



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on July 8, 2013

The Mindset of the Left: Part IV

At the heart of the left's vision of the world is the implicit assumption that high-minded third parties like themselves can make better decisions for other people than those people can make for themselves.

That arbitrary and unsubstantiated assumption underlies a wide spectrum of laws and policies over the years, ranging from urban renewal to ObamaCare.

One of the many international crusades by busybodies on the left is the drive to limit the hours of work by people in other countries — especially poorer countries — in businesses operated by multinational corporations. One international monitoring group has taken on the task of making sure that people in China do not work more than the legally prescribed 49 hours per week.

Why international monitoring groups, led by affluent Americans or Europeans, would imagine that they know what is best for people who are far poorer than they are, and with far fewer options, is one of the many mysteries of the busybody elite.

As someone who left home at the age of 17, with no high school diploma, no job experience and no skills, I spent several years learning the hard way what poverty is like. One of the happier times during those years was a brief period when I worked 60 hours a week — 40 hours delivering telegrams during the day and 20 hours working part-time in a machine shop at night.

Why was I happy? Because, before finding these jobs, I had spent weeks desperately looking for any job, while my meager savings dwindled down to literally my last dollar, before finally finding the part-time job at night in a machine shop.

I had to walk several miles from the rooming house where I lived in Harlem to the machine shop located just below the Brooklyn Bridge, in order to save that last dollar to buy bread until I got a payday.

When I then found a full-time job delivering telegrams during the day, the money from the two jobs combined was more than I had ever made before. I could pay the back rent I owed on my room and both eat and ride the subways back and forth to work.

I could even put aside some money for a rainy day. It was the closest thing to nirvana for me.

Thank heaven there were no busybodies to prevent me from working more hours than they thought I should.

There was a minimum wage law, but this was 1949 and the wages set by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 had been rendered meaningless by years of inflation. In the absence of an effective minimum wage law, unemployment among black teenagers in the recession year of 1949 was a fraction of what it





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would be in even the most prosperous years of the 1960s and beyond.

As the morally anointed busybodies raised the minimum wage rate, beginning in the 1950s, black teenage unemployment skyrocketed. We have now become so used to tragically high rates of unemployment among this group that many people have no idea that things were not always like that, much less that policies of the busybody left had such catastrophic consequences.

I don't know what I would have done if such busybody policies had been in effect back in 1949, and prevented me from finding a job before my last dollar ran out.

My personal experience is just one small example of what it is like when your options are very limited. The prosperous busybodies of the left are constantly promoting policies which reduce the existing options of poor people even more.

It would never occur to the busybodies that multinational corporations are expanding the options of the poor in third world countries, while busybody policies are contracting their options.

Wages paid by multinational corporations in poor countries are typically much higher than wages paid by local employers. Moreover, the experience that employees get working in modern companies make them more valuable workers and have led in China, for example, to wages rising by double-digit percentages annually.

Nothing is easier for people with degrees to imagine that they know better than the poor and uneducated. But, as someone once said, "A fool can put on his coat better than a wise man can put it on for him."

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