



# MWV Union Council

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## Free to Lose

Consider, for a moment, a tale of two countries. Both have suffered a severe recession and lost jobs as a result — but not on the same scale. In Country A, employment has fallen more than 5 percent, and the unemployment rate has more than doubled. In Country B, employment has fallen only half a percent, and unemployment is only slightly higher than it was before the crisis.

### **Don't you think Country A might have something to learn from Country B?**

This story isn't hypothetical. Country A is the United States, where stocks are up, G.D.P. is rising, but the terrible employment situation just keeps getting worse. Country B is Germany, which took a hit to its G.D.P. when world trade collapsed, but has been remarkably successful at avoiding mass job losses. Germany's jobs miracle hasn't received much attention in this country — but it's real, it's striking, and it raises serious questions about whether the U.S. government is doing the right things to fight unemployment.

Here in America, the philosophy behind jobs policy can be summarized as "if you grow it, they will come." That is, **we don't really have a jobs policy: we have a G.D.P. policy.** The theory is that by stimulating overall spending we can make G.D.P. grow faster, and this will induce companies to stop firing and resume hiring.

The alternative would be policies that address the job issue more directly. We could, for example, have New-Deal-style employment programs. Perhaps such a thing is politically impossible now — **Glenn Beck would describe anything like the Works Progress Administration as a plan to recruit pro-Obama brown shirts** — but we should note, for the record, that at their peak, the W.P.A. and the Civilian Conservation Corps employed millions of Americans, at relatively low cost to the budget.

Alternatively, or in addition, we could have policies that support private-sector employment. Such policies could range from labor rules that discourage firing to financial incentives for companies that either add workers or reduce hours to avoid layoffs. And that's what the Germans have done. Germany came into the Great Recession with strong employment protection legislation. This has been supplemented with a "short-time work scheme," which provides subsidies to employers who reduce workers' hours rather than laying them off. These measures didn't prevent a nasty recession, but Germany got through the recession with remarkably few job losses.

Should America be trying anything along these lines? In a recent interview, Lawrence Summers, the Obama administration's highest-ranking economist, was dismissive: "It may be desirable to have a given amount of work shared among more people. But that's not as desirable as expanding the total amount of work." True. But we are not, in fact, expanding the total amount of work — and Congress doesn't seem willing to spend enough on stimulus to change that unfortunate fact. So shouldn't we be considering other measures, if only as a stopgap?

Now, the usual objection to European-style employment policies is that they're bad for long-run growth — that protecting jobs and encouraging work-sharing makes companies in expanding sectors less likely to hire and reduces the incentives for workers to move to more productive occupations. And in normal times there's something to be said for American-style "free to lose" labor markets, in which employers can fire workers at will but also face few barriers to new hiring.

But these aren't normal times. Right now, workers who lose their jobs aren't moving to the jobs of the future; they're entering the ranks of the unemployed and staying there. Long-term unemployment is already at its highest levels since the 1930s, and it's still on the rise. And long-term unemployment inflicts long-term damage. Workers who have been out of a job for too long often find it hard to get back into the labor market even when conditions improve. And there are hidden costs, too — not least for children, who suffer physically and emotionally when their parents spend months or years unemployed.

### **So it's time to try something different.**

Just to be clear, I believe that a large enough conventional stimulus would do the trick. But since that doesn't seem to be in the cards, we need to talk about cheaper alternatives that address the job problem directly. Should we introduce an employment tax credit, like the one proposed by the Economic Policy Institute? Should we introduce the German-style job-sharing subsidy proposed by the Center for Economic Policy Research? Both are worthy of consideration.

The point is that we need to start doing something more than, and different from, what we're already doing. And the experience of other countries suggests that it's time for a policy that explicitly and directly targets job creation.

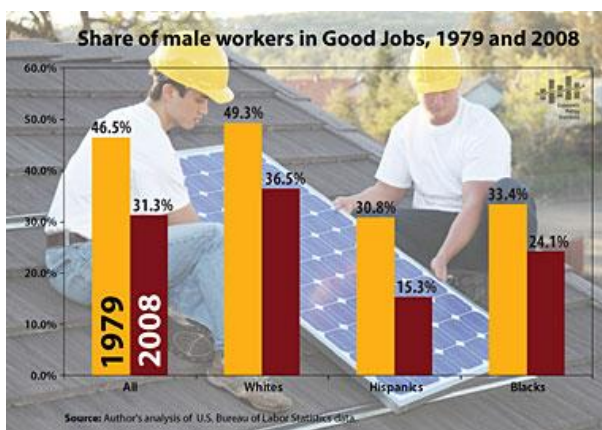
*Paul Krugman, emphasis added  
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# Union News



AFL-CIO News service, graphic(s) added

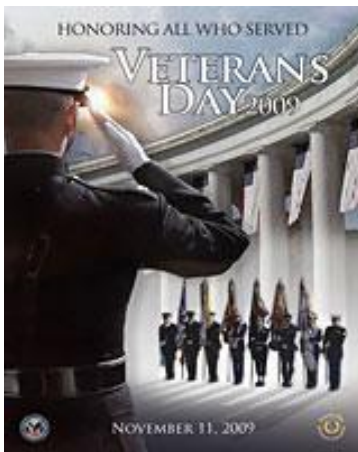
**Florida Students Rally for Tobacco Workers:** Students at the University of Florida (UF) and the University of Central Florida (UCF) spent last Saturday morning raising their voices for justice for tobacco workers. Chanting "Justice now!" and holding signs that read "Hasta la Victoria" ("Onward to Victory"), dozens of students marched and rallied on UF's Gainesville campus. The students joined members of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), the Student/Farmworkers Alliance and the National Farm Worker Ministry to demand justice for tobacco farm workers in North Carolina who suffer low wages and poor working conditions at the hands of Big Tobacco. The rally followed a UF Student Senate resolution calling for a pay increase and better treatment of Immokalee farm workers, who pick the tomatoes used by Aramark, UF's food provider. "Somebody's got to fight for social justice," said UF junior Justin Wooten.



**Unions Can Help Create Good Jobs for People of Color:** Increasing union membership is one of the keys to creating more good jobs for all workers, but especially for people of color and those in low-wage jobs, several experts said today. Many of the 8.1 million jobs lost during the current recession have been good jobs, including union jobs in manufacturing. The jobs now created, mainly in the service sector, are less likely to provide what working families need. In a new report

released today, Algernon Austin, director of the Economic Policy Institute's (EPI's) program on Race, Ethnicity and the Economy, says the United States has too few good jobs. He defines a good job as one with a wage that can support a family, health care benefits and retirement security. Using that minimal standard, Austin found that Hispanics are less than half as likely as non-Hispanic whites to have good jobs, and African Americans about two-thirds as likely.

**Global Inequality, Workplace Deaths Increase—No Coincidence:** Two new reports paint a sobering picture of what growing global inequality really means. Not only are wages continuing to drop, lowering the standard of living for millions of workers and increasing the wage gap, but evidence is emerging that rising inequality can be bad for your health. First, the International Labor Organization (ILO), an arm of the United Nations, reported in its “Global Wage Report: 2009 Update” last week that global growth in real wages slowed dramatically last year and is expected to drop even further this year. The report found that in half of the 35 countries for which figures are available, real monthly wages fell in the first quarter of 2009 compared to their average of 2008, often due to cuts in hours worked.



**Military Veterans Deserve Jobs When They Return:** While we took the time on Veterans Day to honor the courage and sacrifice shown by our veterans, we should also rededicate ourselves to making sure vets have a secure and stable life after they finish their service. The U.S. Labor Department reports the unemployment rate among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans is 11.3 percent, significantly above the overall rate of 10.2 percent for the nation as a whole. Some 185,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are out of work. Many of these unemployed veterans are National Guard or Reserve troops who were called to duty but found when they came home that their old jobs were no longer there for them. The AFL-CIO Union Veterans Council is calling on Congress to strengthen and enforce the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, which ensures veterans, can claim their former jobs when they return from active duty. In his Veterans Day message, Union Veterans Council Chairman Mark Ayers quotes President Franklin Roosevelt who signed the first GI Bill into law in 1944: *What our servicemen and women want, more than anything else, is the assurance of satisfactory employment upon their return to civil life.*

**Report: Face of Unions More Diverse:** The face of the union movement has changed dramatically over the past 25 years. In 1983, more than half of all union workers were white men, few union workers had a college degree and nearly one-third were in manufacturing. Today, almost half are women; more than one-third have college degrees and only one in 10 work in manufacturing. “The Changing Face of Labor, 1983-2008,” a new report released today by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), shows the union movement is more diverse than 25 years ago. The makeup of union members reflects similar shifts in the overall workforce. About half of union workers are in the public sector, while one of every 10 is in manufacturing; and the remaining four are in the private sector outside of manufacturing. Click here to read the report. Says CEPR senior economist John Schmitt, one of the report’s authors: *The view that the typical union worker is a white male manufacturing worker may have been correct a quarter of a century ago, but it’s not an accurate description of those in today’s labor movement. The unionized workforce is changing with the country, The fastest growing groups in the overall economy are also the fastest growing groups in the labor movement.*



**TVA Engineers Join IFPTE:** By a nearly 10-to-1 margin, members of the Tennessee Valley Authority Engineering Association (EA), employees at the nation's largest public power supplier, voted to affiliate with the Professional and Technical Engineers union (IFPTE) on November 13th. The EA includes more than 2,600 scientists, engineers, technicians and other professional TVA employees. EA President Gay Henson says joining IFPTE will make EA a

more effective advocate for its members: *"We are extremely excited about moving forward together with the IFPTE. This partnership provides us with new connections to Washington, to the labor movement and to other engineers and professionals. IFPTE also will lend expertise to help us with legislation and negotiations. As a result of today's vote, it's a new day for the EA."* IFPTE represents more than 80,000 professional employees in both the public and private sector, including technical experts and skilled workers at power-generation facilities across the country. IFPTE President Greg Junemann says he's honored that EA, first formed in 1937, decided to affiliate with IFPTE.



**Obama Announces White House Jobs Summit:** Last week, President Obama announced he will invite labor leaders, business executives, small business owners, economists and other financial experts to a special White House summit on jobs next month. Obama says the summit will explore ways to slow the loss of jobs and quicken the pace of job creation at a time when the nation's jobless rate is at 10.2 percent, its highest point since 1983. As Obama said, *We have an obligation to consider every additional responsible step that we can to encourage and accelerate job*

*creation in this country.*



**Send You're Best Wishes to Fort Hood Hero:** Sgt. Kimberly Munley is a bona fide hero, having risked her life to stop the alleged gunman who killed 13 people and injured 30 at Fort Hood, Texas, on Nov. 5. Munley shot the alleged assailant, Maj. Nidal Hasan, four times, despite being shot herself. She currently is recovering from her injuries and is in stable condition. Now her union, AFGE, has set up a site where you can send your best wishes to Sgt. Munley. Just click here and compose a message to her. Your messages will be collected and AFGE will deliver the messages to Munley on Friday,

November 20th. Munley, 34, is a member of AFGE Local 1920 and the mother of a three-year-old. She and her partner were the first to arrive at the Soldier Readiness Center, where Hasan allegedly opened fire. AFGE President John Gage said Munley "acted with great heroism." Lt. Gen. Bob Cone, commanding general at Fort Hood, told CNN that Munley's actions stopped Hasan cold and saved lives. He said Munley is a "trained, active first responder" who acted quickly after she "just happened to encounter the gunman."

# Safety First?



## Race To The Bottoommm



Jake reached the summit of Saddle Mountain, and then and there he informed his friends that he had planned to make a controlled slide down the cliff face. He would meet up with them in the parking lot or on the trail below.

Most folks are satisfied with the risks and rewards of dune sliding, and the inevitable 150-foot tumble and a broken limb. Jake, 18, decided to 'git-r-dun' down a thousand-foot cliff. He slid pell-mell down the cliff--and what was intended to be a controlled rockslide ended abruptly 1000 feet below the summit, when his body came to rest in a steep ravine. Friends were shocked. "We are shocked," they said, "because he is always doing stuff like this and coming out smiling." Due to the hazardous terrain, recovery workers were not able to reach the body until 36 hours laterz when Clatsop County Rescue and Portland Mountain Rescue teams confirmed the death.

## Sparkleberry Lane



Two disguised men entered the Sprint store on Sparkleberry Lane, pulled out guns, and stole wallets, purses, and credit cards before ordering the employees into a bathroom. Both men fled, but they could not flee from their own stupidity. 24-year-old James Thomas had disguised himself by spray-painting his own face.

Yes, in order to conceal his identity during the robbery, Thomas covered his skin with paint--a toxic substance with well known inhalation risks. He began having trouble breathing (surprise!) and died wheezing shortly after the robbery took place. Witnesses were certain as to the identity of their assailant; had he lived, he would have been charged with armed robbery.

## Crushing Debt



Two bank robbers attempting to make a sizeable withdrawal from an ATM machine died when they overestimated the quantity of dynamite needed for the explosion. Nobody else was in the building at the time of the attack. Robber one was rushed to hospital severely injured, and Robber Two was unexpectedly excavated from the debris twelve hours later.

Uncovering the second bungler's body was a surprise because investigators initially assumed that the accomplice had managed a getaway. Would-be robbers One and Two weren't exactly impoverished--their getaway car was a BMW.

## Look Before You Leak



Traffic was moving slowly on southbound I-95. Shawn Montero had left a Pompano Beach bar with three friends, and now all four were stuck in traffic. You don't buy beer, you just rent it, and Shawn couldn't wait another moment to relieve himself. "I need to take a leak."

Traffic was deadlocked, so the waterlogged man climbed out, put his hand on the divider, and jumped over the low concrete wall... only to fall 65 feet to his death.

"He probably thought there was a road, but there wasn't," said a Fort Lauderdale police spokesman. His mother shared her thoughts. "Shawn didn't do a whole lot for a living. He got along on his charm, just like his father."

Though his death was tragic, it proves the old adage. "Look before you leak!"

## Mr. Tinker



Rob says, "My father-in-law tinkers and most often fixes things. I have seen him take apart toasters, motors, electronics, and power washers. He often has several projects on the go. One day he came home with a neighbor's broken microwave and disappeared into his workshop to search out the problem.

"Awhile later I heard weird noises coming from the workshop, and peeked in. The microwave was now working fine but its front door was missing. The machine was running, and he had his head tucked inside the oven...

"I pulled the plug!

"He did not take himself out of the gene pool, but the microwave incident may have increased the odds of cancer. Years later he developed a brain tumor, which was successfully removed. He still tinkers today, but we do keep a closer eye on him."