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NEWS CLIPS

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What Mitt Romney Really Represents

By Robert Reich

September 22, 2012

It's not just his giant income or the low tax rates he pays on it. And it's not just the videotape of him berating almost half of America, or his endless gaffes, or his regressive budget policies.

It's something that unites all of this, and connects it to the biggest underlying problem America faces — the unprecedented concentration of wealth and power at the very top that's undermining our economy and destroying our democracy.

Romney just released his 2011 tax returns, showing he paid \$1.9 million in taxes on more than \$13 million of income last year — for an effective tax rate of 14.1 percent. (He released his 2010 return in January, showing he paid an effective tax rate of 13.9 percent.)

America has had hugely wealthy presidents before — think of Teddy Roosevelt and his distant cousin, Franklin D. Roosevelt; or John F. Kennedy, beneficiary of father Joe's fortune.

But here's the difference. These men were champions of the working class and the poor, and were considered traitors to their own class. Teddy Roosevelt railed against the “malefactors of great wealth,” and he busted up the oil and railroad trusts.

FDR thundered against the “economic royalists,” raised taxes on the wealthy, and gave average working people the right to form unions — along with Social Security, unemployment insurance, a minimum wage, and a 40-hour workweek.

But Mitt Romney is not a traitor to his class. He is a sponsor of his class. He wants to cut their taxes by \$3.7 trillion over the next decade, and hasn't even specified what “loopholes” he'd close to make up for this gigantic giveaway.

And he wants to cut benefits that almost everyone else relies on — Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, food stamps, unemployment insurance, and housing assistance.

He's even a warrior for his class, telling his wealthy followers his job isn't to worry about the “47 percent” of Americans who won't vote for him, whom he calls “victims” and he berates for not paying federal incomes taxes and taking federal handouts.

(He mangles these facts, of course. Almost all working Americans pay federal taxes — and the federal taxes that have been rising fastest for most people are Social Security payroll taxes, which aren't collected on a penny of income over \$110,100. Moreover, most of the “47 percent” whom he accuses of taking handouts are on Medicare or Social Security — the biggest “entitlement” programs — which, not incidentally, they paid into during their working lives.)

Money means power. Concentrated wealth at the top means extraordinary power at the top. The reason Romney pays a rate of only 14 percent on \$13 million of income in 2011 — a lower rate than many in the middle class — is because he exploits a loophole that allows private equity managers to treat their income as capital gains, taxed at only 15 percent.

And that loophole exists solely because private equity and hedge fund managers have so much political clout — as a result of their huge fortunes and the money they've donated to political candidates — that neither party will remove it.

In other words, everything America is learning about Mitt Romney — his tax returns, his years at Bain Capital, the video of his speech to high-end donors in which he belittles half of America, his gaffes, the budget policies he promotes — repeat and reenforce the same underlying reality.

So much wealth and power have accumulated at the top of America that our economy and our democracy are seriously threatened. Romney not only represents this problem. He is the living embodiment of it.

9/24/2012 9:30:00 AM

USDOT awards funds to improve Amtrak, freight line in North Carolina

On Friday, the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#) (USDOT) awarded \$26.5 million to the [North Carolina Department of Transportation](#) to improve reliability and reduce delays on lines impacting Amtrak service in eastern North Carolina.

The improvements are targeted at infrastructure between Rocky Mount, N.C., and Petersburg, Va., which will impact service for the [Amtrak Carolinian](#) line that operates New York City and Charlotte, N.C., as well as long distance trains that run between New York City and Florida.

The project will include installation of new track and ties, crossovers and signals to alleviate rail congestion in the area, and allow freight- and passenger-rail traffic to move more “fluidly,” USDOT officials said in a prepared statement. The line connects with the future Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor in Petersburg and Raleigh, where trains are expected to travel at 110 mph in the future.

"This project will not only bring jobs to the region, but will also reduce delays between New York, Washington, Raleigh, and Charlotte by eliminating existing choke points," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood.

We've Seen This Dog and Pony Show Before; Stop the Assault on Amtrak

September 24, 2012

Rep. John Mica (R-FL) continued his ["holy jihad"](#) against Amtrak, its 30 million riders and thousands of employees last week by holding his 10th hearing in the 112th Congress demonizing Amtrak.

The last three by the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee focused on what Mica thinks is wasteful Amtrak spending. Speaking of waste, let me point out that the committee has spent more than 20 hours in hearings – paid for by taxpayers – to make this case.

At this point, nobody should be surprised that the chairman, wielding the gavel for Speaker John Boehner and GOP Leader Eric Cantor, is again demonizing a publicly supported company that provides good jobs for thousands, and safe, reliable transportation for millions. The only subsidy this Leadership seems to embrace is a tax code that coddles millionaires and oil companies.

Remember, the head of the Republican Party today, Gov. Mitt Romney, is no supporter of modernizing our transportation system. He says we should slash all federal transportation investments by nearly half. And, as we've seen and heard in a new [video](#), he believes that 47% of Americans are freeloaders who sit around waiting for government assistance. So the Mica hearings are an extension of the Romney [vision](#) for our transportation system.

Gov. Romney and his running mate, Rep. Paul Ryan, have advocated on numerous occasions ending public [funding for Amtrak](#). They even support raising the retirement age for workers under the Railroad Retirement system. Across the board, they want to cut vital transportation infrastructure investments — and the jobs they create — because they deem tax cuts for billionaires to be a better use of government resources.

Thankfully, Romney is, in his own words, currently unemployed. But the man who sits in the Oval Office today understands the value of America's railroads and almost 1 million working and retired employees. President Barack Obama has invested tens of billions of dollars into Amtrak and high-speed rail projects throughout the country, and proposed hundreds of billions of dollars toward rebuilding our infrastructure as a whole. The benefits of these projects are two-fold: they put Americans back to work, and they

build transportation systems built to last. And thanks to Obama [Buy America](#) policy, they further boost the transportation manufacturing revival started on his watch.

Clearly Romney and Ryan do not understand the value of these investments, they don't care, or both. They have demonstrated a complete [misunderstanding](#) of the role of our transportation system in the broader economy. Mica's public statements suggest he wants to build up our transportation system. I just can't figure out how you expand passenger rail by killing Amtrak. As I've [said](#) in front of his committee (yes, I've testified on this subject 4 times since last March) this is "addition by subtraction."

Enough already – we've seen this movie and each sequel is worse than the previous one.

The 'Self-Made' Myth and our Hallucinating Rich

By Sam Pizzigati

September 24, 2012

Let's cut Mitt Romney some slack. Not every off-the-cuff comment the GOP White House hopeful made at that now infamous, secretly taped \$50,000-a-plate fundraiser last May in Boca Raton reveals an utterly shocking personal failing. Take, for instance, Mitt's remark that [he has](#) "inherited nothing."

A variety of commentators [have jumped](#) on Romney for that line. They've pointed out that Mitt, the son of a wealthy corporate CEO, has enjoyed plenty of privilege, everything from an elite private school education to a rolodex full of rich family friends he could tap to start up his business career.

On top of all that, the young Mitt also enjoyed \$1 million worth of stock his father [threw his way](#) to tide him over until big paydays started arriving.

Not quite "nothing." But no reason to pick on Mitt either. Most really deep pockets, not just Mitt, consider themselves entirely "self-made." The best evidence of this predilection to claim "self-made" status? The annual September release of the *Forbes* magazine list of America's 400 richest.

Each and every year *Forbes* celebrates the billionaires who populate this list as paragons of entrepreneurial get-up-and-go. The latest top 400, *Forbes* [pronounced](#) last week, "instills confidence that the American dream is still very much alive."

Of America's current 400 richest, [gushes](#) *Forbes*, 70 percent "made their fortunes entirely from scratch."

Forbes made the same observation last year, too, and most news outlets took that claim at face value. Researchers at United for a Fair Economy, a Boston-based group, did not. UFE analysts stepped back and took the time to investigate the actual backgrounds of last year's *Forbes* 400. They released their findings last week, on the same day *Forbes* released its new 2012 top 400 list.

The basic conclusion from these findings: *Forbes* is spinning “a misleading tale of what it takes to become wealthy in America.” Most of the *Forbes* 400 have benefited from a level of privilege unknown to the vast majority of Americans.

In effect, as commentator Jim Hightower has aptly been noting for years, most of our super rich were born on third base and think they hit a triple.

In its just-released [new report](#), United for a Fair Economy extends this baseball analogy to last year's *Forbes* 400. UFE defines as “born in the batter's box” those *Forbes* 400 rich who hail from poor to middle-class circumstances. Some had nothing growing up. Others had parents who ran small businesses.

About 95 percent of Americans, overall, currently live in these “batter's box” situations. Just over a third, 35 percent, of the *Forbes* 400 come from these backgrounds.

Just over 3 percent of the *Forbes* 400, the United for a Fair Economy researchers found, have left no good paper trail on their actual economic backgrounds. Of the over 60 percent remaining, all grew up in substantial privilege.

Those “born on first base” — in upper-class families, with inheritances up to \$1 million — make up 22 percent of the 400. On “second base,” households wealthy enough to run a business big enough to generate inheritances over \$1 million, the new UFE study found another 11.5 percent.

On “third base,” with inherited wealth over \$50 million, sit 7 percent of America's 400 richest. Last but not least, the “born on home plate” crowd. These high-rollers, 21.25 percent of the total *Forbes* list, all inherited enough to “earn” their way into top 400 status.

Last year, a rich American had to be worth at least \$1.05 billion to make the *Forbes* 400. This year's entry threshold: \$1.1 billion, the highest ever.

***Forbes*, the United for a Fair Economy** researchers sum up, has glamorized the myth of the “self-made man” and minimized “the many other factors that enable wealth,” most notably the tax breaks and other government policies that help the really rich get ever richer.

The narrative of wealth and achievement that *Forbes* is pushing, the new UFE study adds, “ignores the other side of the coin — namely, that the opportunity to build wealth is not equally or broadly shared in contemporary society.”

And many of those who do have that opportunity — like the mega millionaires in Boca Raton who applauded so warmly when Mitt Romney asserted he had “inherited nothing” — see absolutely no reason to turn that coin over.

9/25/2012 11:00:00 AM

UTU, BLET advance agreements

[United Transportation Union \(UTU\)](#)-represented yardmasters employed by [CN](#)'s Illinois Central Railroad recently ratified their first collective bargaining agreement, the union announced.

The four-year pact, which was reached following assistance from the National Mediation Board, provides hourly wage increases, coverage under the UTU's national health care plan, a signing bonus and wage parity for all yardmasters, UTU officials said in the announcement.

Meanwhile, the [Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen \(BLET\)](#) reached a tentative contract agreement with the [Missouri & Northern Arkansas Railroad \(M&NA\)](#). The union recently sent affected members a ratification ballot, which must be returned by Oct. 22.

The tentative agreement governs rates of pay and work rules for 90 BLET members in the various crafts, including locomotive engineers, conductors, and trainees in train and engine service.

Owned by RailAmerica Inc., M&NA operates 594 miles of track in Arkansas, Kansas and Missouri, and interchanges with BNSF Railway Co., Kansas City Southern and Union Pacific Railroad.

9/25/2012 11:30:00 AM

Amtrak testing trains at 165 mph in Northeast Corridor

Starting last night and during the rest of the week, [Amtrak](#) will operate high-speed test trains at 165 mph in four areas covering 100 miles of the Northeast Corridor.

The tests will use high-speed Acela Express equipment and measure interaction between the train and track, rider quality and other safety factors, Amtrak officials said in a prepared statement.

The faster trains will be tested along the following sections of track: 21.3 miles between Perryville, Md., and Wilmington, Del.; 22.9 miles between Trenton and New Brunswick, N.J.; 29.2 miles between Westerly and Cranston, R.I.; and 27.8 miles between South Attleboro and Readville, Mass. Amtrak is considering operating trains at up to 160 mph along those segments.

The initial test run is in New Jersey, where Amtrak is working on design, engineering and other pre-construction activities for a \$450 million project that's being funded by the federal high-speed rail program.

That project includes upgrading track, electrical power, signal systems and overhead catenary wires to improve reliability for Amtrak and commuter-rail service, and is necessary to enable permanent train operations at higher speeds.

Thank You, Millions Of Anonymous Chinese Workers Making \$2 An Hour

We Love Our iPhone 5s!

By [Henry Blodget](#) | [Daily Ticker](#)

Apple reported on Monday that it sold 5 million iPhone 5 devices in just 3 days since the product's launch -- a new record for the tech giant but also 3 million short of most Wall Street estimates. A good percentage of those phones are made by Chinese workers at Taiwan-based Foxconn Technology Group's plants.

Millions of these phones are now in the hands of rich consumers in the 7 lucky countries that got the iPhones first.

And, for the most part, these customers love them.

As well they should!

Because, relative to what we all carried around as recently as 6 years ago, the iPhone 5 is nothing short of a miracle.

So, it's time to send a thank-you note to the folks who made our iPhones.

Apple and its shareholders have been thanked already, billions of times over, and they'll get thanked even more in the months ahead. The iPhone is the most profitable product in history. And it has made Apple the most valuable company in the world.

It's time to say thank you to the people who actually made the iPhones--as in, put them together.

In other words, the millions of Chinese workers who have worked feverishly to assemble millions of iPhones part-by-part over the past few months.

Assembling iPhones isn't exactly a high-glamour job. In fact, it's an exhausting, backbreaking, and mind-numbingly tedious job. And, unfortunately, making iPhones is

not a job that pays enough to enable the folks who make the iPhones to actually buy an iPhone. (Even a crappy old iPhone 4 would be way out of reach for the people who make them, because it's ~\$400 without a contract).

Monday morning Foxconn was forced to close its Taiyuan plant in China after a riot broke out at one of its worker dormitories according to news reports. Foxconn employees make Apple devices in addition to other products by Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard. At least 2,000 workers were involved in the brawl that supposedly broke windows at the factory and forced paramilitary police trucks to patrol the area.

So, on behalf of the millions of us who just got our new iPhones, here's a big 'thank you' to the millions of people who made them.

"THANK YOU!"

By the way, if you don't believe that making iPhones is a tough, thankless job, read the description below, from someone who briefly helped make your iPhone.

A reporter for a Shanghai newspaper spent a week working in a Foxconn factory helping to build iPhone 5s.

He described the working and living conditions as a "nightmare," and he couldn't quit soon enough.

The reporter's story was translated by MicGadget, and you can read the whole thing here. We've also written a summary here.

The report doesn't reveal anything horrific or shocking, but unlike many Foxconn stories, it really makes you understand how godawfully boring, difficult, tedious, and physically strenuous the work is, especially when you remember that it pays only \$2 an hour.

Yes, hundreds of thousands of people line up for Foxconn jobs. And, yes, these jobs are said to be better than working in rice paddies.

But here's a taste of what it's like:

We have reached the entrance of the production floor with a warning sign that says: "TOP SECURITY AREA". We are told that if anyone enter or exit the metal detector door and found carrying any metallic stuff on your body such as belt buckle, ear rings, cameras, handset, mp3 players, the alarm will sound and you will be fired on the spot. One of my room mate told me that his friend has been fired because he carried an USB charging cable. When I walked into the production floor after passing through the metal detector door, I heard loud sounds of machinery engines and a very dense of plastic smell. Our supervisor warned us: "Once you sit down, you only do what you are told". The supervisor finally present us the back of the iPhone 5 and shows it to all of us and

said: "This is the new unleashed iPhone 5 back plate, you should be honored having the chance to produce it"

Our line is being assigned to use masking tapes and plastic stoppers to cover up the earphone jack and the connector ports of the back plate in order to prevent the paint from being sprayed onto it on the next process. Our supervisor asked us to put on our mask and gloves and see how the seniors work on it. At 11 p.m, we went for a supper and after midnight, we started work again. I'm being assigned to mark placement points on the iPhone 5 back-plate using an oil-based paint pen. I'm being scolded many times for spilling too much oil on the markings. My roommate has being assigned to paste the masking tapes of not more than 5mm wide on the right spots that I have marked. And he has being scolded many times for pasting them too slow. Our supervisor said that these works were actually being assigned to females workers with nimber fingers, but due to too many workers have resigned lately they have no choice but to assign these jobs to male workers.

An iPhone 5 back-plate run through in front of me almost every 3 seconds. I have to pickup the back-plate and marked 4 position points using the oil-based paint pen and put it back on the running belt swiftly within 3 seconds with no errors. After such repeat action for several hours, I have terrible neckache and muscle pain on my arm. A new worker who sat opposite of me gone exhausted and laid down for a short while. The supervisor has noticed him and punished him by asking him to stand at one corner for 10 minutes like the old school days. We worked non-stop from midnight to the next morning 6 a.m but were still asked to keep on working as the production line is based on running belt and no one is allowed to stop. I'm so starving and fully exhausted.

By my own calculations, I have to mark five iPhone plates every minute, at least. For every 10 hours, I have to accomplish 3,000 iPhone 5 back plates. There are total 4 production lines in charge of this process, 12 workers in every line. Each line can produce 36,000 iPhone 5 back plates in half a day, this is scary ... I finally stopped working at 7 a.m. We were asked to gather again after work. The supervisor shout out loud in front of us: "Who wants to rest early at 5 a.m !? We are all here to earn money ! Let's work harder !" I was thinking who on earth wants to work two extra hours overtime for only mere 27 yuan (USD\$4) !?

9/26/2012 12:30:00 PM

Arizona land department issues study on proposed UP yard site

On Monday, the [Arizona State Land Department](#) (ASLD) released a study on [Union Pacific Railroad](#)'s proposal to purchase about 1,873 acres along Interstate 10 in the Red Rock area of

Pinal County as a site for a classification yard.

The ASLD is processing UP's application and has yet to make a final decision on the appropriate size and shape of the proposed parcel. Conducted by RBF Consulting, the planning and engineering study evaluated a technical report authored by URS Corp. for UP last year, and issued recommendations to facilitate discussions between the county, railroad and state.

The study also identified issues and potential costs associated with infrastructure — such as streets, interchanges and utilities — should the land sale move forward.

Amtrak aims to bolster its aging infrastructure to accommodate mounting ridership despite funding limitations, says Boardman

[Amtrak](#)

By Jeff Stagl, Managing Editor

The nation needs a balanced transportation system, one that places infrastructure investments for rail and bus systems on equal footing with dollars spent on highways and airports. If such a balance was achieved, [Amtrak](#) could realize its opportunities to expand capacity and bolster operations to better accommodate growing ridership, which has reached record levels the past 11 months.

That was the crux of Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer Joseph Boardman's keynote address on Sept. 18 in Chicago during the chairman's luncheon at the [American Railway Engineering and Maintenance-of-Way Association's](#) annual conference and exposition. Amtrak has major plans in the works to expand capacity, improve infrastructure and realign routes — such as a Northeast Corridor (NEC) master plan and a "NextGen" high-speed rail initiative — but there are limits on what the national intercity passenger railroad can do with its old infrastructure and constrained budget, said Boardman.

"Amtrak has nearly every obstacle to growth: aging rolling stock, reliability challenges and run-down stations that are at or past capacity," he said.

Boardman also identified funding, environmental clearance and "coalition building" as major challenges that would need to be overcome in order for the railroad to fulfill its growth plans.

"Lack of investment really is the culprit," he said.

Despite the roadblocks, Amtrak is doing what it can to bolster infrastructure, especially along the NEC, which has "alignment and age issues," said Boardman. For example the railroad continues to replace the 105-year-old Niantic River Bridge

in East Lyme, Conn., a \$140 million project that's slated for completion in mid-2013, as part of an NEC upgrade program.

A tight squeeze

Studies suggest capacity on the NEC will become more constrained over time — the primary reason Amtrak drafted a \$52 billion NEC master plan in 2010 that's designed to help the railroad "squeeze out capacity" along the route to 2030, said Boardman. The railroad will carry out long-range projects as funding becomes available, but for now, there is no money dedicated for the corridor, he added.

In July, Amtrak issued a report that integrates and updates the railroad's NEC and high-speed rail "vision plans." Essentially, Amtrak plans to accommodate more trains operating at faster speeds with significantly reduced trip times and improved service reliability, while at the same time develop 220-mph, next-generation high-speed rail, or NextGen HSR, along the NEC.

Building a dedicated two-track alignment along the NEC will allow a maximum speed of 220 mph, said Boardman.

"But we need government action first, not government inaction," he said. "If [NextGen and other plans] are implemented, it will dramatically improve trip times."

Whether the federal government takes any action of the funding kind for Amtrak remains to be seen. Rather than discuss ways to help the railroad carry out its growth plans, Congress is spending more time reviewing Amtrak's finances and spending, said Boardman. He expected to testify at a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing Sept. 20 in Washington, D.C., that seeks to explore monetary losses associated with Amtrak's operations, compare the railroad's federal subsidy with other passenger transportation modes and examine "management deficiencies" identified by the Amtrak Office of Inspector General, as characterized by a media advisory distributed by Rep. John Mica's (R-Fla.) office.

Regardless if all the growth-accommodating plans are completed now or in the future, the bottom line is that the work needs to be done, said Boardman.

"All of this *will* be done at some point in our history," he said.

Strikes at Walmart Warehouses Expose

Threats in Supply Chain

Thursday, 27 September 2012 11:19 *By Jane Slaughter, Labor Notes | Report*

A strike at Walmart? Two of them. In a time when few union members dare strike, three dozen Southern California workers who move goods for Walmart were desperate enough to walk off their jobs September 12 even without union protection.

Three days later, 30 workers who'd been organizing with Warehouse Workers for Justice in Elwood, Illinois, southwest of Chicago, walked out, too.

Both groups of workers had taken legal action against their employers, contractors who move goods for Walmart, and their strikes were protesting illegal retaliation.

California strikers asked the NLRB to investigate a half dozen unfair labor practices: retaliation against and surveillance of those who've been organizing with the energetic [Warehouse Workers United](#) (WWU) worker center, an affiliate of the Change to Win federation, for better conditions.

Striker David Garcia said, "For a whole week they were making me lift bicycles all day every day just to see if I would quit or give up." Wearing a WWU T-shirt could mean being sent home early, Garcia said.

In Illinois, workers for Walmart contractor Roadlink filed suit in federal court September 13 for non-payment of overtime, non-payment for all hours worked, and even pay less than the minimum wage. When they delivered a petition to a Roadlink manager onsite, he immediately fired several of the leaders and threatened everyone else, touching off the strike. One manager tried to drive a big forklift into the crowd of workers.

The warehouse is still operating but the strike has impacted production. All strikers have been told they are suspended. Their petition to Walmart asked the company to ensure workers are paid for all their hours, with consistent work schedules and safety training and equipment.

The warehouses outside Chicago are a major portal for goods flowing into retail stores throughout the country, and [Warehouse Workers for Justice](#), a worker center connected to the United Electrical Workers union (UE), has been working there since 2009 to support workers in getting their full pay and to fight sexual and racial harassment.

Strikers delivered a national petition to Walmart corporate offices north of Chicago, with 37,000 signatures supporting the California workers. They got support from striking Chicago teachers September 18 when 150 red-shirted teachers marched with them from a high school to a nearby Walmart store. The group received a police escort to march in the street and then went inside the store for 45 minutes, chanting.

"The idea," said UE organizer Leah Fried, "was to link the disturbing labor practices in Walmart warehouses with the Walmart Family Fund, which has invested \$1 billion in efforts to privatize public schools." The Fund gave \$3 million to a group, Stand for Children, that successfully lobbied for an [anti-teacher](#) law in Illinois last year.

On October 1, the workers plan a big rally at their warehouse with allies from unions, worker centers, and community groups.

WALMARCH

The California workers were already planning a "Walmarch" when they hit the dusty pavement outside their warehouse the day before. Warehouse workers, supporters, and former warehouse workers who are injured walked 50 miles from the "Inland Empire," home to hundreds of warehouses and 85,000 warehouse workers. Their destination was city hall in downtown Los Angeles, a six-day trek.

Their goal: to win immediate improvements inside the warehouses and to say once again to Walmart that it must take responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of workers in its supply chain.

Workers took the risk of striking because, having worked in other warehouses, they say conditions at this warehouse are the worst. It's owned by NFI, a major national player in the growing "third-party logistics" industry.

Elizabeth Brennan, a WWU staffer, said some union members came to the warehouse to support the workers when they walked out. "Their jaws were on the floor," she said. Workers say they've never seen conditions so bad.

Over the summer David Garcia, 29, and other workers filed complaints with both CalOSHA, the state health and safety agency, and the National Labor Relations Board. They told CalOSHA, which is investigating, about intense heat and dangerous conditions.

"There's no lanes painted so the forklifts don't know where they're driving," Garcia said. Springs on the ramps that lead to trailer doors are broken, so workers are manually lifting 500 pounds. On a day when it's 95 degrees outside, he said, "inside the container it's over 120—and whoever's receiving merchandise stays in there all day."

The warehouse is of the "cross-dock" type—it has a roof but no walls, and workers have no way to keep the billowing dust out of their mouths. The employer charges workers for necessary safety equipment such as reflective vests.

On the march, Garcia said it was hot walking in the sun, "but not as hot as the warehouse. Here at least we have a breeze. Here we get fresh water." In the warehouse water comes from a hose, and supervisors discourage workers from refilling their bottles too often.

Garcia found the marching "a relief. At least we're not getting yelled at."

Despite harassment, Garcia didn't quit the \$8-an-hour job (California's minimum wage), citing his five children to support. Most workers on his job are Latino immigrants.

AFTERMATH

The six-day march was an excellent chance, Brennan said, for workers to "leave the desert and interact with all kinds of other people." Their march was joined by a contingent from the United Farm Workers one day and from OUR Walmart, a group of Walmart store workers, on another. Students, church members, union members, and community groups all walked.

Best yet, at each meeting held since the march ended, a couple more warehouse workers join the strike and start participating. Last Saturday they connected with a rally by community groups in San Diego opposed to Walmart tearing down a historical building to build a store. Picket lines in front of the warehouse continue. And, said Brennan, "the workers don't seem to be exhausted at all."

THE SUPPLY CHAIN

Everything from socks to above-ground swimming pools passes briefly through these workers' hands on its way to Walmart stores around the country. Huge containers stuffed with goods from Asia are trucked directly from ships docked in the Port of Los Angeles. NFI workers remove the merchandise and push it or forklift it across the dock to waiting tractor trailers, which will take it to Walmart warehouses or stores.

Walmart hires contractors like NFI, which owns 21 million square feet of warehouse space in the U.S., to run such "transloading" facilities, and those contractors use temp agencies like Warestaff to supply workers like Garcia.

Will County, Illinois, where the second strike took place, is a key Walmart hub with a similar set-up. In this case, Schneider National, another huge third-party logistics supplier, contracts with Roadlink for the muscle to move Walmart's goods.

WALMART BACKS DOWN

Walmart suffered a rare defeat at the hands of workers in its supply chain this summer when eight crawfish peelers in Louisiana walked out after weeks of forced overtime and threats from supervisors.

Although the eight were on H-2B guestworker visas, which tie an employee to a particular employer, they struck and presented Walmart supplier C.J.'s Seafood with a list of demands, including unpaid wages.

After the National Guestworker Alliance spearheaded a national petition campaign, highlighting the 24-hour days workers were at times forced to work, Walmart reluctantly severed ties with C.J.'s and the Department of Labor dunned the company \$248,000 for back wages and fines.

The striking warehouse workers aren't looking for Walmart to dump their contractors but to get the world's largest retailer to enforce its own "Standards for Suppliers." Both groups insist that Walmart sets the standards for all warehouse work, nationwide.

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9/28/2012 1:00:00 PM

AAR: Year-long intermodal up, carloads down trend continues in U.S.

For the week ending Sept. 22, U.S. railroads originated 292,644 carloads, down 4.1 percent, and 250,253 containers and trailers, up 0.7 percent compared with volumes from the same week last year, according to the [Association of American Railroads](#).

Only nine of 20 carload commodity groups posted increases, led by petroleum products (54 percent), motor vehicles and equipment (13.2 percent), and food and kindred products (11.5 percent). Metallic ores volume fell 33.3 percent, coal loads dropped 12.1 percent and metal carloads declined 10.8 percent.

In the coal sector, railroads have noted that utilities' inventories are declining, but likely will remain elevated into 2013, said Robert W. Baird & Co. Inc. analysts in their weekly "Rail Flash" report.

"Recent NS commentary [also] noted weaker export coal trends given global macroeconomic conditions," they said.

Meanwhile, Canadian railroads reported 80,271 carloads for the week ending Sept. 22, a 1 percent increase compared with the same week last year. Their intermodal volume rose 10.1 percent to 57,888 units. Mexican railroads reported 15,280 weekly carloads, up 3.2 percent, and 11,453 intermodal loads, up 11.7 percent.

Through 2012's first 38 weeks, 13 reporting U.S., Canadian and Mexican railroads originated 14,213,618 carloads, down 1.3 percent, and 11,268,010 containers and trailers, up 4.6 percent year over year.