

AFL-CIO president decries outsourcing

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NBC thinks that outsourcing is a joke. So do Toyota, St. Ives, and Home Depot. In fact, they think shipping jobs overseas is so funny that they sponsor a sitcom about it.

Isn't there something wrong when shipping jobs overseas has become so commonplace that we're able to write sitcoms about it?

Behind every call center outsourced to India, there is another call center in America whose cubicles are empty and whose phones are off the hook. And it's not just call centers or manufacturing plants. The signs are everywhere: conferences for outsourcing professionals; books on the top 10 careers that can't be outsourced; and millions of Americans desperately spamming companies with résumés, looking for jobs that may never return.

Big business and their politician supporters have sparked an outsourcing epidemic. It used to be said that only manufacturing workers had to worry about losing their jobs to workers overseas. Now we know it's possible to outsource anything. Even so-called "safe" jobs -- white-collar accounting services, tax preparation or jobs in the fastest-growing industries like engineering and health services -- are at risk.

Unless we take drastic steps to stop the job-killers, they may very well ship the rest of our jobs overseas.

For years, CEOs clamored to pass free-trade agreements and cut worker protections. They claimed that harnessing the global economy would ensure prosperity at home, but actions speak louder than words. It's hard to tell workers that shipping their jobs to China will help them make rent or pay for their kid's college education -- especially when the same CEOs that cut jobs reward themselves with billions of dollars in compensation.

And these corporate job-killers have found other ways to save pennies at the expense of American workers: by imposing mass layoffs, refusing to hire even when they're making money, and ignoring safety regulations.

What have these policies done for Pennsylvania? We've lost 290,000 manufacturing jobs since 2000. According to a new database called Job Tracker launched this month by the AFL-CIO and Working America, within 50 miles of Erie, workers in 35 companies have lost jobs due to outsourcing since 2005.

This is the bottom line: In the long term, we can't maintain an economy of our size if our businesses don't invest in jobs, build things here, and cut working people an honest deal.

We need an economic strategy that reforms our broken trade and tax policies while investing in infrastructure and skills and technology.

That means enforcing our trade laws, addressing currency manipulation by countries like China, and eliminating tax incentives for offshoring.

The Obama administration has taken steps in the right direction with investments in green technology and new infrastructure, and a commitment to a new manufacturing strategy. But all our elected leaders need to take a stand, and many have chosen to support corporations over working people. More leaders need to be like U.S. Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper, of Erie, D-3rd Dist., who just last month voted for a bill that puts the heat on China for manipulating its currency and making it tougher for American manufacturers to compete.

Until our leaders take a stand against corporate outsourcers, jobs will continue to stream away from our shores. Shedding our jobs and moving production offshore won't help any of us pay the bills or make our nation more prosperous.

If we want to get our economy up and running again, we have to start with the engine: our workers. Corporations have shown that they don't have our best interests at heart. Instead of waiting for big business to come and save us, let's fight now to keep our jobs at home.

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