

# LETTERS

## Striking back against 'evil empire' about fighting for Coventry

To the Editor:

*The Coventry Courier* missed the most important point in their editorial, "Striking back against the 'evil' empire." The editors maintain that given Wal-Mart prices are so low, people need to shop there for budgetary reasons. Teachers, they maintain, make more than the average citizen in Coventry and can conveniently elect not to shop at Wal-Mart for political and social reasons. They go on to say that most people don't have the luxury of taking a stance against the corporate behemoth.

If the editors thought deeper and broader about the point they are making, perhaps they might realize the futility of their stance or logic. See, it's not only that Wal-Mart fails to pay most of its employees low wages with minimal benefits, it is that Wal-Mart is so large and so competitive it works to bring other non-Wal-Mart wages down as well. Most importantly, this trend works to pit worker against worker or citizen against citizen. As many lose their jobs or see their incomes fall, they begin to see other people who still have benefits and livable wages as the enemy. In this case, it's teachers that are vilified because they have healthcare, pensions, and a livable income.

Why is it so difficult to see the larger picture? In order to do this one needs to know that "wages and salaries now make up the lowest share of the nation's gross domestic product since the government began recording the data in 1947, while corporate profits have

climbed to their highest share since the 1960's." (NYTimes) In other words, money is being made, our GDP continues to grow, our businesses are profiting, we are the richest nation on earth, yet the majority of our citizens are not sharing in this wealth and prosperity.

The money instead is going to just a few. For example, "income for the top 1 percent skyrocketed 201 percent between 1979 and 2000. Meanwhile, income for the middle 20 percent rose only 15 percent and income for the bottom 20 percent rose only 9 percent." (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities) CEO pay is in the stratosphere while the majority's pay loses when inflation is factored in. Union labor, at its lowest membership in decades, is luckier given the power of collective bargaining in negotiating fair wages proportional to our prosperity. For the rest of the average citizens, it means decreasing or stagnant wages, no healthcare, or unemployment due to outsourcing.

The worst part of it is that it doesn't have to be like this. An Economic Policy Institute report stated that "Wal-Mart could raise wages and benefits significantly without raising prices, yet still earn a healthy profit." In fact, the authors found that "Wal-Mart could have raised the wages and benefits of each of its non-supervisory employees in 2005 by more than \$2,000 without raising prices a penny."

These workers, over 1.2 million, are parents and taxpayers in towns and cities across the country. If these people saw their incomes grow as productivity has

grown, they would make livable wages with real benefits. Wages now represent only a third of the growth in worker productivity (State of Working America). Instead, Wal-Mart gets away with paying low wages and convincing America that its low prices offset them. Low priced consumer goods, like TV's, clothing, food, etc. are convenient, but the price of healthcare, heating fuel, college education and housing continue to climb.

The bigger picture involves people realizing that ALL workers should be earning a living wage with benefits. If Wal-Mart and other corporations would pay its fair share of taxes and its fair share of its profits to the people who make its business successful in the first place, we wouldn't be having this argument. "A GAO report showed that 61 percent of US corporations paid no federal income taxes from 1996 through 2000, a period of rapid economic growth and rising corporate profits." (Los Angeles Times)

Wal-Mart's competitors wouldn't also be forced to cut their employees wages and benefits as well. Incomes could rise and represent a more equitable part of our nation's wealth. Scapegoating unionized workers would also be unnecessary because most people's incomes would reflect the wealth our country has generated over the past decades. Why is this so hard to understand?

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