The Great Awakening About Jobs

by Phyllis Schlafly March 14, 1996

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When Bob Dole said in New Hampshire, "I didn't realize that jobs and trade and what makes America work would become a big issue in the last few days of this campaign," he revealed the cloistered mindset of government officials who have relative job security backed up by a golden parachute. Now, the New York Times has had a similar epiphany, reporting the same discovery to its readers in a five-newspaper-page article starting with five columns on the front page.

To most families across America, it's old news that jobs are the premier issue. The media only discovered it when it became a factor in the presidential campaign.

The Times now admits that nearly three quarters of all households have had a close encounter with layoffs since 1980. One-third of American households have had a family member who lost a job, and another 40 percent know a relative, friend or neighbor who was laid off.

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Doesn't it strike you as remarkable that the elite press is just discovering something that is an issue with three-fourths of American families? Maybe the media were just snowed by President Clinton's bragging in his State of the Union Message that our economy is "the healthiest it has been in three decades."

Actually, newspaper headlines have been spelling out the news for several years: 123,000 laid off by AT&T, 18,800 by Delta Airlines, 16,800 by Eastman Kodak, 50,000 by Sears, 20,000 by DEC. It isn't just blue-collar manufacturing jobs that are disappearing, it's white-collar and middle-management jobs, too.

In an earlier generation, most people who were laid off found jobs that paid roughly as well as their old jobs. That doesn't happen, now.

Prior to the New Hampshire primary, the attitude of most presidential wannabes, politicians, pundits had been to recite the mantras "Free trade is wonderful; we have to complete in a global economy; and get yourself retrained for a new job." It's now clear that competing in a global economy does not improve our quality of life in America but lowers it, and buying a cheaper computer can't compensate for losing your

job.

The politicians have been saying that the answer to layoffs, as well as to the fact that the median wage in America today, adjusted for inflation, is nearly three percent below what it was in 1979, is "training and education." That's become a code word for creating more taxpayer-financed "job-training" programs.

But many of the victims of large layoffs are fully educated and trained. The majority of those laid off have at least some college education.

Lockheed, Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas have been laying off aerospace engineers. IBM, Compaq and Apple have been laying off systems analysts and software programmers. The automobile industry has been laying off skilled machine tool operators and automotive engineers.

Many of these men and women will never find another job in their area of expertise or at anywhere near their past salaries. If education and re-training are the answer, what should they be trained for? Half of those who received Ph.D.'s in mathematics last year did not find fulltime employment within a year of graduation.

And, if these educated workers cannot find meaningful re-employment in their industries, prospects are even bleaker for blue-collar workers and others without marketable skills.

In addition to the financial setback, there is an enormous human cost of layoffs when there is no prospect of a new job anything on a par with the old one. This includes acute humiliation in front of your loved ones and friends, marriage breakup, withdrawal from volunteer community service, and being uprooted from your home town and forced to move elsewhere.

Technological progress is the cause of many of these layoffs. Of course, we have to progress from horse and buggies to automobiles, from kerosine lamps to electric appliances, and from typewriters and carbon paper to computers and copy machines.

But more and more people have realized that another major cause of this disruption and downsizing is the incessant and orchestrated demand that America compete in a global economy with hundreds of millions of unemployed and under-employed people around the world who are willing to work for 25 cents an

hour. That's what "free trade" means, and there's nothing fair about it.