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Full Employment Boosts Welfare States


By JOCELYN PIXLEY

Why has poverty increased even in the richest countries? To learn why, “Diminishing Welfare” is essential reading. Its key argument is that full employment—the goal of many nations for several decades after World War II—finances decent welfare states. Sufficient employment for all, at fair wages, is the basis for raising everyone’s living standards.

This book is timely. Today, unemployment is rising again simultaneously in many countries. Dominant policies of the past quarter century are in tatters.

Scandalous Childhood Poverty

This book shows that wherever governments have not defended full employment, social provision has been cut back. What are the results? One is scandalous levels of poverty for children in the United States, with the United Kingdom and Italy not far behind.

“This book shows that wherever governments have not defended full employment, social provision has been cut back.” —Jocelyn Pixley, senior lecturer in sociology at the University of New South Wales, Australia, is on the NJ FAC advisory board.

From the Chair

A Watershed Election

A watershed presidential election is only months away. In November, the American people will decide whether to continue or end the policies that have harmed working families and worsened inequality, threatening the foundation of our democracy.

The National Jobs for All Coalition is taking advantage of the opportunity of an election when the ears of the citizenry are a little more attuned and open to new ideas and policies. The coalition’s three main projects are designed to raise consciousness about the permanent war economy, the so-called Social Security crisis, and the context of election 2004.

The Permanent War Economy

Military spending cured the Great Depression. But our $400 defense budget—over one half of the world’s military spending—is concurrent with the loss of millions of jobs. The winners in this war are not soldiers and their families or the nation’s defense. The winners are the CEOs of defense firms, whose median total compensation leaped 79 percent in just one year.

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“Diminishing Welfare” has chapters on nine countries. The U.S. chapter and the introductory and concluding ones are by coalition chair Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg, a social welfare expert. A chapter on Sweden is by coalition executive committee member and economist Helen Lachs Ginsburg and Marguerite G. Rosenthal, a professor of social policy.

Jocelyn Pixley, senior lecturer in sociology at the University of New South Wales, Australia, is on the NJ FAC advisory board.
Below are excerpts from “Toward a Fair Economy: The Economic Context for 2004,” published in October 2003, which is part of a coa-

tion initiative to highlight the jobs issue in this year’s elections.

Washington enacted a stricter welfare requirement in recent years. Yet, it has not committed itself to decent, living wage jobs for all who need to work. A strict work ethic without sufficient opportu-

nities to work is not a fair economy.

Unemployment was low, but not vanished in the closing years of the 20th century. Now that our brief holiday from mass un-

employment is over, unemployment hovers around 6 percent. This official unemployment rate fails to count millions of unem-

ployed workers and underemployed Americans. Nearly 3 million jobs have disap-

peared from the labor market since the Bush presidency began.

Even highly trained professionals have had their jobs downsized and outsourced, sometimes multiple times. And the ad-

ministration’s fiscal policies are forcing cutbacks by be-

haguered state governments that reduce services and jobs for ser-

vice providers.

Insufficient Job Gains

Recent job increases, even if sustained, would not be sufficient to keep up with the growth of the labor force, much less significan-

tly decrease the unemployment rate. Unemployment not only devas-


tates workers who are denied a job and a living, it undermines their

confidence in the economy. Unemployment also takes its toll in billions of dollars in goods and services that are not produced by the economy.

This nation must create a Fair Economy, one that balances the ob-

ligation to work with a national commitment to decent, living wage jobs for all. That goal includes vital workplace benefits to cover

health care, unemployment, child care, and retirement—all of which are grossly insufficient and dwindling in today’s unfair economy.

Otherwise the strict work ethic is a cruel, double

Blindside

A policy for Jobs All must begin with large-scale job creation

through government—construction of affordable housing, provision of

child care, and elder care, etc. According to estimates of the National

Jobs for All Coalition, such a program is not only desirable but fea-

sible. It would create useful services and goods, and add to national

resources, and generate enough in extra taxes and savings from unem-

ployment insurance and other costs of joblessness to pay for itself.

A policy of full employment would make every domestic problem

easier to solve and begin a reversal of the dangerous rise in eco-

onomic inequality that is a consequence of our unfair economy.

A large job creation program as part of a staged policy of Jobs for All should be at the heart of a compassionate, affordable, and vote-

getting presidential platform.

MAY 2004 UNEMPLOYMENT DATA

(U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS)

OFFICIAL UNEMPLOYMENT: 5.6% 8.2 million workers
White: 5.0%
Black: 8.6%
Native: 7.0%
Hispanic: 7.0%
Men 20 years and over: 5.2%
Women 20 years and over: 4.8%
Teenagers (16-19 years): 17.2%
Black teenagers: 32.5%
HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT: 6.0% 9.4 million workers
People working part-time because they can’t find a full-time job: 4.7 million workers
People who want jobs but are not counted in official statistics because they are not looking* 4.7 million workers
TOTAL (Official and Hidden): 11.6% 17.6 million workers

About 16 million more were working full time, yearround, yet earned less than the official poverty level for a family of four. In that same year, for which data are available, 2002, those numbers amounted to 16 percent—about one in six—of full-time, full-year workers (estimated from U.S. Census Bureau data).

JOB OPENINGS: In March 2004, the most recent month available, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported only 3.1 million job openings, 8.4 million people were unemployed that month.

*See Uncommon Sense #4 for an explanation of the unemployment measures.

**Of the group, approximately 1.5 million searched for work during the prior 12 months and were available for work during the reference week.

1. Increasing Unemployment Increases The Deficit Use of Unemployment Reduces The Deficit, by Gillian Brooks.
2. Unemployment Means Lost Output And Human Deficits, by Helen Ginsburg.
3. 17 Million Unemployed And Underemployed Is Natural, So Is 16 Million, by Helen Ginsburg and Bill Ayers.
9. Why The Debt Isn’t All Bad: Balancing Our Deficit, by Robert Revere (Reprinted with permission from the Nation magazine. c (1995)
10. Let’s Have An Adequate Minimum Wage, by Robert Cherry.
11. High Anxiety: Economic Insecurity And Jobs For All, by Charles Whalen.
12. Environmental Regulation And Jobs: Myth And Reality, by Roberta Buffett.
13. The Collapse Of Low-Skill Wages: Technological Shift Or Institutional Failure?, by David Harvey.
14. Paying For Full Employment, by Philip Harvey.
27. The Real Medicare Crisis, by Bruce Vladeck.

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The Employment Crisis

Whose Recovery Is It?

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By HELEN LACHS GINSBURG

The recession that started in March 2001 was short-lived. Officially, it ended in November 2001, when a “recovery” is said to have begun.

But whose recovery is it?

The stock market, profits and productivity are up. Yet even with the strong upturn in jobs in recent months, tens of millions of workers—unemployed and employed—are taking a beating.

In June, the administration crowed over the latest Labor Dept. jobs report. Those May figures showed a welcome, brisk growth of payroll employment for the third month in a row.

Economic Havoc?

But it is important to recognize that job loss occurred during both the recession and the so-called recovery. What the Bushites don’t mention is that:

• there are still 1.1 million jobs lost (net) than when the recession started
• the extensive destruction of manufacturing jobs in the last three years has wreaked havoc on workers and communities.

Nor are the unemployment figures cause for celebration. The official jobless rate of 5.6 percent in May was exactly the same as when the recession started. That loss of 2.7 million since October 2000, when unemployment was 3.9 percent.

But this is an undercount. These figures would more than double if they included involuntary part-time workers unable to get full-time jobs and people who want jobs but aren’t currently looking for them. Blacks are especially hard hit, with about 10 percent official unemployment and more than triple that rate among their 16 to 19 year olds. (See box on p. 2.)

The situation is even worse than it appears because the percentage of working age persons actually holding jobs, especially blacks, has fallen. In New York City, the Community Service Society reports a catastrophic drop in the percentage of working age black men holding jobs, plummeted by a fifth since 2000. Barely half of them (53.8 percent) were working in 2003, compared to 3 out of 4 white men.

Traditionally disadvantaged groups and manufacturing workers are not the only affected ones. College graduates are far less likely to be unemployed than those with less education. However, among jobless persons 25 and older, college graduates now outnumber those without a high school diploma.

Long-term unemployment up

Long-term unemployment has soared. Last year, 22.1 percent of the unemployed were out of work for 27 weeks or longer. That’s the highest annual rate since 1983.

Current figures are no better than last year. The largest number of long-term unemployed had manufacturing jobs, but with restructuring, persistent job losses in high-tech industries, and global outsourcing going up, the number of long-term unemployed has also increased. College graduates (and higher) quadrupled in just three years, according to a joint study by the Economic Policy Institute and the National Employment Law Project.

Less than half of the jobless receive state unemployment insurance. Provided for at most 26 weeks, these benefits don’t make anyone rich. Compensation averages just $265 a week and replaces less than half of the average worker’s prior earnings.

Despite the persistence of long-term unemployment, Congress, with the blessing of the Bush administration, refused to renew an emergency federal program that extended unemployment benefits and that expired at the end of 2003.

The recession and recovery have also taken their toll on the employed. Jobs have been shifting from higher- to lower-wage industries with fewer health and other benefits.

Inflation-adjusted hourly wages for private sector non-farm workers—actually lower than in 1968—have stagnated and barely recovered. No longer do productivity gains lead to higher wages.

Reared at the Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies shows that productivity gains have mainly been used to boost profits and CEO compensation not wages. A report from the Center for American Progress compared to all other recoveries since World War II, during this recovery, after-tax profit rates have soared to record highs while wages in incomes and salaries hit historic lows.

Bush’s huge tax cuts were targeted to the 40 percent of families earning above $50,000, who spend a larger share of their incomes. Thus, the administration’s cuts provided only a mild stimulus to a lagging economy. But this was weak to keep up with productivity gains, so in this recovery, unlike all others, one could get by with a shrinking workforce. This partly explains why employment actually fell in this recovery.

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The discussions have focused on a possible bill that could create at least 1 million new jobs.

The proposed jobs would be in areas not being sufficiently provided by current private or public sector investment, such as child care, education, health care, housing, transportation, infrastructure construction and repair, alternative energy and conservation, the arts, and summer jobs for youth. The committee is also considering the possibility that Congress might do away with the tax cuts for some corporations, in return for the tax credits that many corporations have taken their toll on the employed.

The committee has been very vocal about an indicator that will be a unique emblem of our work:

“Unemployment Barometer,” the full count of unemployment, underemployment and low wages that we post monthly on our Web site. Every month the coalition posts official unemployment and hidden unemployment, giving these figures by age, race and ethnicity and gender. The unemployment Barometer can be accessed easily on our Web site at www.njfac.org/jobnews.html.

The National Jobs Bill could Create At Least 1 Million Jobs

The NJFAC legislative committee is considering proposals to develop a national job creation program.

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The legislative committee has been very encouraged by recent statements by members of the Progressive Caucus of the U.S. Congress in support of public job creation. In his recent speech on the House floor, Rep. Barney Frank called for more public spending to assist state and local government with providing public services, including police, fire, housing development transportation, environmental restoration, and education. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. has proposed a constitutional amendment that would guarantee every American a right to a job, a living wage and economic security. Rep. Jan Schakowsky has proposed a bill to hire an additional 100,000 teachers in schools across America.

To help educate other members of Congress about the need for job creation, the NJFAC is preparing a packet of materials for several hundred senators and representatives that includes the coalition’s recent Special Reports, “Toward a Fair Economy: The Economic Context for 2004” and “The Permanent War Economy: Real Security or False Promise?”

Over the next few months, we will be completing our job creation plan and seeking support from members of Congress, labor unions, community groups, and religious organizations.

—Charles Bell

Charles Bell, programs director for National Jobs Union, is on the NJFAC executive committee.

If you are interested in participating in efforts to enact a major federal jobs bill, and have ideas or suggestions for this campaign, please contact Bell, chair of the NJFAC legislative committee, at 914-378-2507 or cbell@consumer.org.
World Unemployment Reaches New High

The economic slowdown has pushed worldwide unemployment to new heights. In a new study, “Global Economic Trends,” the International Labor Organization estimates that 180 million people were unemployed worldwide at the end of 2002—up 20 million since two years earlier.

Weak labor markets have also reversed reductions in “working poverty” achieved in the late 1990s. At the end of 2002, the number of workers living on $1 a day or less resumed its upward trend and returned to the 1998 level of 550 million, when 550 million of the world’s people live on $1 a day.

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The NJFAC affiliate is working with a coalition to advocate an increase in San Francisco’s minimum wage.

The NJFAC is looking for help with establishing informal jobs in search of work faced even more uncertainty because these jobs always lack unemployment benefits and social security coverage.

And the future doesn’t bode well. Greater unemployment and poverty will place severe pressure on government budgets, given the fragile financial situation of many countries, according to “Global Economic Trends.”

The ILO report recommends that policymakers focus on measures to restart economic growth that secure and spread recovery—and spawn the most decent work opportunities and reduce unemployment and poverty.

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Support the NJFAC with your volunteer time and tax-deductible donation.

The Bottom Line:

Nat Mills

women were denied assistance on the basis of thinly veiled racial criteria.”

To honor these lives, we resolve to continue to work for jobs for all at decent wages and for social justice.

connection to an expanding military budget. Yet that local government’s financial woes may partly stem from the combined impact of Washington’s growing military budget and cuts in domestic programs—and tax cuts, mainly for the rich. The negative impact of such layoffs also spills into the whole local economy, but this is even less likely to be recognized as fallout from increased military spending and the tax cuts.

4. But is that a realistic possibility?

5. How is an expanding military budget likely to affect different kinds of workers?

6. I’m not sure I understand. Could you give more details?

7. Does anyone at the local level see the connection?

8. But aren’t there some big winners?

9. How can I learn more about this?

Answer. Read “The Permanent War Economy: Real Security or False Promise” available from the National Jobs For All Coalition, 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 601, NY, NY 10115.

10. What can I do about it?

Answer. Lots. Spread the message by distributing this Quiz and “The Permanent War Economy” at public meetings, at churches and synagogues, to your legislators, opinion makers and friends. Write letters to your newspapers and op-eds based on it. Work with others to reverse these policies. Join and support the National Jobs For All Coalition. Work with us to promote policies that lead to jobs for all at livable wages, with good benefits, and that fund our national security needs, not the needs of defense contractors and their political cronies.

Coalition Mourns Loss of Friends

We report with sorrow the deaths of two advisory board members and a former executive committee member.

Winifred Bell was a social welfare expert. A long-time full employment advocate, she wrote in “Contemporary Social Welfare” (1982) that, “in the United States the war has been a much-maligned.” Yet few practical steps are taken to assure sufficient jobs for all people who wish to work. Nor are economic policies avoided because they will throw millions of people out of jobs.

Coalition chair Gertraud Schaffner Goldberg and executive committee member Sheila D. Collins note in “Washington’s New or Poor Law,” the significance of this moment in time full employment advocate, she wrote in “Contemporary Social Welfare” (1982) that, “in the United States the war has been a much-maligned.” Yet few practical steps are taken to assure sufficient jobs for all people who wish to work. Nor are economic policies avoided because they will throw millions of people out of jobs.

Jack Sheinkman, a giant in the labor movement, had a strong commitment to jobs for all at decent wages. A graduate of Cornell University and its law school, he began as a labor organizer. Later, as chairman of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, he negotiated its merger with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. As a result, the new, stronger union, now called UNITE, signed a contract with J.P. Stevens, a North Carolina-based textile company that had successfully fought unionization for two decades.

The ILE has, among other things, generated cutting edge research on living wage policies, health care access, paid family leave, immigration policy, global outsourcing and related issues. It also funds the UC Berkeley and UCLA Labor Centers, the latter headed by NJFAC advisory board member Kent Wong.

In December, the governor proposed that the current year ILE budget, which had been approved in August 2000 be cut and then eliminated entirely in the fiscal year that starts July 2004. Due to the outsourcing of support, the committees of the state legislators, the latter headed by NJFAC advisory board member Kent Wong. Upon joining the NJFAC advisory board, Wong said, “We need to organize together for jobs for all, for a living wage for all, and social and economic justice for all.” He added, “We need to recuit resources from war and the military and instead promote peace and economic sustainability.”
IBM, which once enjoyed a reputation Internet.

A living wage, Quigley, maintains, should be an anti-poverty read X-ray files transferred over the we have it.

—Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg

Many radiologists is expected to beshipped out to Asia at an accelerated paceas lower-paid workers there are used to

tutional amendment, he writes, would give us the will, and he citesnumerous practical proposals for carrying out the commitment once

the means of achieving full employment at living wages. The Consti-

tution's goal is the formidable task that confronts advocates of economic jus-

Fighting for the right of a job at a living wage to all who want to

work. The author argues forcefully that these two principles “must be

kept together, for the right to a job without a right to a living wage is just as

weak as the right to a living wage without a job.” Indeed, Quigley would agree with the position of the National Jobs for All Coalition that a job without a living wage is a form of underemployment.

Quigley’s strategy for obtaining the goals of jobs for all at full employment begins with a constitutional amendment. He mounts a great deal of evidence, historical and current—including a number of public opinion polls—to show that Americans of all political persuasions support this twin goal and that it is embedded in American thought. For example, he documents sources of support for a living wage for all workers: popular support, political and government support at the federal level, and local living wage laws.

At the same time, the book shows, we are not living up to those prin-
ciples. Indeed, a quote of Franklin D. Roosevelt, tells us how far our leaders have departed from a stated commitment to those principles: “No business which depends for its existence on paying less than

living wages to its workers has any right to continue its existence. By living wages I mean more than a bare subsistence level—I mean

what a decent family living can maintain. It means a living wage for a decent living.” (Address to Congress, May 24, 1937.)

A constitutional amendment would not immediately achieve living-wage goals for all, but it would elevate what Quigley considers an “accepted American principle” to “a protected right.”

A strength of Quigley’s work is its insistence that the twin goals of a living wage jobs for all are consonant with the American creed, that we would only be living up to our ideals if we assured this economic right to our people. I wish Quigley had tried to explain the paradox of a na-

tion that pledges allegiance to the work ethic but denies millions of its people the right to practice it. The right to a job at decent wages is in

line with the democratic values of our nation but not with powerful el-

ements of American capitalism. How to translate widespread agree-

ment that everyone should have a job at a living wage into a movement strong enough to overtake the economic elites who oppose this goal is the formidable task that confronts advocates of economic jus-

tice. Quigley pays generous tribute to the individuals and organiza-

tions, beginning with Tom Paine, who have advocated the idea of a

living-wage jobs for all, but it would elevate what Quigley considers an “accepted American principle” to “a protected right.” “Once we

amend the Constitution, we are under a serious duty to act.” Quigley agrees with those who hold that we lack the political will, rather than the means of achieving full employment at living wages. The Constitu-
tutional amendment, he says, would give the will, and he cites numerous practical goals for carrying out the amendment once we have it.

Creating Good Jobs

Ending Poverty as We Know It: Guaranteeing a Right to a Job at a Living Wage.


Bill Quigley’s goal of “Ending Poverty as We Know It” is a lot more noble than Bill Clinton’s goal of “ending welfare as we know it.” Quigley, a public interest lawyer and professor of law at Loyola University in New Orleans, wants to end poverty by guaranteeing the right to a job at a living wage to all who want to

work. The author argues forcefully that these two principles “must be

kept together, for the right to a job without a right to a living wage is just as weak as the right to a living wage without a job.” Indeed, Quigley would agree with the position of the National Jobs for All Coalition that a job without a living wage is a form of underemployment.

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