

## A Stimulus Bill That's Good for Workers, Good for the Economy

By Richard A. Levins

Here's something you won't hear everyday: a card-carrying economist (namely me) saying that the Employee Free Choice Act must be front and center in our economic recovery programs. Why do I think this way? I believe that wages, not borrowing and printing money, are the foundation of a strong, middle class economy.

We all know that our economy cannot recover until consumer spending gets back on track. We have programs that borrow money from China and print new money. These programs, even if they somehow boost consumer spending for a while, mean bigger problems down the road when debts come due and inflation heats up.

Worse yet, those leading our economy seem to think that falling wages are somehow a good thing. How else do you explain programs that offer Federal money to auto makers on the condition their unions make wage and benefit concessions?

Falling wages are a big problem, one you can't paper over with funny money. Paul Krugman, our most recent Nobel prize winner in economics, wrote that "falling wages are a symptom of a sick economy." He went even farther and said that falling wages "can make the economy even sicker." (NY Times, May 4, 2009)

So tell me this: who is out there fighting for the higher wages that will lead us to sustainable economic recovery? Labor unions are the only economic force I know of that consistently and effectively works to keep wages at levels that will support a strong economy. And what does the Employee Free Choice Act do? It makes it easier for people to join those labor unions. This is why I see EFCA as such an important part of our recovery efforts.

That's not the line the public is being fed by corporate spin machines. Surely, no one reading this thinks that corporations are spending millions in advertising against the Employee Free Choice Act out of concern for the worker's right to a secret ballot. Workers could still choose the secret ballot under the Act, and those paying for the ads know that. No, these are the same corporations that have outsourced most of our manufacturing jobs. They oppose the Act because weak unions are good for corporate profits—when people do the same job for less, the rich get richer at everyone else's expense.

A middle class economy sustained by middle class wages should be what we are all working toward. Labor unions have a proven track record of building our middle class economy on a strong foundation of middle class wages. That's the path we need to get back on, and soon. The Employee Free Choice Act will help us do just that.

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