



TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

OCTOBER 24 WWW.TIMEDAY.ORG

NEWSLETTER - September, October 2009

Once our personal connection to what is wrong becomes clear, then we have to choose: we can go on as before, recognizing our dishonesty and living with it the best we can, or we can begin the effort to change the way we think and live.

Wendell Berry

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Letter from the Executive Director - John de Graaf

It's nice to be able to announce some good news! Our recent call to help save Take Back Your Time has resulted in about \$4,000 in donations from members—enough to get us back on track and moving forward again! Thank you so very much to all of you who contributed! I know times are very hard out there. It's my hope that soon we'll be able to have available on the Web many of the presentations from the recent National Vacation Matters Summit.

Our board of directors met at the Vacation Summit and we are in the middle of merger discussions with an organization that we have worked with in the past and whose work has been very inspiring to us, the Center for a New American Dream (www.newdream.org). If these discussions end up in agreement, as we feel confident they will, Take Back Your Time would become a project of the Center, which is based in Takoma Park, Maryland. We would have a project officer in the DC area and I would remain as a consultant based in Seattle. Our board would continue in its advisory role and our reach would be greatly expanded. We would no longer be a project of the Center for Transformative Action at Cornell University. This will be a parting tinged with sadness as our non-profit sponsor at Cornell has been a wonderful organization to work with these past seven years. We can't thank its Executive Director Anke Wessels and financial officer Richard Landsdowne enough for their consistently wonderful support. Over the years we have had suggestions we

could be more effective as part of an organization like the Center for a New American Dream, with both an excellent staff and Web presence and a Washington DC presence. We hope to formalize an agreement with the Center sometime before the end of this year.

AN ALLY IN SARKOZY?

While this has been a hard time financially for TAKE BACK YOUR TIME, our ideas in many ways are more recognized than ever before. Just two days ago, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, who, less than two years ago was extolling the American model of (over)work and trying to end France's 35-hour work week, announced his plans to begin measuring French economic success using broader indicators than Gross National Product, including leisure time. Sarkozy said the new worldwide recession should lead us to question old economic models. "The crisis doesn't only make us free to imagine other models, another future, another world; it obliges us to do so," he said. You can read the full story at:

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jexJ6rodmKtChDY8J8j0j7vmnJIQD9AN6KO02>

HEALTH AND THE RECESSION

Some other interesting findings that bolster TAKE BACK YOUR TIME's analysis: Contrary to popular expectations, **the current recession is actually improving American health.** Dr. Christopher Ruhm of the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, estimates that for every one percent increase in unemployment over the past two years, we've seen a one-half percent decrease in the death rate. Among the reasons for this: although there is an increase in suicides, depression and alcoholism among some who lose their jobs, others use the time to change their lifestyles with more exercise, etc; among those who have kept their jobs, work hours and overtime are at their lowest levels for many years and this has given people more time to exercise, spend time with friends and family, eat at home instead of on the run; driving is down and the accident death rate is down; less driving and factory production means lower air pollution and fewer asthma deaths, etc.

Now, of course, we want to reduce unemployment and give people a chance to earn their livelihoods, but we don't want to lose the gains we're making with health. And the way to do both is to share work—more on a good way to do that later in this newsletter. We've got to rethink things and TAKE BACK YOUR TIME has some good ideas about that. What we've said about overwork and health is being shown conclusively.

JESSICA CASSIDY WINS AMERICAN BEAUTIES 30S COMPETITION

I'm delighted to report that Mrs. California 30s, Jessica Cassidy, who wrote a wonderful article in our October, 2008 newsletter has been crowned the national America Beauties 30s Queen at the recent American beauties pageant in Myrtle Beach, California. I'm hoping Jessica will write us a piece about the experience for our next newsletter. She has been a strong supporter of Take Back Your Time and the American Cancer Society and is using her fame as a forum to speak out on the importance of family and family time. We are so honored to have her as a member and supporter. You can read about her success at the pageant at:

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/articles/0px-13973-style-font.html>

MY UPCOMING SPEAKING SCHEDULE

I'll be doing a lot of speaking this fall and winter. Here is the agenda so far. If you're in any of these areas, I'd love to meet you.

October 7: Holyoke Community College, Massachusetts and the University of Massachusetts

October 8: Jamaica Plain, Mass.

October 12: Gustavus Adolphus College, Minnesota

October 18: The Bioneers Conference, San Rafael, CA. This is a fabulous conference and runs this year

from October 16-18. For information see: www.bioneers.org/conference.

My session is described at: <http://www.bioneers.org/conference/sessions-events/when-less-is-more-rethinking-our-relationships-to-time-and-money>

October 23: San Jose State University Take Back Your Time event

November 20-22: 5th International Gross National Happiness Conference, Iguassu Falls, Brazil

February 8-9, 2010: University of Georgia

Feb. 10: Georgia Tech

We'll be happy to list events and speakers (including yours, if you're a speaker) relating to TAKE BACK YOUR TIME issues in our next issue. Just send the information to me:

jodg@comcast.net.

Leisurely yours,

John

Letter from the Editor - Kelley Smith

Is there anything wrong with the employment picture in your community? Probably not, but I just thought I would ask! So, let me tell you about Oklahoma City. There are people who need jobs who can't find them, people who have jobs and are afraid they will lose them, and people who are underemployed. People who have jobs are afraid not to volunteer for ever-more overtime, fearing that if there is a layoff, they will be targeted unless they are seen as a good "team player." Some people who have jobs are afraid of an impending layoff, and are thus spending weekends trying to line up after-hours work or to start small consulting businesses. And people who are unemployed are spending lots of time looking for work, but sometimes thinking they would be better off staying home and planting a vegetable garden.

So, what can we do? Taking a cue from Wendell Berry, if we recognize something is wrong, and we know no one is going to solve the problem for us, can we find something to do to "begin an effort to change the way we think and live"?

Here's a suggestion. Think about Take Back Your Time Day. Could you or a group of friends organize something in your community? Read on for more ideas.

Vacation Summit Report

Despite less than expected turnout, first-ever National Vacation Matters Summit at Seattle University was a great event, with attendees rating it an average of 9 on a scale of 1-10 (the lowest score was a 7 and there were a few 10 plusses). Some 50 experts from the fields of medicine, psychology, business, labor, recreation, environmental sciences, and family studies (and representing the U.S., Canada and Taiwan) joined a group of activists at Seattle University to try to lay the groundwork for a campaign for more vacation time. Their message was resoundingly clear: vacations are not an idle luxury. They're a crucial ingredient in creating a healthy, civically engaged, and environmentally responsible society. Many of their reports will appear soon on our Web site: www.right2vacation.org.

GREAT NEWS STORY ON THE SUMMIT BY CARISSA BLUESTONE

Carissa Bluestone covered the Summit for the respected environmental Web site, Worldchanging. You can read her in-depth report at: <http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/010343.html>

Richard Seven of The Seattle Times did an in-depth pre-Summit article:

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2009626067_nwvacations09m.html

Thanks to our corporate sponsors for the Summit—Norwegian Cruise Lines (www.ncl.com), Experience Life Magazine (<http://www.experienclifemag.com>) and the American Resort Development Association (www.arda.org). ARDA was also a partner with Take Back Your Time with its “vacation better” (www.vacationbetter.com) Web site. Thanks also to Seattle University for providing wonderful facilities and accommodations at truly affordable prices. Seattle University is a great place for a conference! Thanks also to Paige Pauli for designing our program guide. **And to Take Back Your Time board member for copies of her great book, WORKING TOO MUCH CAN MAKE YOU GRUMPY (Mancini Clintock Press) as gifts to the speakers!**

Vacations do matter, conference speakers confirmed, especially for health. Sarah Speck, a cardiologist at Seattle’s Swedish hospital, scared everyone at the conference with a graphic look at the impact of stress, and especially workplace stress, on heart health, concluding that such stress is “the new tobacco,” and that vacations are an important way to reduce stress and burnout. Dr. Arnold Pally, a family physician from New Jersey, confirmed Dr. Speck’s findings, saying that many of the health problems his patients suffer from stem from lack of vacation time. “Take two weeks and call me in the morning,” he tells them.

Former National Park Service Director Fran Mainella provided an inspirational keynote encouraging attendees to keep up the good fight for vacation time and for access to recreation areas and parks. She urged everyone to watch the new Ken Burns PBS series on our national parks: THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA’S BEST IDEA, premiering September 27th. See www.pbs.org for listings.

Attendees watched a video by Representative Alan Grayson of Orlando, Florida, who introduced the Paid Vacation Act of 2009, the first effort to pass a vacation law in the United States since 1936. “When people tell me they oppose such a law, I ask them if they get vacations,” Grayson told participants, “and every single one of them has said, ‘Yes.’ They want vacations for themselves but not for others.” John de Graaf’s report from the Summit can be found at: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/living/no-vacation-nation>

Thanks to all our speakers and attendees!

Take Back Your Time Day, 2009

Thanks to a suggestion from Take Back Your Time board member Greg Wright we have a theme for Take Back Your Time Day, 2009—‘Chill Out!’ This October 24th, on TAKE BACK YOUR TIME DAY, mobilizations will take place around the world calling for action to combat climate change. The brainchild of author and activist Bill McKibben, the event is called “350” (see www.350.org). The idea is to get carbon dioxide in the atmosphere below 350 parts per million, the level considered safe for humanity (the current level is 385). While we did not organize this effort, we encourage all our members to take part in these activities, which are essential to leave a habitable world to our children and theirs.

Bill McKibben agrees that overwork and over-consumption play an important role in global warming and that efforts like Take Back Your Time’s are not only important for health and happiness, they can also lead to a cooler planet. Hence our theme: Chill Out. By chilling out and working less, we can help chill the planet out as well. We encourage you to bring this message to your local 350 events, write about it in local papers, and seek media interest. Excellent data to back our contention can be found in the report, ARE SHORTER WORK HOURS GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT? (http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/energy_2006_12.pdf) from the Center for Economic and Policy Studies.

Consider a combined TAKE BACK YOUR TIME/350 event in your town. Support 350, and if you have a little extra energy organize a TAKE BACK YOUR TIME event in your community earlier in the week and promote our Chill Out theme. If you do plan an event, let us know asap and we’ll put all of the events out in

a mailing the week before Take Back Your Time Day! Do you part, for your health, happiness and the planet!

Current Vacation Bill Status

HR 2564, Congressman Grayson's Paid Vacation Act of 2009 is in committee and needs your support. For Take Back Your Time Day, considering writing letters to your Senators and Congresspeople supporting the bill. It's a modest piece of legislation but an important first step. Currently, believe it or not, only the Guyanas, Nepal, the United States and that paragon of human rights, Myanmar (Burma) have no law mandating paid vacations for workers.

The Work Sharing Bill in Congress: Jack Reed's Bill

While we've emphasized the vacation issue over the past two years, Take Back Your Time supports all efforts to provide more work-life balance for Americans. One great idea is gaining traction all over Europe and now has a sponsor in the United States. In German, the idea is called Kurzarbeit, or short work. It allows companies that reduce employees working hours rather than doing layoffs to keep their employees while the government, using unemployment insurance, helps the workers maintain at least part of their lost salaries. We could do that here by providing federal stimulus dollars to states to use as partial unemployment funds for workers whose hours have been cut. The New York Times explains how it can be done:

"States have different unemployment insurance formulas, but generally, a worker being paid \$600 a week, if laid off, might receive \$300 in jobless benefits. With work-sharing, if that worker's hours drop 20 percent, wages would fall to \$480 and work-sharing would make up at least half of the lost wages (\$60), for a total of \$540 a week. With savings from reduced income taxes and from commuting fewer days, some workers nearly break even."

Economist Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research has proposed using some of the next round of stimulus funds—assuming there is another round—for such a purpose, and to give workers more vacation time, etc. Now, Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island has sponsored legislation in the Senate that would get this idea moving:

<http://reed.senate.gov/newsroom/details.cfm?id=315916>

Let your Senators and Representative know you favor ideas like this one!

Fundraising Report

After our successful fund raising appeal, which raised \$4,000 of our \$10,000 target, Take Back Your Time is currently roughly \$3,400 in the black. Much of these funds will be needed to update our Web site, add materials from the Summit and continue to communicate effectively with our members regarding our possible transition and various plans for Take Back Your Time Day. As you know, we are almost totally dependent on our members for funding. We want to say an extra thank you to all of you who gave to our recent appeal and to encourage other of you to add your support by going to:



Or sending a check made out to CRESP/TAKE BACK YOUR TIME to:

Take Back Your Time
PO Box 19862
Seattle, WA 98109

Take Back Your Time in the News

We've had quite a bit of news coverage lately. Not all of it positive as you can see by the final story here.

[MORE VACATION TIME MEANS BETTER HEALTH, PRODUCTIVITY](#)

Scarlet Scuttlebutt - Sep 12, 2009

[MANY WORKERS SKIMP ON VACATIONS -- AND PAY THE COSTS](#)

New York Post - [Brian Moore](#) - Sep 5, 2009

Great health information in this piece—thanks, Brian Moore!

[TRAVEL MATTERS: PAID VACATION LAW & SUSTAINABLE TOURISM](#)

WorldChanging - USA

[DO AMERICANS WORK HARD ENOUGH?](#)

Northwest Cable News - [John Sharify](#) - Sep 7, 2009

[A PRESCRIPTION FOR GOOD HEALTH: "TAKE TWO WEEKS AND CALL ME IN THE .](#)

Emediawire (press release) - Sep 1, 2009

[SOME FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO PARTY, OTHERS FOR THE RIGHT TO WORK](#)

Modesto Bee - [Ruben Navarrette Jr](#) - Sep 7, 2009

We would quarrel with Mr. Navarrette that our goal is the right to party. We want the right to balance, health and the work that could be provided for everyone if we had more work sharing and vacation time. Some people just don't get it.

Here's a radio story:

[HERE ON EARTH: RADIO WITHOUT BORDERS](#)

Take Back Your Time JUNE 4, 2009 THURSDAY AT 3PM CT. FROM WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO

Your letters

From West Virginia:

I was born and raised in Holland and lived in Belgium for a while too. In Holland people have an average of 23 days of paid vacation plus holidays; in Belgium it is about the same. But I worked at a bank and as with the government jobs, banks often give more days. I had 32 days of paid vacation plus holidays (10). Also, we had to work about 7 hours a day (full-time job is 38 hours at the banks, in Holland even 36) and I could work up to an hour longer every day. That hour would be saved and if I did that 7 times, I saved an extra day off!

They had a limit to the days you could take off like that a year, but if you had reached that, you could still save half days off like that, or just leave an hour early the next day. Now THAT is what I call good balance between work and private life!

From Washington State:

I can't believe what I'm hearing?? I'm from Europe, and I had 32 days vacation every year! I do think America is a great country, but this is just UNhealthy! I can't believe that people call this freedom... It has been proven that people, who have more vacation every year, work harder when they're at work!

From Washington State:

I grew up in Belgium. It was absolutely normal to take 30 days off every year. It is only when we moved here that vacations seemed to be such a big deal. As it is, Americans seem wary of leaving the country for any reason. On top of that, they are discouraged by this perceived taboo of taking a vacation, as if it's a sign of laziness, not being outgoing or "goal-oriented". People forget that we are here to enjoy life, not to make more money for these companies

From California:

I can't remember the last time I took a vacation ... I get 5 days paid vacation after working for one year. I end up using these days to get a long weekend, go to a wedding or day event I have to use them as single days, I have to be at my company for three years before I get more than that. I deserve a vacation.

From Pennsylvania:

We were the only people, since our early-married life, who ALWAYS took a family vacation. Our peers couldn't understand where we found the time and money. Simple—we didn't have all the expensive stuff they had. We didn't spend a month's salary on custom drapes.