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Things that come to mind when politicians talk about jobs

Richard Wyszynski | Nov. 6, 2012 NCR Today
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My mother had part of a sewing machine needle embedded in the middle of her finger. You could see a thin black piece of steel as a shadow when a flashlight was pressed against the flesh, and it stayed there until the day she died.

Seamstresses working in sweatshops were constantly driven to work at increasingly faster paces. This was the price you paid for filling your job requirements, and I wouldn't be surprised if there are needles in fingers in China today.

My father was gassed, frostbitten and shell-shocked in World War I, then worked at manual labor 16 hours a day to keep food on the table, even if it wasn't anything but bread dipped in hot lard. I remember the day my parents came home from the dentist. Lacking money for alternative treatment, they had all their teeth extracted at one time. They were in their 40s.

My parents struggled to put us through college. My sister worked 12 hours a day commuting to a distant suburb to teach school. When she applied to the Chicago Board of Education she was rejected because she lacked a political "sponsor."

My first job was for 35 cents an hour, which was lower than Ronald Reagan's first job 12 years earlier. After 45 hours, it totaled $15.75 a week. By the time I was in high school, I was working in the sub-basement, filling trucks for Montgomery Ward. Every 20 minutes, they stuffed a bunch of orders in your hand for merchandise -- everything from tires to furnace pipes -- and you were expected to collect, ticket, package and send to shipping. You never could fulfill the orders in the time allotted because they purposely shoved more orders in your hand than anyone could handle in the time allotted, no matter how hard you hustled. That hustling strained the ligaments in my hands, which still pained me 12 years later as I worked as a symphony musician.

We didn't have a car or a refrigerator. We shared a party-line telephone with four neighbors. We had a portable radio, a wind-up phonograph and one table electric fan. I was finally able to buy my first window air conditioner when I was 63 years old, but I still don't have a CD or DVD player, an iPod, digital TV or a computer.

Now Mitt Romney comes at us, insisting he will produce more jobs. What kind of jobs? The kind he terminated in order to increase his profits by outsourcing them to slave labor in China (which, by the way, didn't seem to conflict with his religious beliefs)? The pharaohs of Egypt clamored for more jobs on their pyramid schemes, but they never said much about more (or living) wages, and neither does Romney. A third of our workforce earns $12 an hour or less. There are taxi drivers working, however dazedly, 80 hours a week. Mothers are forced to lie to get public aid for food stamps to feed their children. Waiting times at county hospitals' emergency rooms have been reduced to two hours. One would hope Catholics can realize that there is more than one form of abortion.

Romney candidly said, "I'm not concerned with the very poor." He might have added: nor with poor working

conditions, poor wages, the very sick, the very old or the very underprivileged. These are the byproducts of the overprivileged exerting their power to make sure there will be no "redistribution of wealth" after they themselves have redistributed the wealth among the 1 percent. They have historically and consistently impeded the concepts and functions of Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, minimum wage, unemployment compensation, food stamps, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and now even the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Along comes vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan, a proclaimed Catholic (apparently at the same level as Torquemada, the 15th-century Spanish Dominican friar who became the first Grand Inquisitor), revealing his enthusiasm for the writings of Ayn Rand, who regarded the poor (Romney's 47 percent) as parasites living on the body of the producers of wealth.

"It was the morality of altruism that undercut America and is now destroying her," Rand wrote. "Capitalism and altruism are incompatible; they are philosophical opposites; they cannot co-exist in the same man or in the same society."

Despite the pious poses, it's not hard to see which credo forms Romney's character when he looks at unemployment lines and chuckles, "I like to fire people."

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