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Editorial Health and Safety at the Dawn of the Trump Administration.pdf

Charles Levenstein
Carlos Eduardo Siqueira

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Health and Safety at the Dawn of the Trump Administration

Charles Levenstein\textsuperscript{1} and Carlos Eduardo Siqueira\textsuperscript{2}

First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Martin Niemoller, January 6, 1946\textsuperscript{1}

This famous poem was written by Martin Neimoller, an anti-Nazi Lutheran theologian and pastor and a German nationalist who opposed Hitler and paid a serious price for it: 7 years in concentration camps. He was not a radical activist and had even supported Hitler’s ascendency to power in the 1920s and early 1930s.

We have been anticipating the impact of the Trump victory on occupational and environmental health policy. We had imagined that the anti-regulatory agenda of the Trump administration would provide us with a vast battleground

\textsuperscript{1}University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, MA, USA
\textsuperscript{2}University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Charles Levenstein, 44 Kilsyth Road, Brookline, MA 02445, USA.
Email: huck_lev@comcast.net
on which to defend the health and safety of workers and their (and our) communities. Writing this after Trump’s first 2 weeks in office, we’ve seen that within days of taking office, Trump had shut down EPA and proposed handing over its leadership to Scott Pruitt an anti-regulatory ideologue who consistently sided with the fossil fuel industry as attorney general of Oklahoma and is on record as a climate change denier. Andrew Puzder, a fast-food billionaire who is the CEO of CKE restaurants (the parent company of Carl’s Jr, Hardee’s, Green Burrito, and Red Burrito) and has consistently disregarded worker health and safety for his employees, was proposed as Secretary of Labor. OSHA has been barred from moving ahead on its worker protection activity and even NIOSH, a public health research agency, has been prohibited from publishing anything relevant to workplace regulation. “Climate change” has been struck from the Federal Government lexicon—and a long-anticipated conference on the public health effects of climate change has lost federal support and participation.

All Executive actions so far lead us to believe that a corporate takeover is under development given the fast and furious Trump administration’s attacks on many fronts, ranging from civil to labor, environmental, and immigrant rights. But at this writing, the heavy hand of the new Trump administration has fallen on Muslim refugees from Muslim majority countries—barring them, including people with legitimate visas, from entering the United States. The new government of the United States (US) has chosen to attack the weakest of victims it could find. This, we are told, is a central aspect of Trump’s “America First” Program. And we are told that the President is determined to move ahead on the construction of a great wall protecting the US from Mexico. Controversy has already emerged regarding who is going to pay for this wall, which by the way would extend an already existing wall that stretches for hundreds of miles along the US–Mexico border. With all these action, we see all the evidence of a bully and demagogue inhabiting the most powerful political office in the world.

On the other hand, we are seeing the biggest resistance against a new administration in US history. In Trump’s first weeks, we witnessed historically large Women’s Marches across the US and many international cities, and multiple protests in airports, municipalities, universities, and workplaces across the country opposing the agendas of Trump and the Republicans in the Congress. We are hopeful that communities across the US will continue to oppose this sharp right turn that can lead to fascism and not make the errors that were made in Germany as noted in the starting poem. Although we acknowledge progress in our common rejection of the overt corporate neoliberal assault on our society, the challenge of unifying movements that are driven by social issues remains formidable. It is now due time for significant organizing efforts and profound tactical discussions to overcome narrowly focused and sectarian approaches. There are reasons to be optimistic because millions of people seem to have recognized the danger early and started to move against Trump’s regressive
program, as one Women’s March poster suggests: “Respect My Existence or Expect My Resistance.”

In this horrific (shocking) political and social environment, New Solutions calls on researchers, scientists, public health and worker health activists to contribute to the critique of the new administration’s approach to “making America great”—and to posing “solutions”—scientific, technological, and political. We cannot stand by and watch as the slim protections from technological hazards and for labor rights are eaten away by special interests concerned only about profit. Consider this journal as an ally in the struggle to stop corporate dominance, prevent the worst consequences of catastrophic climate change, advance human rights, peace, and equality and ensure the health and safety of all communities.

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