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'You can't survive on \$7.35'

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NCR Today

On the Thursday before Labor Day, I arrived at a downtown McDonald's at 6 a.m. for the "You can't survive on \$7.35" walkout. It was not your father's peace demonstration.

There were 150 protesters, a hundred of them young (their average age is 29) and mostly black fast-food workers. They took the day off or walked off the job to call out:

"Hold the burgers, hold the fries. Make our paychecks supersized."

"We want change and we don't mean pennies."

"No music. \$15 and a union."

This is a crowd that grew up on rap, and their chants have rhythm, bounce and counterpoint. For a while, I stood on the sidewalk next to a tall young man who called wha-hoos and whoop-yas over the chants like a descant. He was terrific. When a woman arrived to go to work, people called out to her to join us.

Then we, all of us, went into the McDonald's, a small shop, built with tax-increment financing! The chants now were:

"\$7.35 just ain't fair. Started from the bottom. We're here."

"Come on out. We got your back."

The floors reverberated with the chant. The energy was amazing. Most fun I've ever had on a picket line. We left when the police arrived.

A friend in Kansas City, Mo., missed those demos but walked into a fast-food joint to say she won't buy there until wages are just. Anybody can do that any time.

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The next day, clergy walked workers back to their jobs, prepared to insist that there be no retaliation. And there wasn't. Nobody got fired. That's standing with the poor.

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