

Whose Rules Are We Playing By?

Reviewing Where We've Come So Far

Over the last month, Rapid Response InfoAlerts have told the story of why workers aren't getting further ahead. When Steelworkers ask why we keep enacting more job-killing free trade agreements, why we aren't doing more to ensure a decent environment, or why wages aren't keeping up, the answer all has to do with economics.

Economics is about the decisions on three questions: How do we allocate resources? How do we produce things? And, who benefits?

Over time, the answers have changed.

In the 1930s, workers won great battles, establishing Social Security, unemployment and other pro-worker reforms. We were taking control of the economy and making it work for us. Post World War II, workers and employers shared power, and we saw productivity and worker wages rise and the start of programs that benefit workers such as OSHA and the establishment of the minimum wage. At that time people realized that some rules for an imperfect free market were a good thing to ensure all benefited. Since the 1970s, that power has flipped in favor of a different way of thinking that wants to loosen the rules for business and allow the "market" to operate with as few rules as possible. Workers are being left behind, and anti-worker policies are taking over.

What is specifically happening to workers? Stay tuned for the next part of our series that discusses the growing gaps between the wealthy and everyone else.

Here are a few facts to consider until next week:

- **Over 1/2 of all female workers still earn less than \$8.70 an hour (\$18,000 a year).**
- **25% of all U.S. workers still work in jobs paying \$8.70 or less an hour.**
- **More than 1 in 5 children still live in poverty, the highest among 17 industrialized nations.**
- **We are still the only industrialized country in the world without some system of universal health care.**
- **Our health care system is leaving 47 million Americans a year without care.**