

Editor's Page

And a Union Natasha Lewis

The first regular work I did for *Dissent* began in 2013 when I became editor of the new *Belabored* podcast. For our theme music we chose a song by workers involved with the Fight for \$15 in Chicago who rapped about their experience living on low wages. Back then, the minimum wage in Illinois was \$8.25 an hour.

Today, the music on *Belabored* is the same, the minimum wage in Chicago is \$14, set to increase to \$15 in July, and there's a dust up in Congress over how (or whether) to pass the same increase at the federal level. I feel very tense watching this policy come so close to becoming national only to hit obstacles. It's heartening to think about how far we've come; it's frustrating to remember that \$15 isn't, and was never, enough.

Average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Chicago is \$1,471, meaning that if minimum-wage workers were making \$15 and clocking up forty hours a week, they'd still be giving 60 percent of their wages straight to the landlord. If you're reading *Dissent*, I probably don't need to tell you that's bad.

The Chicago workers' original demand—\$15 *and a union*—recognized that \$15 wouldn't be sufficient. Recent reporting on the unionization effort at the Amazon plant in Bessemer, Alabama, shows the kind of urgent problems that aren't solved by a wage increase. And even if they got all their immediate wishes, many minimum-wage workers will still be giving too much for not enough dollars in return.

It's in moments like this, when even the best-case scenario on the table doesn't get us far enough, when socialist ideas are most important. Socialist thought acknowledges the importance of a change like this, while recognizing its limits. It provides an imaginative and moral horizon to look toward.

In this issue, Mark Levinson and Julia Ott co-edit a special section on the global economy, where we find even lower wages, more intractable problems, and institutional rot. But, as they remind us in their introduction, "the current rules and institutions are not unchangeable. The intellectual visions in this section offer alternatives for the waves of change when they come."

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