

Annual 40-Hour Fast
COMING TOGETHER
for the Common Good

Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State
 800 Troy-Schenectady Road
 Latham, NY 12110-2455

Excerpts from
The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker
 by Steven Greenhouse, 2008

"If wages had kept pace with productivity, the average full-time worker would be earning \$58,000 a year; \$36,000 was the average in 2007." (p. 5)

"More than one-fourth of the 45 million workers under age thirty-five do not have health insurance from any source..." (p. 267)

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Join us for the 14th Annual 40-Hour Fast...



A time of prayer and reflection, sacrifice and action for change.

Begins Wednesday, March 4, 2009 at 8 pm

Concludes Friday, March 6 at noon

The goals of the 2009 40-Hour FAST are threefold:

- To **SACRIFICE** from food so that moral and spiritual connections are deepened. The giving up of such a basic human need as food, if only for a few meals, can re-focus one's priorities on the importance of the common good of all.
- To **PRAY** for public officials as they make the difficult budgetary, policy and regulatory choices that every day affect lives.
- To **COMMUNICATE** with the public and co-workers and elected officials about why you are fasting and why you believe that the common good requires an end to wage theft, a shrinking of the wage gap and increased attention to "the least among us."

THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.

"Millions of workers in the U.S. suffer from **WAGE THEFT** – when they are not paid the wages they are legally owed. **WAGE THEFT** also occurs whenever a worker is paid below the minimum wage; does not receive time and a half for overtime work; has to work 'off the clock'; is misclassified as an 'independent contractor' so that he receives a lump sum without overtime pay or benefits; or when a worker is not paid at all." – Kim Bobo



Kim Bobo before Washington Committee 2008

Nationally, Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) has begun a Wage Theft Campaign. IWJ Executive Director Kim Bobo testified in the summer of 2008 at committee hearings in Washington on this issue. In November, her book *Wage Theft In America* was published. In New York State, Labor Commissioner Patricia Smith has significantly stepped up enforcement of wage and hour violations: for example, when employers have not paid workers for the total number of hours they have worked, or not paid for overtime. Enforcement of wage violations is especially important for minimum wage workers who earn \$7.15 an hour (\$14,872 a year before taxes) and depend upon every dollar to pay for food, clothing, shelter and transportation.

During the FAST this year, we ask all congregations to focus on the issue of "wage theft" in light of the seventh commandment.

More Excerpts from
THE BIG SQUEEZE: TOUGH TIMES FOR THE AMERICAN WORKER
 by Steven Greenhouse, 2008

"The typical CEO earns 369 times as much as the average worker, up from 131 times in 1993 and 36 times in 1976." (p. 41)

"Pfizer, the pharmaceutical company, promised its chief executive, Harry McKinnell, an annual pension of \$6.6 million, representing 100% of his annual salary and bonus, even though Pfizer's stock had plunged \$137 billion in value – 43% – during his tenure as CEO." (p. 285)

"In 1982, 84% of full-time workers in companies with more than one hundred workers had traditional pensions, which promise a monthly income stream for life after retirement. Today less than 33% do." (p. 276)

"...in the modern middle-class American household, both parents taken together work 540 more hours per year - 13.5 more weeks per year - than parents did a generation ago." (p. 192)

WHY FAST FOR 40 HOURS?

The number 40 has special significance in both religious and labor tradition. In religious history, the 40 days of Lent, the 40 days of rain in the Great Flood, and the Israelites' 40 years wandering in the wilderness are examples of this deeply symbolic number. The 40-hour work week, giving workers the weekend for family and rest, was won only after years of struggle and sacrifice by men and women in the labor movement.

HOW DO YOU FAST?

We invite you to not eat solid food for as much of the 40 hours as you can. This may mean fasting from sunrise to sunset on March 5th. It may mean fasting from one meal or two, or fasting from snacks between meals, or from desserts. While fasting from solid food, it is important to drink plenty of fluids.

WHAT CAN YOU DO WHILE FASTING?

- Go to www.iwj.org and learn more about the Wage Theft Campaign of Interfaith Worker Justice. Or, read the book by Kim Bobo: *Wage Theft in America – Why Millions of Working Americans are Not Getting Paid and What We Can Do About It*.
- Contact the governor and your senator and assembly-person, asking them to actively support passage of the "Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act." This law would reverse what editorial writers have called "New York's Harvest of Shame."
- Visit www.labor-religion.org; go the section on the FAST. There YOU can take action to help diminish wage theft in New York state for the sake of the common good.