right-wing agenda that threatened to set workers backwards to the robber baron years.

But in order to ensure that a \$15 minimum wage is just the beginning, rather than where our story ends, we need comprehensive worker improvements for the 21st century that in many ways mirrors what was needed 150 years ago.

Just like we needed the eight-hour workday then, well, we need the eight-hour workday now. During the Industrial Revolution, workers fought to ONLY work eight hours a day. But today's working women, men and those in between are fighting not only for full-time hours with decent pay, but predictable schedules.

Cities like San Jose and Emeryville, CA are looking to pass innovative policies that move workers toward full-time regular hours. The goal is something many people take for granted: one single family-sustaining job with predictable hours to be able to pay the bills, budget for the future, and schedule childcare, education, and even rest.

One hundred and fifty years ago, we needed child labor laws; today we need affordable childcare. We've all seen the pictures of sooty-faced children who were forced to work in the factories. Today, we need affordable childcare so that working parents — particularly low-income women — don't have to spend half their earnings on a service that allows them to work in the first place.

Many parent grassroots organizations are fighting for increased childcare funding at the state and federal levels. We also advocate for companies to provide childcare for their workforce on-site or as a benefit: it makes workers more productive, decreases absenteeism and reduces costly turnover.

One hundred and fifty years ago, we needed to create the National Labor Relations Board and Department of Labor to set and enforce labor laws, and today, we need greater local and statewide enforcement measures. Cities need to step up their game to enforce minimum wage laws and prevent wage theft. Enlisting community organizations that have direct ties to low-wage workers makes sense. Cities like Oakland are doing just that, but it's not enough as decision-makers turn the other way and often do nothing when law-breaking activities are reported.

That is why when workers have a union, they have the collective power to fight back regardless of what the government is doing. Because as long as there are laws, there will be law-breaking employers.

One hundred and fifty years ago, a movement was set into motion, which shifted the entire economy away from robber baron millionaires and poverty workers, to a more equitable economy with a robust middle class. But today's corporations have changed the workplace, shifting workers' wages to shareholder profits. The exponential gap between worker and CEO pay has grown to an unconscionable level with the very few living lavishly while the masses struggle to get by.

We believe that the \$15 minimum wage can begin to swing the pendulum back in the other direction just as we did so 150 years ago.

We know that for these changes and others to happen, policy won't be trickle down from the national level, but bubble up from the grass roots. We created the momentum for the \$15 minimum wage at the local level. City-level wins have served as a powerful reminder that when we stand up together, we can change even the most entrenched views and give hope to those left behind by a rigged economy.

While we are still fighting to make \$15 the floor nationally, now is the time to push for comprehensive worker improvements for today's economy. Working people are making history, and now we don't just have to dream of a better future. We can continue the fight knowing we have the power to make it a reality.