

F**k U-Scan

Automated tech and job displacement

By Nishaan Sandhu

Automated technology is becoming more common in nearly every venue of the world marketplace. Supermarket U-Scans, automated bank tellers, and computerized technical support systems serve as time savers for some while inspiring strings of expletives for others. The isolating nature of U-Scan and other computerized customer service results in major job losses, a huge impact on the economy, and a significant decrease in everyday social interactions. Instead of saving labor for the benefit of the workers, technology continues to drive the wedge between the ultra-wealthy and the growing ranks of the poor.

When discussing the unemployment rate that remains at a high level, it seems much easier to become passionately angered by offshoring or job displacement than to recognize how our nation’s motto of “I want it fast and I want it now!” actually takes away jobs. Let’s take a moment and think, what is the real price of this modern day convenience we call U-Scan?

The (jobless) situation

In the early 1900s, the economic firestorm of the industrial revolution took the spirit out of artisan craft, transforming it into an efficient and profitable Jello mold. Ten years into the twenty-first century, we seem to be following a similar pattern. The machines

of the industrial revolution eliminated tens of thousands of opportunities for humans to be fruitful in the workforce. Will the current explosion of the modern automated technology forcefully do the same?

In his 1997 article, “The Impact of Technology on Employment,” Kirkpatrick Sales writes, “It is indisputable that automation has eliminated vast numbers of jobs across all sectors of the economy in all industrial nations, maybe 35 million of them in the last decade...From 1988 to 1994 the number of jobs lost [U.S.] was estimated to be 6.5 million, far higher than in any other post war period, and fully 85% of them are thought to be permanently lost to machines and overseas transfers.”

Sales further states, “Automation is held to be responsible for the loss of half a million manufacturing jobs every year in this period and close to 3 million in the decade before—the completely automated factory is only a few quarters away—but it has also begun to make deep cuts into service jobs and seems likely to make its biggest future impact here.”

The perception among some Americans is that immigrant labor and offshoring of jobs are the major causes of unemployment. Indeed, American corporations choose to utilize migrant labor and offshoring to India and China in order to pay out lower wages. Yet, studies have estimated that offshoring accounts for 10 percent of unemployment and



The corporate bottom line: no workers comp necessary for broken U-Scans. Photo by Captain Comannokers.

would only affect two percent of employed Americans. Martin Ford, author of *The Lights in the Tunnel: Automation, Accelerating Technology and the Economy of the Future*, states that in the IT sector, automation eliminates more jobs than offshoring.

Let us consider what happens to many individuals whose jobs have been displaced due to supposedly helpful automated technology. The numbers of jobs lost since 2007 is staggering. The job market seems to be kicking the former worker while they are down as businesses replace human workers with computers. How are citizens able to “feed” the economy if they no longer have jobs and money to spend? In July 2010 Chris Isidore, of CNN Money, reported, “The recession killed off 7.9 million jobs. It’s

increasingly likely that many will never come back.”

It does not take a lot of critical thinking to recognize that, if there are jobs lost due to an economic recession, our top priority should be finding ways to create more jobs. Yet, we find ourselves purchasing goods made from machines and paying for them with the “assistance” of automated computers. If we have issues with our goods, we are prompted to listen to a “customer solutions” recording so that we can push more buttons to solve our problem. During the course of one consumer’s finding, purchasing, and complaining, at least three different jobs were replaced by computers.

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Meddling with our city streets

By David Shattuck

Editor’s note: David’s previous two columns demonstrated that converting Lexington’s downtown streets to two-way traffic would result in unacceptable congestion at peak hours. Currently, city leadership is once-again expending public capital to study two-way conversion as a means to improve the city.

Conversion proponents argue that slower traffic makes streets more “walkable,” thereby enhancing retail potential, and that retailers shun locating on one-way streets. Slower traffic means fewer accidents, and is safer for pedestrians, they reason. This column dispels these myths.

One would expect that conversion proponents would have evidence supporting their claims. The Lexington Downtown Development Authority (LDDA), an entity that was created in large part to make conversion happen, offers none. Remarkably, as the LDDA wrote me last November, it “has conducted no research and has no information regarding the benefits and costs of converting Lexington’s downtown streets to two-way traffic.”

It doesn’t take a degree in urban planning to know that increased congestion is not beneficial for downtown. Here are some reasons why.

- “I don’t think you bring more life to city centers by increasing the congestion and accident hazards,” says Paul Box, a traffic engineer interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal* in 1996.

- “[T]wo-way streets are likely to contribute to downtown decay as they reduce the capacity of streets to move traffic into and through downtowns,” writes Randal O’Toole, an economist with the American Dream Coalition, a group dedicated to promoting auto travel and the right to live in the suburbs.
- Conversion “would ensure that downtown is choked off and would destroy downtown as a potential urban center,” Lexington attorney Gordon Moss writes in a 2004 letter to the *Herald-Leader*.
- ”Parking is the primary reason (for businesses) to not be downtown,” explains Bill Harman in the March 9, 2007 edition of *Business Lexington*.
- “Drivers wanting to shop downtown found it very difficult to find a convenient parking space,” Tom Radden Sr. explains in a letter to the *Herald-Leader* last January.

Those most familiar with our downtown know that one-way traffic is no serious impediment to retail success. As the above urban observers note, it is the perception that downtown is congested that has the potential to keep many folks away, just as the perception that parking is scarce deters many from visiting downtown now.

False premise

As Michael Cunneen, an Oregon traffic engineer who has studied the topic

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Announcing NoC Community Supported Journalism

The CSA, an acronym for Community Supported Agriculture, grew out of 1960s Japanese and Swiss culture and were transplanted to the United States in the mid-1980s. In a typical CSA, shareholders exchange their upfront monetary investment for a stake in a farm’s seasonal or yearly bounty. As Susan DeMuth has observed, CSAs are places “where consumers interested in safe food and farmers seeking stable markets for their crops [have] joined together in economic partnerships.”

North of Center is offering its own model of community sustained products: a CSJ (Community Sustained Journalism). For three years, we have developed a brand of journalism that is at once radically independent and committed to a locally connected and globally informed community. (Hopefully it has a little humor, too.) In over 60 issues of publication covering local politics, film, sports and music, not to mention featuring comics and other art/ists, we have yet to earn a cent. Our time has been entirely donated. But in order to continue doing what we do, we do have costs to pay: namely our lone bill, for printing the freely-distributed paper, close to \$500 an issue.

Buying a CSJ share in *North of Center* means you help this paper—our viewpoints, our styles, our



coverage from this part of the world, whether you like it all or not, whether you agree with it all or not—continue to survive. And in the spirit of exchange and partnership, your CSJ share will also enable you to participate in the publication of the paper. In buying a share in *NoC*, your money will help purchase ad space. You can choose to advertise for your favorite businesses or nonprofit, or you can choose to dedicate your share for a space to announce, publicly, a kickass party you’re throwing.

You’ve got choices. Check them out, along with the great swag that accompanies each CSJ choice, on the back page of this print edition, or on our web site: look for the “Community Supported Journalism” link in the “Resources” menu.

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Who is my neighbor?

Southland Christian Center’s shopping mall odyssey

By Andrew Battista

When I read the New Testament, I always pay attention to the questions people ask Jesus. For example, there is a famous conversation in which a Torah scholar asks Jesus what one must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” a core tenant of the Jewish Law. The scholar asks in return, “Who is my neighbor?” This question obviously has a layered meaning. The scholar isn’t asking who literally lives next to him; rather, he is trying to find out how far the ethic of justice suggested by the Law should extend. The story Jesus tells to answer this question, known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan, seems to imply an infinite hospitality. Everyone is our neighbor, even our most despised social enemies. There are no limits to the deference and love we should show to others, whether or not their property is adjacent to us.

Sometimes, though, it’s worth literalizing the text and thinking about neighbors as the people who really are affected by our stewardship of the land. The megachurch Southland Christian

Center, which purchased the abandoned Lexington Mall property on Richmond Road, has not been a good neighbor recently. In the two years that have passed since the church acquired the 31-acre property from a Maryland-based real estate firm, the *Lexington Herald-Leader* has reported a string of disagreements between Southland and its new neighbors. In early 2011, the owners of Perkins Restaurant filed a suit against Southland. Restaurant owner Mark Perkins, who now leases his property from Southland, claimed that the church has misrepresented the actual value of the retail space his business occupies and doubled the rent. According to Perkins this is a clear attempt to gouge prices and drive his restaurant out of business. As one astute person asked on the online section of the newspaper story, “when did it become Christian to rob your neighbor?”

More seriously than the Perkins dispute, Southland is now implicated in what amounts to an issue of environmental justice. Southland pastor Chris Hahn admitted that the church mortgaged its future to this construction

project and encountered substantial costs that were not anticipated. What was once a \$19.3 million project has ballooned to a more than \$24 million boondoggle, and there’s still no end in sight. To recoup some of the costs, Southland now wants to fill in most of the giant retainer pond that separates the mall from Richmond Road and turn over the newly created property into commercial parcels of land.

The construction decisions Southland makes now have the potential to affect people in negative ways. The people who live in the neighborhoods surrounding the mall worry that the existing pond holds a functional purpose and should not be filled in. The pond collects runoff from rainwater and protects adjacent properties from floodwater damage. Some neighbors feel duped by the church, while others have gone on record to say that they never really trusted Southland in the first place.

While it is to some degree noble that Southland Christian Center has tried to rescue a derelict property located in what Hipster Runoff blogger Carles would call “the ass-crack of suburbia,”



Spring on the Southland Christian collection pond. Photo by Danny Mayer.

we should not exonerate the church for biting off more than it can chew, especially if their attempts to stay within a budget pose an environmental risk to others. Who is my neighbor? Southland Christian Church, of all organizations, should ask this question as it tries to recuperate from the consequences of its empire-building growth model.

Recent thefts at Loudoun House

NoC News

On March 22, concerned residents met with city officials after the Loudoun House in Castlewood Park suffered several thefts. In a five-week period, the Loudoun House had, among other things, its copper downspouts and air conditioning unit stolen.

Chris Cooperrider of LFUCG Parks and Recreation said that it was the third time the HVAC units at the Loudoun House had been targeted in the last 14-16 months. Cooperrider emphasized that, in talking to the police department, he was assured that this type of crime is perpetrated by “low-level” criminals, who tend to pose little safety threat.

Copper has been a popular target for theft in the last few years, and Cooperrider said that other historical buildings in Lexington had been hit in February and March. Some historical buildings use copper to maintain their historical character. To avoid problems at the Loudoun House in the future, the downspouts will be made of galvanized steel, an acceptable substitution.

Other preventative measures include eventually replacing conventional HVAC units at the Loudoun

House with geothermal heating and cooling. The police have also stepped up patrols at the park, and neighbors are encouraged to call the police if they see suspicious activity in the area.

The residents at the meeting were keen to support the Loudoun House and the Lexington Art League (LAL), which resides in the house, seeing it as a centerpiece of the Castlewood Neighborhood.

Stephanie Harris, executive director of LAL, said, “LAL has been so fortunate to have the Loudoun House as our home which proudly serves as a free cultural resource for the Castlewood Community. LAL is committed to maintaining its residency here, and it is such a tragedy to watch this historic space be dismantled by senseless vandalism.”

“We feel confident that the collective efforts of LFUCG Parks and Recreation, the Lexington Police Department and the Castlewood Neighborhood Association will end this recent wave of thefts so that we all can continue to improve our park for the families and community members who come here for recreation.”

During exhibitions, the gallery at LAL is open to the public at no cost from Tuesday to Friday, 10 AM-4 PM, and Saturday and Sunday 1-4 PM.

Castlewood Neighborhood Sidewalk Sale

Saturday, April 21 · 8am-2pm

For easy shopping, participating vendors will have a list of articles that other vendors are selling.

Interested in being a vendor?

Contact Maureen at mhenda52@yahoo.com

Ladies Army marches into city

Bike polo tourney, April 27-29

By Sunny Montgomery

It was a warm and particularly windy afternoon when I attended my first bike polo practice, arriving at Coolavin Park as the pickup games were already underway. A dozen or so players and two large dogs hurried back and forth across the old tennis courts. The dogs, unfortunately, did not play polo. Instead, they barked raucously at the young children who’d wandered over from the playground, in part to tease the dogs but also to watch the players circling the court on their bicycles, chasing a small ball with their homemade mallets. Occasionally, a player would cruise past where I sat taking notes and whack their mallet up against the chain link fence.

Within just a few minutes, I witnessed my first collision. The player toppled sideways off his seat then struggled to climb back on while still holding onto his groin.

“You okay?” The other players asked, casually concerned. But of course he was. He pulled himself back upright, tapped out then rejoined the game.

Polo players, I learned, are not allowed to let their feet touch the ground during play. If they do, they must “tap out” before rejoining the game. This rule can be used as part of a strategy. For instance, all “like” contact is permitted. A person can hit a person. A bike can hit a bike and a mallet can hit a mallet. If an opponent seems wobbly on their ride, a bump from another cycle could result in them steadying themselves with a “foot down” or, at times, crashing headlong over their handlebars. Either way, it has the same effect: play is disrupted.

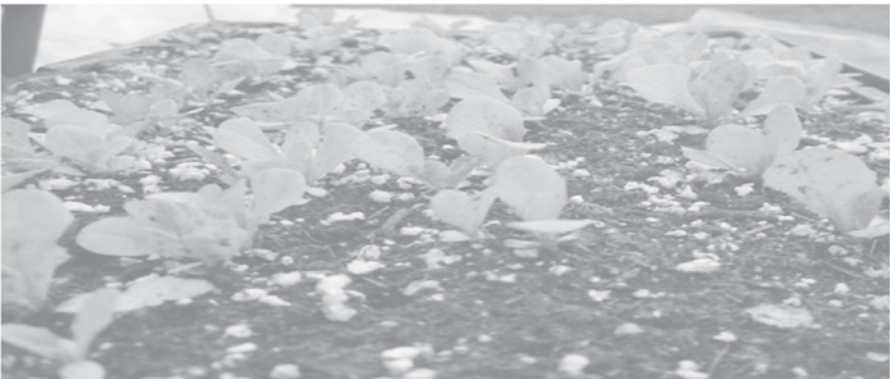
Bike polo is a cross between horse polo—minus the horse—and ice hockey. It is a high- contact, hardcore sport with the potential for carnage and Lexington now has a new reason to get interested: The fourth annual Ladies Army bike polo tournament is right around the corner.

The Ladies Army tournament is the only all female bike polo tournament in the country. In previous years, this widely anticipated gathering has been hosted by cities such as Austin and New York City. This year it will be hosted by our very own. Representing Lexington will be the Mortal Wombats, featuring local athletes such as Katie Jo Doerfler, Christina Buckner, and Corbin Little. It is predicted that over 30 all-female teams will travel cross country and overseas alike to compete in the weekend long event: Swiss Rounds on Saturday and Double Elimination on Sunday.

Every year, Lexington gets more interesting. We are a burgeoning hotspot for exciting subcultures and alternative things to do. Whether you are already an avid fan or a beginner like me, come out and show support for your city’s formidable female athletes. There will be interesting people, a chance to gather outdoors, possible carnage and—did I mention?—there will be bad ass ladies from all over the globe.

The IV Ladies Army bike polo tournament takes place April 27-29 at the bike polo courts at Coolavin Park, corner of Sixth and Jefferson. For more info, check out this video: <http://coolbikevideos.com/ladies-army-promo/>

CROCK Report



CROCK lettuce sprouts are destined for the Kenwick Exchange, held Tuesdays from 5:30-7:00 at Kenwick Park. First exchange scheduled for May Day, May 1. Bring your body, mind and things to exchange.

CROCK, Community Radicals of Central Kentucky, meets regularly to discuss readings and work on projects with the intent of establishing a participatory society in our neighborhoods and municipalities. For more info, visit

<https://sites.google.com/site/crocklex/>

“Return of the Jedi may have been set in a galaxy far, far away, but Jabba’s harem encouraged a fantasy about women as sex slaves in our bedrooms.”

APRIL 2012

Modern-day abolition and its price

Human trafficking in Kentucky

By Beth Connors-Manke

On March 23-24, Georgetown College held what was billed as “the first state-wide conference on human trafficking,” I attended.

Human trafficking comes in two stripes: sex and labor. Legally, the crime is defined as “sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age” or “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.”

Slavery.

The Princess Leia syndrome

I knew what I was getting into when I signed up for the conference.

Meddling (cont.)

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for over a decade, explains, sreet conversion is predicated on a false premise: “Popular places are congested, so if we can congest an unpopular place it will have the ambiance of popularity even if our actions actually reduce the number of people able to get to the area.”

Conversion proponents commit the fallacy of thinking that the appearance of busyness brought about by slowing traffic will spawn retail activity; in fact, it’s the other way around: give folks a reason to travel—a farmers market, a movie, fine dining, and they will make their way downtown.

Consider, for instance, a couple of downtown’s two-way and one way streets. Third and Fourth Streets were converted to two-way traffic back in 2000; yet, this move has resulted in no significant business or residential activity. Conversely, businesses have sprouted on North Limestone, a one-way street, between Short and Third Streets, and on Short Street between Broadway and Limestone. Limestone is conducive to retail and residential activity, as is part of Main Street, whereas Vine Street and Third and Fourth are not: Vine is dominated by banks and LexTran and Third and Fourth by Transylvania. Clearly, then, two-way traffic is not a precondition for a successful downtown.

Finally, while it certainly helps, pedestrian traffic does not ensure retail success. Exhibit A is the UK basketball museum. Located next-door to Rupp Arena, which generates significant pedestrian traffic (much of which is headed to/from a ball game), the museum has struggled to remain solvent. Exhibit B is UK itself, which generates significant pedestrian student/faculty/staff traffic; yet prime real estate near campus has remained vacant for significant periods for going on two decades now.

Since roads were built to move cars and since we’re not building more roads but certainly getting more cars, and given that retail success depends on so many variables other than traffic patterns, perhaps its best to let our roads function as intended: to move traffic.

Way-finding

According to the 2007 Lexington Traffic Study, “The reasoning behind the [two-way] recommendation is that one-way streets negatively impact businesses and tourism because the present configuration creates circuitous travel and causes confusion among out-of-town visitors.”

Street conversion was first proposed in the early 1990s, and became fashionable in urban planning circles by the late 1990s. At that time, way-finding was surely more of a concern than it is now, with most cars and mobile phones containing GPS capability.

I’d seen *Taken* (on a flight to Europe, no less); I’d encountered discussions of sex trafficking in my research, and even in ad in *Yoga Journal*. The ad was sponsored by Off the Mat, Into the World, a community service initiative. As yoga has its roots in India, the magazine frequently runs articles about Indian mythology, with its pantheon of gods and goddesses. Playing off this, the ad read, “This is how we treat Goddesses today... She is one of 3 million women and children enslaved for sex.” Ok, great, get the word out. Startle people, get them concerned, and then, when they are concerned, involved.

But here’s what “she” looks like: a beautiful, dark-haired young woman. Big black eyes accentuated with dark eyeliner. Most of her body is shadowed except for a bit of her face and her arms, which are held up before her, forearm to forearm, shackled. She wears gold

bangles; there’s a henna design on one wrist. The photo is washed in sepia.

I’m sure the ad turns on almost any straight guy who sees it, especially if he’s watched *Return of the Jedi*. That part of the trilogy includes Princess Leia’s enslavement by Jabba the Hutt. After her capture, Leia is garbed in a bronze metal bikini, adorned with gold jewelry, and chained to fat-ass Jabba’s pedestal. Chained *by her neck*—she’s got a gold collar that he yanks on. Like she’s a dog.

This Leia, the “slave Leia,” is the one boys have dreamed about for 30 years. The confirmation for this? The costumes you can buy online (when I googled it, I got 500,000 results). The *Friends* episode when Rachel dons the costume to please Ross.

Even as a young girl watching *Return of the Jedi*, I knew this was the hottest scene, not because there was really going to be sex (come on, how would Jabba get it on with anyone?) but because it was

sexy to tie up—excuse me, *chain up*—bikinied women.

Return of the Jedi may have been set in a galaxy far, far away, but Jabba’s harem encouraged a fantasy about women as sex slaves that’s nestled into our bedrooms and our private imaginings. So much so that an organization trying to eradicate sex trafficking actually *sexes up* the crime in order to get our attention.

House Bill 350

Back to the conference. Lovely, verdant Georgetown, KY on a warm spring day. I arrive late to the conference and slide into the large John L. Hill Chapel, where a talk on fair trade (to combat the labor side of human trafficking) is taking place.

During a break between talks: walking across the campus, looking at the

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A diverse mix of businesses along one-way North Limestone. Photo by Danny Mayer.

163% more pedestrian accidents in Sacramento, and 100% more pedestrian accidents in Portland and Hollywood, Florida.”

Air pollution

In 2008 the Brookings Institute ranked Lexington as having the worst carbon footprint among the 100 cities studied. The increased congestion conversion causes would significantly exacerbate Lexington’s pollution problems. Planners in Austin estimate that converting several one-way streets to two-way traffic would increase traffic delays by 23% and increase air pollution levels by 10 to 13%. The Lexington Traffic Study confirms that “higher vehicle emission levels (air pollution) can be expected as a result of the increased congestion” conversion would necessitate. (Indeed, \$19,000 of the \$100,000 spent on the study came from a federal Air Quality planning grant).

Emergency vehicles

“Traffic calming” refers to measures designed to slow vehicle traffic; two-way street conversion is the most severe of all such measures, given that conversion effectively cuts lane capacity in half. One needn’t be an ambulance driver to realize that emergency response times will be substantially slower on two-way streets. Studies in Boulder and Austin show that 85 heart attack victims will die prematurely before 1 pedestrian death is prevented through traffic calming. Accordingly, emergency response professionals are adamant in their opposition to conversion.

Unproven experiment

Perhaps the most important question one can ask when deciding whether to implement an idea is this: has it ever worked anywhere else? Two-way street conversion fails this test miserably. For while the issue has been tossed around and studied by many cities, in the decade that I’ve studied the matter I have not

found a city with streets comparable to Lexington’s where conversion has made a difference. Colorado Springs commissioned a study of conversions in “similar sized cities” in early 2007. The study concluded that, at best, the economic benefits are mixed: “Recent studies vary widely in their findings and often contradict one another.”

Cincinnati is one of ten cities surveyed in that study; it converted Vine Street in 1999 as part of a major revitalization effort. The study found that the Cincinnati conversion “didn’t accomplish much” and “did not result in the revitalization expected in the area.” Although traffic speeds decreased, accidents increased. The city reported: “We are considering converting the street back to a one-way because the traffic flow on that street is important for travel between uptown and downtown.”

Tucson, Arizona had decided in 2004 to convert a major one-way pair running east-west through downtown. In February 2007, however, the city council voted unanimously to keep these streets as a one-way pair. The Cincinnati and Tucson examples are particularly instructive for Lexington, since Main/Vine and High/Maxwell are the only major streets running east-west downtown; alternative routes are not available. As Richard Deneger wrote the *Herald-Leader* in February 2006: “Returning Vine and High streets to two-way streets would be a huge mistake as they represent the only realistic east-west corridor through the city.”

It is no wonder then, that economist Randal O’Toole concludes: “By almost any measurable criteria—safety, pollution, congestion, and effects on most local businesses—one-way streets are superior to two-way.” Although Lexington’s developers and planners refuse to acknowledge this fact, we can only hope that public participation will convince the Urban County Council of this truth.

River bones

Elkhorn to Lockport, part 2

By Danny Mayer

“Thank you for showing me Gest today, the two lock houses facing Cedar Creek those bureaucrats will soon raze.”

My breath flashes vapor at each line. Nearing late-afternoon on the Kentucky River, the sun has only recently asserted itself in the sky, somewhere near Stevens Branch on pool 3, four river miles past. This would have been before the portage at Gest, Lock 3 across from Monterey, and before the exploratory amble up the hill to see the two Gest lock houses in decay, the result of a strategic decision by the state and its people to abandon upkeep of grounds and water. Before the ham and cheese on bread, before the piss breaks, before reloading and shoving off, one-by-one from the remnant pad below the lower lock gates, to ferry back into the main-stream (eddying overnight at Severn Creek) on our way to Lockport.

Say, three hours ago.

But still, my breath leaves me heavy and wet. In the sky, the January sun is shining bright and dry. Here on the water, the current up from considerable winter rains earlier in the week, things still feel damp.

In honor of Monterey’s poet laureate Richard Taylor, I am reciting—“Ad infinitum ex-temporanium,” I have exclaimed just moments ago off-page in a fit of Jim Beam exuberance—the poem “Letter to Chenoca (Lock 3, Kentucky).” By now, the current has pushed us out of sight from Gest and the frothy mouth of Cedar Creek, but the decaying houses are still on our minds.

“Hunkered atop this lock, space closed by caved ceilings ten feet and higher, chill wind shushing through frayed wallpaper and yellowed bits of history, holding tightly inside from out—looking in from under the spear-shaped eaves, it all comes back to you.”

Wes, whose father spent time as a child in the 1940s at the Gest lock houses, catches my drift and cuts in.

“Tales where Dad laid up playing Indians with friends, kids, who hung in the attic to watch the river go, to play Huck along the banks. Not perfect, but other worldly.” He pauses for a second, looks briefly back upriver. “Lock life, fattened with water, kept the bluegrass lubricated.”

Scribing this now, I should remind you: none of this has gone down exactly this way. By late-afternoon on the Kentucky, this one or any other on that river, the likelihood of Wes and I achieving any non-rote coordination in our endeavors, much less harmonizing on a riffed Richard Taylor poem, is—while quite certainly possible—not very probable. In fact, Taylor has only intruded into this story in the past couple weeks, late-March, as I’ve placed my non-existent notes and dampened memory of “night on Severn” alongside my harried research of the area. Heck, I don’t even like Jim Beam. But then again, skimming along a river like the Kentucky, with its abandoned channels and pirated

watersheds, its prehistoric gar and grown-over river communities, its upthrusts and its erosions—a veritable river of revisions—who’s to say this fourth draft of our trip, this new channel etched into the public record, isn’t as accurate an account as any.

Wes and I converge on our harmony. “These jaunts we take to scraps of found timber, to beds of fossil coral—“

“To Elkhorn!—”

“To Gest!—”

“To Brown’s Bottom!—”

Then Silence.

Wes, Lyle and I stare blankly at Keith—on his first trip, a rookie—sitting hitched in his canoe at the edge of our floating armada, vaping, giving us the “*did I miss something?*” look. Our eyes linger on our friend only a moment, and then, Lyle joining in now, we return to our tailored piece.

“This lust to get the primal depth of things, it strikes us finally why. To reconstruct an unconstructed state, the touchy balance of waters we might measure before we gurney, so that as we sink, our hands might judge the depth.”

Past events

We close our score to the sound of buzzards, Kentucky eagles, really, circling the heights above us on river-left. We are at the turn to Clement’s Bottom, at a temporary confluence of the ancient and current Kentucky Rivers.

In earlier times, about six million years earlier at the beginning of the Pliocene epoch, the river here bent left, to the west, before looping back around to present-day Lockport. Several million years later, a series of late-Pliocene orogenies—upthrusts in the earth’s crust that literally lifted the bluegrass savannahs from their foundations—knocked the ancient Kentucky from its entrenched meandering path. Here at the entrance to Clement’s bottom, the local result of that orogeny, the Mint Spring Dome, caused the Kentucky to cut an entirely new bed. Instead of curving left and to the west, we modern paddlers of the Kentucky follow its arc to the right—east—threading between Clements’ Bottom, the Severn Creek watershed, and Brown’s Bottom.

To put it straight, this ancient upthrust pirates the rest of our paddle. We spend our last two days rimming the Mint Spring Dome in search of a low spot to scour our way beyond. In typical Kentucky fashion, to find that low spot, that knick in Mint Spring Dome, we will trace a near complete circle, paddle 6 river miles and cover 2 days in order to travel the ¾ of a mile to Fallis, located on the back-side of Clement’s Bottom, an alluvial suburb of the Kentucky River town of Lockport.

On the water, Wes elaborates to the group.

“Before the Pliocene uplift, the bluegrass was nearly completely flat. Like a rivulet cut into a dirt path, the Kentucky etched its bed into the surrounding savannah. When its banks flooded, the flatness of the surrounding

area meant that alluvial sediment was dispersed along a broad floodplain. Willard Rouse Jillson, in my estimation our state’s most esteemed geologist, calculated that flooded sediment reached a distance of 3-5 miles from its banks.”

“When the bluegrass orogenies came, they lifted the Kentucky’s bed, staunched the river’s flow, and ultimately caused it to overspill its banks. These over-spills eventually cut an entirely new bed as the river, desirous as always to ensure proper laws of gravity, sought out new courses around (and through) the new impoundments recently sprung from the earth’s crust. Jillson claims these upthrusts ‘brought about the rejuvenation of the Kentucky River.’—Say, do you all want some Zwack?”

Wes looks at each of us. With *why not* shrugs, one by one we grab the Hungarian liquor and take warming swigs. With the bottle making the rounds, our trip’s geology lesson concludes.

“Beyond the bluffs to the left—if we were to go that way, which of course we can’t now—is the abandoned Pot Ripple Channel, first discovered by Jillson—” and here Wes points to me—“on May Day, 1943. Josie’s birthday.”

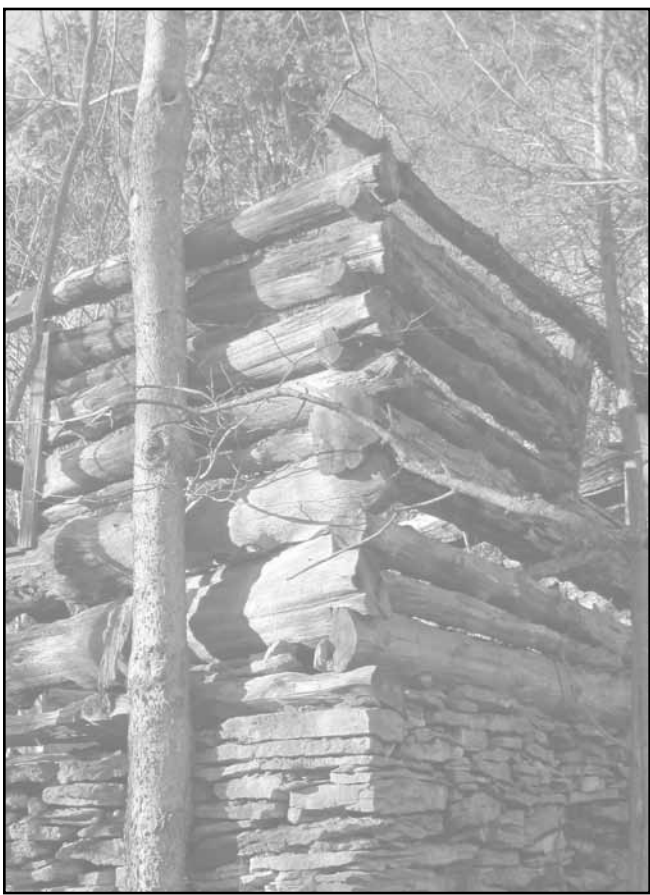
Night on Mint Spring Branch

We come into Severn’s mouth with a feeling of relief and satisfaction. The last hour on the mainstream, we have paddled hard into stiff headwinds, the water at times resembling a choppy bay. Passing under the truss bridge spanning Severn Creek, roughly half-way around Clement’s, we ease up and begin reconnoitering lodging options. Lyle’s preliminary Google-Earth scouting of the area suggests possibilities on the large bottom beyond the Owen County municipal straw, and farther up, any flat land that strikes our fancy on either side of the creek.

These things are always touch and go. One never really knows until doing it how far up a creek one can paddle. Water levels fluctuate according to watershed and season. Long shoals, virtually hidden via internet scouting, could appear too close to the mouth. The day could be getting late. You could be tired. There’s also deadfall. Private developments. Four-wheelers. Beavers.

So after a couple bends on Severn when Lyle says, “not far beyond this looks to be pretty secluded. From Google, it didn’t appear as if any houses would be within eyeshot,” we all know not to get too excited just yet.

After passing a low-lying, muddy, braided bottom, we make first landing on the downstream side of Mint Spring Branch. The exploration reveals unfavorable camping conditions, but we stumble upon a series of rock foundations and empty cabin hulls that follow the spine of a 300 foot knob, the remnants of an abandoned community that must have grown up around Howlett’s (later Clement’s) landing near the mouth of Severn Creek. Official history, in this case a recently written



Cabin at Severn Creek and Mint Spring Branch. Photo by Wes Houp.

history of Owen County, makes no mention of the community. Its presence, so far as I can tell, only comes in map form, a reference to a Mint Spring School on a series of 1930s-era oil and gas maps.

Our initial hypothesis of the Mint Spring ruins, based on the stacked rock foundations and log walls, dates it to early 1800s. Upon closer observation, though, the settlement looks more like a historical conglomeration. The ruins appear to be in some state of reconstruction. Parts of the old rock foundations seem restacked, and in some cases fresh-cut stone, which has a greater appearance of blue along its fracture line, mixes with the old.

While the downstream plot doesn’t meet our overnight needs, just across the way, the large wooded bottom on the upstream mouth of Mint Spring Branch, meets them quite well: flat, dry, good view, somewhat sheltered from turbulent weather and snooping landowners, and with an abundance of downed wood.

By the time we set up our sleeping quarters, work up a fire, cook and consume a delectably muddy river rat stew, and pass around all night-time sharables, the sky has grown cold. Last night’s clouds kept our temperatures in the high 30s, but the clear heavens tonight let the cold rush in. I had hoped for enough energy to take a night-walk down a trail that led (we thought) to an old post office located further up the Severn Creek valley. But by 9:30, I am tired and ready to hit the sleeping bag.

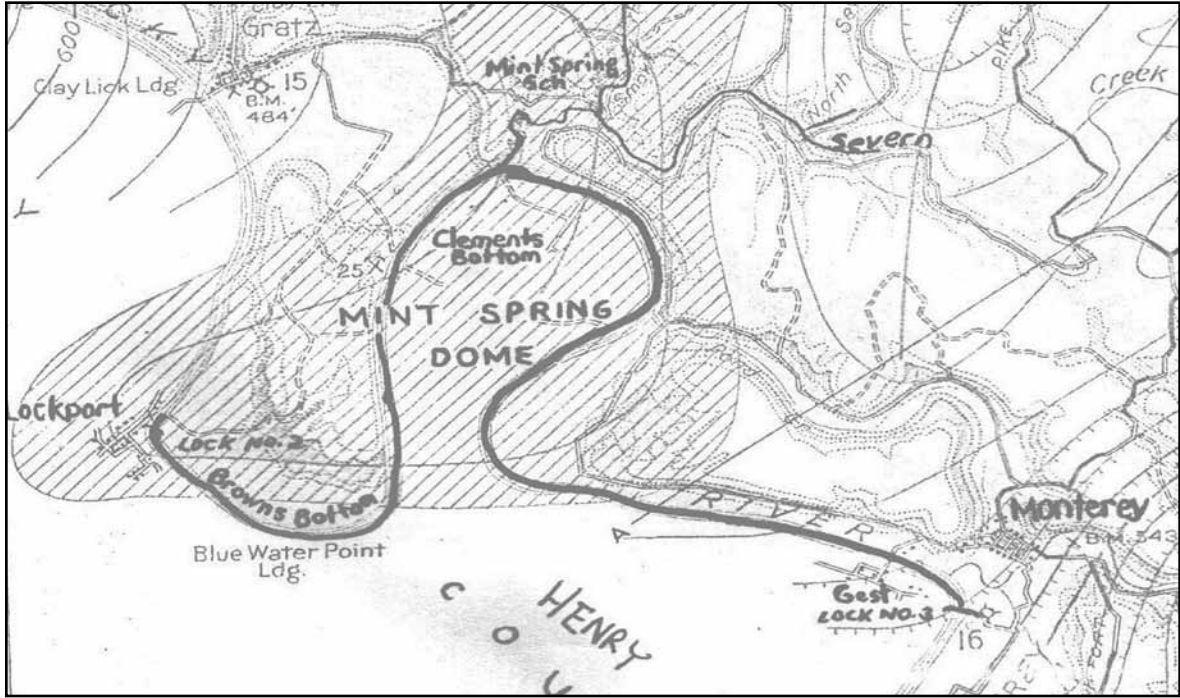
Everyone seems to agree that tonight will be an early one. “Just staying warm standing around this fire,” Keith observes, “is adventure enough at this temperature.” I am in my sack under the tarp by 10:00 P.M., and drift in and out of sleep to Wes reciting to Keith and Lyle a final campfire poem, another Taylor concoction, this one titled “Severn Creek.”

“For the third spring we trek the disused county road,” Wes intones. “Deer prints pressing ground made soft by yesterday’s showers. In gray tiers, hardwoods rise up toward the cedared bluffs. The luscious glut of creekwater ripples through us intimate as breath.”

“It’s early. Spring purrs its lime among the branchtips—not yet an exclamation. The trout lily has performed its bloom, but the Dutchman’s-breeches are still furled like silken flags. Fire pinks still smolder hours shy of floral combustion, the beds of bluebells we hiked miles to see already basking in the bottoms...”

A winter silence descends over us all. As my world darkens, as I fade out for the night, the last thing I hear is Lyle

continued on the next page



Aerial and Structural Geology of Owen County, Kentucky. Map by J.J. Wolford, M.S. Chappers, and S. Withers, 1931, completed under the directorship of Kentucky State Geologist Willard Rouse Jillson.

“In earlier times, about six million years earlier at the beginning of the Pliocene epoch, the river here bent left, to the west.”

APRIL 2012

River (cont.)

continued from the previous page

breaking the silence: “Shit. We need to get back here in the spring.”

Good morning weathercock

I awake, stiff, to the sound of Lyle’s voice falling upon me as a morning sun that lights the fading night. Up early as always, Lyle has forsaken his normal morning walk in favor of re-stoking the fire. From a slant-eyed peek out of my sleeping bag, I glimpse him sitting Indian-style on top of his PDF, singing Jethro Tull to the embers.

“Good morning weathercock, how did you fare last night? Did the cold wind bite you? Did you face up to the fright?”

I force myself to unzip and exit into a biting cold. The world outside our tarp has become glazed with frost. My boots, which I’d forgotten to put in my sleeping bag to keep warm, are cold blocks of stitched leather. Begrudgingly, I throw them on and tend to my morning chore: water filtration.

This was my first with this crew. My rat friends here have an instinctual

distrust of the safety of Kentucky waters. They prefer six-packs of half-gallon water jugs. Our truce, successful it will turn out, is to allow me to pump water from any creek residing in a watershed down-river of the MTR line. Here on Mint Spring this morning, the handle on my pump is cold, and my hands sting with each turn. But the empty High Bridge jug eventually fills, and I return to camp for breakfast (rat stew, add Wes’ eggs), shareable pass-around, pack-up, clean-up, another pass-around and load-up.

By day 2 on trip 9, things have their own familiarity. Even Keith, rookie that he is, pipes in with a Taylor contribution of his own. Fishing a book from his dry bag, he says, “Gentle-rats, here is a final poem for our final descent into Lockport. Ahem...”The River issues a statement regarding its watery ethos,’ by Richard Taylor...’Don’t look to me for virtue, for high-minded feats, or elevated speech that flows in a stream of lustrous silver—when cutting is my nature, meandering my path.” “If at times I stray from my banks, diverge from narrow limits, know that motion

is my credo, that at heart I’m inclined to trade in sediment, traffic in silt.”

“Here! Here!” We all cry out.

“Virtue I leave to creekside pillars, to chaste limbs of the sycamore, small hands of the quivering birch...to towering cottonwoods, whose rectitude goes untested.”

Upthrusts and rabbit shit

On our paddle out, we pass by the Mint Spring settlement again. Catching it from this angle, one can see how vast and subtle a reconstruction is taking place. Somebody apparently has a rock-stacking compulsion. And so, the old Mint Spring Branch trails start to get reclaimed; a certain order, an infrastructure, begins to appear on the old bed.

Seeing the rock-work, I can’t help but think of another Kentucky river writer—Gurney Norman. One of the defining images of *Divine Right’s Trip*, Norman’s picaresque counter-cultural travel-adventure that ends in the coal-damaged mountains of Eastern Kentucky, is that of the lead character, hippie hero Divine Right (DR),

employing his uncle’s method for rehabilitating family property ravaged by coal-overburden and erosion. DR’s daily task? Grow rabbits to create rabbit-shit flower gardens, a steadying of the land. It’s one of the more beautiful and hopeful visions of anthro-geological upthrust.

Of course, that’s just story-timing. It took me a little longer to put all this together. It wasn’t until just past Fallis on the other side of Clement’s, where Pot Ripple Creek now comes into the mainstream that things started to cohere. And even then it was more of an elemental free association, a fluidity almost. Josie and Jillson upthrusts; Mint Spring branches and Pot Lick abandonments; Gest houses and Lockports. The coherence bit, the bed into which to put all these, the maps, these come a little more slowly, through revision, and etching.

To hear Lyle sing “Goodmorning weathercock,” visit noclexington.com. Then purchase a Richard Taylor book from your local bookstore to read the actual poems we’ve debauched here. Our choices: Fading into Bolivia, Stone Eye, and Earth Bones.

Trafficking (cont.)

continued from page 3

trees, the green, I feel aversion bubble up. I think: *I hate small towns*. On the next break, I think, *I hate small campuses in small towns*. During the next session, more aversion: *There are too many women here*. I listen to another session, and aversion shades into disgust about social work.

None of these reactions made sense. I have twice lived happily in small, quaint towns. I had a great college experience at a small school just like Georgetown, even down to the red brick. I like and get along with women, not to mention the fact that the audience had plenty of men in it. I once worked with social workers in a domestic violence shelter. All I knew was that I was, irrationally, hating a lot of things.

I did my best to ignore the angst while State Representative Sannie Overly and attorney Gretchen Hunt discussed House Bill 350, the Human Trafficking Victims Rights Act.

HB 350, which has passed the House and now awaits attention by the Senate, would augment the work of Senate Bill 43, passed in 2007, which made trafficking a felony.

Since real human trafficking is much less glamorous and much more, um, entrepreneurial than Jabba the Hutt’s pleasure ship (or whatever it was), Kentucky law needed to tackle the real dynamics of modern-day slavery. As Overly and Hunt described it, HB 350 needed to address three things: child victims, the fact that trafficking is a business, and resources for law enforcement and victims.

To those ends, the bill clarifies that it is a felony to buy children for sex. HB 350 also targets the “ill-gotten gains” of traffickers with asset forfeiture or seizure. This means that traffickers who force or coerce individuals into labor or sex will have their profits taken away. The assets seized will fund programs for victims, law enforcement agencies, and prosecutors.

Hunt, who has practiced immigration law on behalf of victims of domestic violence, rape, and human trafficking, said that it “makes sense that human trafficking happens in Kentucky.” I-75 makes for easy transport; the poverty rate in the state fosters desperation and exploitation; the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have pushed desperate immigrants into the U.S. “Kentucky is a ripe state for trafficking with its high rates of vulnerability,” Hunt told us.

While I assume it to be a standard phrase in the field, “high rates of vulnerability” seemed to speak to whatever was sparking my unwarranted feelings of aversion, those feelings that signaled that I wanted to push things way from me.

We’re not protecting our children

The evening’s keynote speaker, Theresa Flores, began her talk by saying that human trafficking is “an epidemic problem in our country and we know nothing about it.” A licensed social worker, Flores is the Director of Training and Education for Gracehaven House, a residential rehabilitation home in Ohio for girls under 18 who are victims of human trafficking. As several other speakers had also done, Flores claimed that human trafficking is the second leading crime in the world. The first? Drug trafficking. Flores asserted, “there’s more penalty for trafficking drugs than for trafficking humans.”

Flores had two major parts to her argument. First, women were increasingly sexualized during the course of the twentieth century, one dangerous result being teens (girls and boys) posting sexual pictures on the Internet, which draw traffickers to them. Just as insidious and damaging is that this sexualization makes children vulnerable to exploitation because they come to believe their value lies in sex.

Part of this dynamic also includes accepting pimping as an acceptable entrepreneurial venture. Because popular culture has glorified pimping, we tend not to see it for what it is: human trafficking. (Remember: the definition of sex trafficking stipulates that the crime can be “induced by force, fraud, or coercion.” Even in *Pretty Woman*, the romanticization of prostitution *par excellence*, we get a glimpse of how women are forced and coerced by their traffickers with Kit’s troubles with drugs and her pimp. Vivian gets out, but we’re not sure if Kit will.)

The second part of Flores’s argument is that we’re not protecting our children. When underage girls and boys are arrested for “teen prostitution,” we’re living in an oxymoronic world in which teens can’t legally give consent for sex with adults (that’s called statutory rape), yet we act as if they have sexual agency when they are bought for sex, i.e. prostituting. Flores’s point: they are not “teen prostitutes,” they are victims of human trafficking.

An energetic speaker, Flores made me feel as if I was getting better tools for thinking about the issue: an argument about culture; statistics about the number of persons trafficked into and within the U.S.; the places where trafficking is at its worst (generally border states, but also Ohio, where Flores is from); and the point that sex trafficking should be considered an economic issue. (Again, this is a pimp’s business.) Throughout the talk, though, Flores often referenced her own life, “my situation.”

The story of her situation didn’t come until the end, when Flores, a white woman from an Irish Catholic family, told her story of being trafficked as a

teenager. The story was as shocking for what she was forced to do as for the fact that she doesn’t fit our current stereotype of a trafficking victim. She’s not an immigrant to the U.S.; she’s not black or brown. Her family wasn’t poor; she had a normal home life. She was forced into trafficking by a clean-cut boy at her high school who was linked to a sex trafficking ring happening, in part, in upscale suburban Detroit basements. And, if I did my math correctly, this was happening in the early 1980s, meaning the shadow economy of sex trafficking has been rooted in middle class sexuality *for decades*. (Side note: *Return of the Jedi* was released in 1983.)

Other parts of her story, though, spoke to the commonplaces of sex trafficking. Her traffickers controlled her movements, even though she was living in her parents’ home. They threatened her family. She was drugged, beaten, and treated as a commodity, not as human being. Groups of men lined up to rape her.

Truthfully, I would have been more taken aback by rich, educated guys chumming up in a sex trafficking ring if I hadn’t just come across a news story from June 2011. Here’s how Cleveland.com glibly titled the story: “College professors gone wild: Ex-president, physicist arrested in probe of prostitution website.” The story of David Flory, a physics professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, and F. Chris Garcia, former president of the University of New Mexico, made its rounds nationally. Flory created a site called “Southwest Companions,” the goal of which was to connect johns to prostitutes in a way that evaded the police. Brainy as a physicist usually is, Flory allegedly created a tiered system by which johns were vetted and allowed to higher levels. Garcia sat at one of those higher levels and was accused of helping recruit prostitutes. This level was dubbed “the hunt club.”

I couldn’t find much recent reportage on the case, so it’s hard to know to what degree the prostitution ring overlapped with sex trafficking. Not all sex workers are being trafficked, but considering that coercion and fraud constitute part of human trafficking, there’s a good chance that in a web of supposedly 200 prostitutes and 1,400 members, there’s a pimp or two in there. And, if any of the prostitutes were under 18, the transaction is automatically sex trafficking.

The bigger picture

The complexity of addressing human trafficking is that it intersects with so many other issues, as attorney Gretchen Hunt had pointed out earlier. There’s drugs, there’s poverty, there are trafficking victims who don’t always fit the public’s picture of a pitiful victim. Some kids are sold by their parents; some are run-aways; some come to the U.S.

to help make money for their families. We have a culture that teaches men that they are entitled to sex when they want it, as speaker Rus Funk of MensWork pointed out. We have women who traffick other men, women, and children. The more you look at the picture, the more you need a panoramic lens. The issue is so big.

Both Flores and Funk suggested that we have to address the cultural practices that normalize sexual exploitation: advertising, porn, “pimp and ho” parties, societal messages about dating and gender.

In terms of law, Flores advocated for the “Sweden Model” in which selling sex is made legal, but buying it is illegal. In other words, the johns are the ones bearing the punishment for fueling the trade and creating the demand for human trafficking and child sexual abuse. Flores didn’t hold out much hope for this type of law in the U.S., which told me yet again that we’re not that concerned about protecting our children.

According to KY Rescue and Restore, in Kentucky 52 percent of human trafficking cases are sex trafficking; 42 percent, labor. The remaining six percent are cases of both sex and labor trafficking. Currently, 43 percent of victims in Kentucky are children; if you consider that a number of adults enslaved in sex trafficking are pulled in when they were minors, you can see how much this business preys on children. This is one of the aspects of “the high rates of vulnerability” that Hunt was talking about.

The issue of vulnerability makes this issue hard to face, really face. The fact that there is an economic demand for abusing vulnerable men, women, and children in our country makes me doubt the integrity of my neighbors, my co-workers, my fellow citizens. And this is a profound unsettling, enough so that at the beginning of the conference, that fear, repulsion and, more than likely, despair, was displaced onto innocuous things around me: a small town, a grassy campus, other conference participants.

There’s irreparable damage done to those enslaved in human trafficking. If we are to join the fight to combat it, we also have to be prepared to accept that we’ll be damaged in some way, if only because facing this type of crime, exploitation, and perversion wounds you. In clinical settings, this is called “secondary trauma.” We might call it the price of being a modern-day abolitionist.

Or, we might call it the legacy of living in a country that has enslaved and continues to enslave. That’s our inheritance, our burden—whether we choose to face it or not.

Contact your State Senator about HB 350 by calling the legislative message line at 1.800.372.7181.

A promising movement

Our man in Amsterdam

By Michael Marchman

An inspiring and very promising movement is taking shape in the Netherlands. And it is one from which unions, workers, and students in the US and around the world might be able to learn. University students and faculty members, who are fighting cuts to higher education, have joined with blue-collar workers, specifically cleaners and caterers, who are in a heated battle with their employers over deteriorating wages and working conditions.

The movement is being built around a strike by the Dutch cleaners union, FNV Bondgenoten, which is now in its twelfth week. The cleaners provide contracted custodial services for large companies, such as the Dutch electronics giant Philips, and a range of public institutions, including government ministries, universities, Schiphol International Airport, and Dutch Railways.

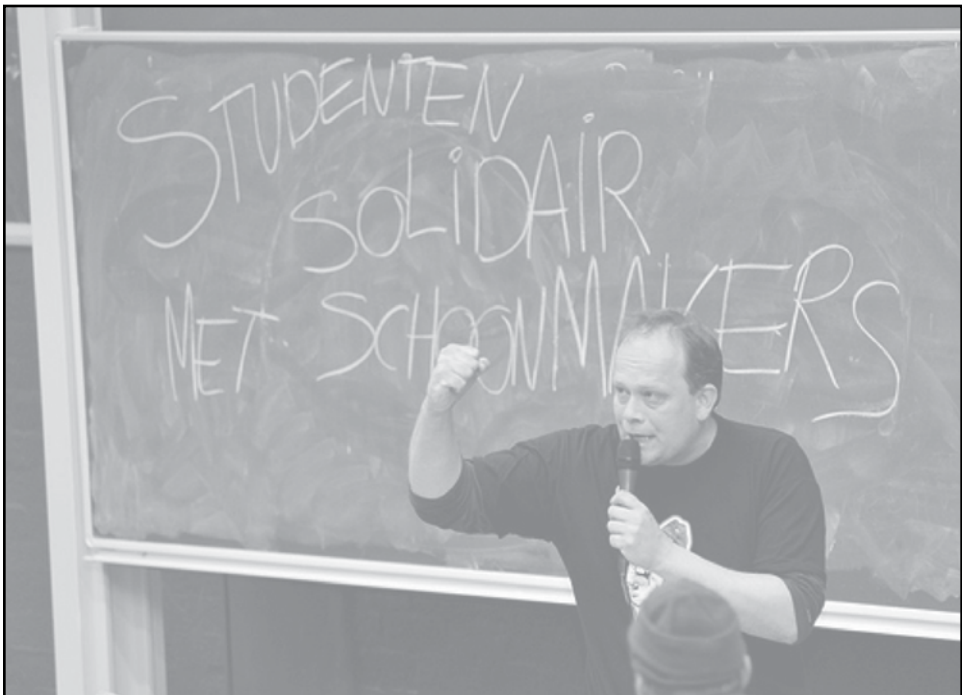
They are among the most vulnerable workers and earliest victims of the economic crisis. As private and public budgets get slashed, custodial services are often at the top of the list of expenses that are cut. The result is that cleaning companies are competing with each other by offering clients faster cleaning services done with fewer employees. For cleaners, who already earn very low wages and are denied paid sick leave—

workers, boosted union membership by an additional one thousand members, generated new alliances and solidarity, and garnered widespread public support in the process. Their remarkable success is inspiring workers and progressive activists across the country and beyond, including SEIU members here in the US who have visited Dutch Consulates in the New York, Portland and elsewhere to deliver letters of support for the striking cleaners in the Netherlands.

Occupation U

In January, the cleaners struck. By the third week of February with negotiations going nowhere, the union stepped up the pressure on the companies. After weeks of protests and failed negotiations, some 2000 cleaners and dozens of supporters—including students and university employees—stormed a building on the campus of Utrecht University, sat down, and occupied the building for twenty-four hours. They demanded that the University pressure the cleaning companies (with whom they contract custodial services) to accept the workers’ demands of a 50 cent wage increase and paid sick leave.

Two weeks later (in early March), a similar occupation, involving cleaners, students, and university employees, was staged at Vrije Universiteit/Free University (VU) in Amsterdam.



“Student solidarity with cleaners.” Photo courtesy of our comrades at <http://roarmag.org>.

US film *Bread and Roses* about the late 1990s Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles).

Statements of solidarity were delivered by representatives of the Greek cleaners’ union via Skype live from Athens, by Dutch public transportation workers (who have struck several times in the past year over massive cuts in services and jobs), by students (who are facing rapidly increasing tuition, the conversion of education grants into

commitment by the university to send a letter to the cleaning companies stating their support for the workers’ demands. Although some occupiers were upset that union leaders chose so quickly to end the occupation once the university accepted these demands and when there seemed to be strong support among the occupiers to hold out for more, the occupation was by most measures a resounding success. Not only did the cleaners succeed in achieving some of their demands, the strike/occupation is testament to the power of solidarity and targeted strategic action.

The strength and success of the action was rooted in the coalition of cleaners and their union, organized student activists, university faculty and staff members, activists from the Occupy movement, and other radical and progressive groups in the community.

The universities were chosen as the sites for action because these groups all realized that their struggles all intersect there. The cuts to higher education budgets mean job losses for university staff and contract workers, increased workloads and decreased independence for faculty members, and higher tuition and lower quality education for students. The occupiers also realize that the university is a site where strategic interventions can produce concrete victories as well as ripple effects to go well beyond campus—the same realization that made the Students Against Sweatshops campaigns of the late 90s and early 2000s in the US so successful.

There is yet another remarkable aspect to this action. In a brilliant display of genuine solidarity, the cleaners included in their demands on the university that it guarantee the jobs of university catering staff members who are facing lay-offs as the university moves to out-source its food services. The cleaners included this demand as their own despite the fact that the caterers belong to a different union, which did not participate in the occupation (although a number of individual caterers joined the occupation in the course of the action). As part of the negotiations to end the occupation, the university agreed—for the first time—to enter into negotiations with the caterer’s union over the issue.

The occupation has ended (in a partial victory) but the cleaners’ strike and our collective struggle goes on. (As this article is being submitted to the scruffy editor of *NoC*, thousands of cleaners are occupying the central train station in the city of Utrecht). The ripples of these actions and of the creativity, spirit and bravery embodied in the fight of the cleaners for ‘respect and pay raise’ will continue to be felt in the Netherlands and, let’s hope, well beyond.

Love and solidarity from Amsterdam.



“Cleaned enough!” Image courtesy of www.schoongenoeg.nu.

a benefit enjoyed by almost all other Dutch workers—this means heavier workloads and mandatory speed-ups with no increase in pay.

The cleaners strike, which started in January, is the longest strike in the Netherlands since 1933 and is the second major cleaners strike in two years. The 2010 cleaners strike took people by surprise because previously cleaners were not organized and, as women and immigrants (predominantly), they constituted an ‘invisible’ workforce. But their two-year long struggle for ‘respect and a pay raise’ has united cleaners across gender and ethnic background, raised the political and class consciousness of

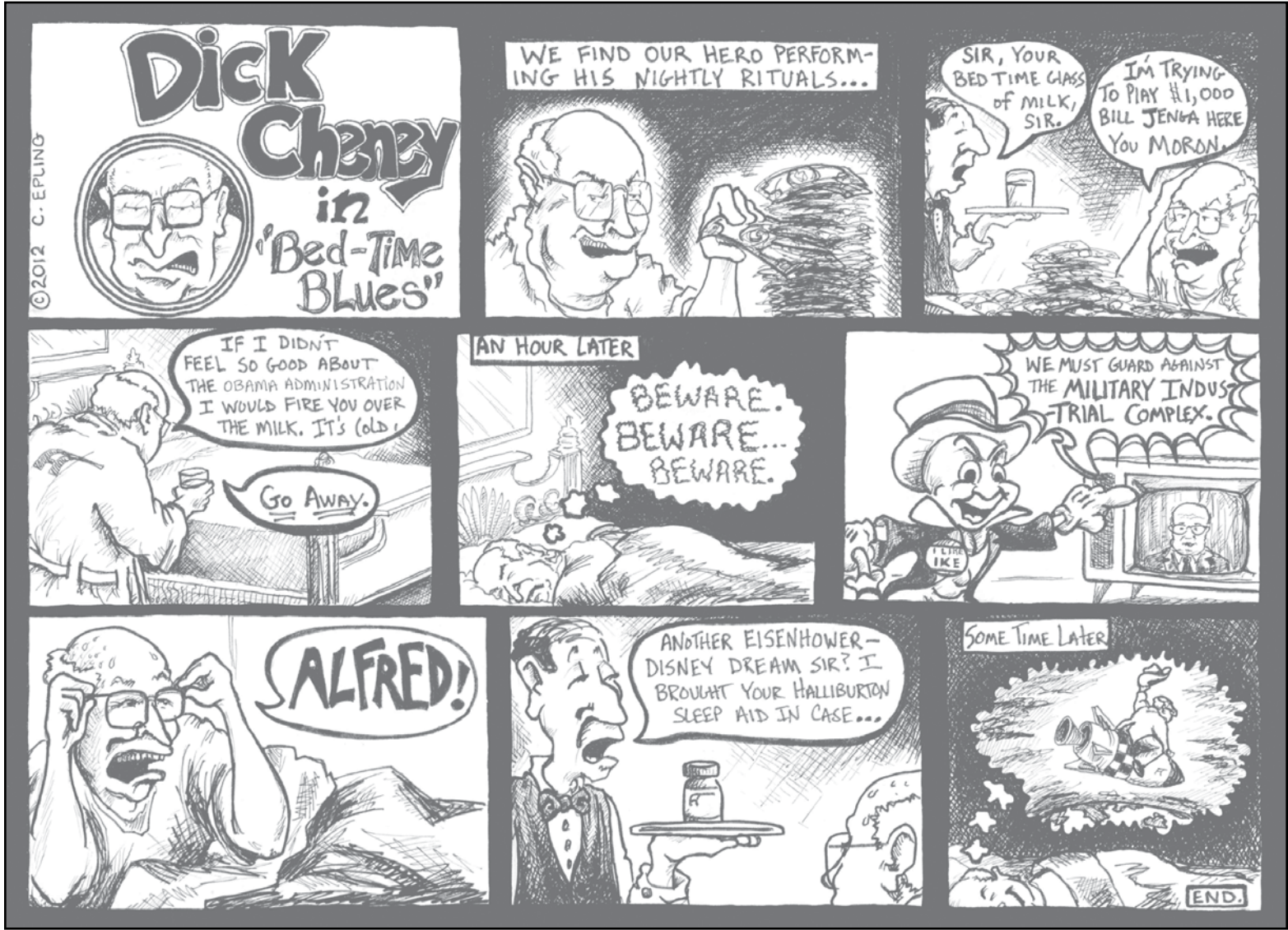
Upon entering the university’s main building, hundreds of cleaners and their supporters immediately took over the main lecture hall while others, along with student supporters and even some university faculty members, visited students in their classrooms to explain the reasons for and the goals of the occupation.

Over the next twenty-four hours, cleaners used the occupied spaces to hold decision-making assemblies, speak about their struggle, attend a lecture on the history of the Dutch labor movement, and watch films on worker occupations and cleaners organizations from other countries (including the excellent

loans, and huge economic penalties for students who do not finish their degrees in a prescribed period), and by school teachers (who themselves held a 50,000-strong strike—the largest education strike in Dutch history—on the second day of the cleaners’ occupation in protest over 300 million euros of cuts the education budget).

Solidarity works

Clearly these combined actions caught the attention of university administrators. Within 24 hours, the university agreed to several of the cleaners’ demands, specifically the re-hiring of six workers who had been fired and a



Food laws and flaws

By Marcus Flores

Of the 14,000 public school districts in the United States, only one has made national headlines for having provided chicken nuggets as the healthful alternative to turkey and cheese on wheat: North Carolina’s Hoke County Schools. The *Carolina Journal* reported on February 14, 2012 that an anonymous “state agent” (who, despite the school system’s best efforts, could not then be located) made a four-year-old girl purchase chicken nuggets to accompany her home-packed lunch.

The incident may be pinned to the list of adverse side effects of a well-intentioned, but clumsy, federal response to the current obesity epidemic. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) somewhat imperiously requires all young students to eat a lunch of meat, milk, grain, and two servings of either vegetables or fruit. Given the viral media response to the West Hoke Elementary School squabble, it was clear that many Americans were surprised to learn federal nutrition standards even existed. More curiously, the story also suggests another point of interest: Hoke County Schools are perhaps the only district in the nation

currently in compliance with the federal mandate.

Indeed, the feds show an admittedly strange set of priorities when choosing their battles.

You may not remember the Food and Drug Administration’s 2011 Amish raid that included “aliases, surprise inspection and surreptitious purchases” for the sake of quelling the illicit sale of unpasteurized milk. Let it be known that milk maids will now be harassed and barn doors will be kicked down over this nefarious contraband. Granted, unpasteurized milk—otherwise known as raw milk—can potentially cause serious gastric illnesses according to the FDA. So can shellfish. The consumer of raw milk *ipso facto* assumes a similar risk as the diner slurping down raw oysters by the dozen. It’s worth noting that the Amish, despite medicinal chastity, continue to live as long as their worldly counterparts (72 years)—unpasteurized milk and all.

Returning to the story at hand, Principal Jackie Samuels of West Hoke Elementary authored a letter to parents stating (or reminding?) that nutritionally deficient home lunches would be supplemented with the missing items at the parent’s expense, even if they go uneaten.

Samuels also cited a “state inspector” as the lunchbox investigator in an interview with the *Carolina Journal*. Other sources identified an employee from the Department of Agriculture as the culprit. The DHHS denied any involvement from its employees, and the whodunit continued until a school investigation eventually named a teacher, Ms. Maynor, as the employee responsible for having “amended” the four year old’s lunch.

At that point, the district *might have* prevented further national embarrassment by issuing an official statement in defense of its employee, something like: “Ms. Maynor is an excellent young teacher still adjusting to the school’s official policy. We are taking appropriate measures to ensure this remains an isolated incident—&etc.” Instead, Hoke County impaled itself by suspending Ms. Maynor until “the issue could be resolved.” What issue? Her careful obedience of statutes?

Ergo, an axiom: the government does not make a good parent. Government is simply too complex. There are national agencies like the Department of Health of Human Services and the Department of Agriculture, in addition to agencies for those agencies, such as the FDA.

Policies (sometimes impractical) develop somewhere within this nexus.

Maynor’s suspension (and eventual resignation) illustrates a corollary: those honoring the laws suffer from them. Her sad case only portends that others may fall victim to the government’s recent health crusade. General Mills and Kraft Foods are currently clawing for an answer to proposed FDA salt regulations aimed at preventing heart disease.

Genetics and lifestyle choices spur the majority of human diseases, and these two factors *should* lie beyond the realm of governance. But since the government chooses to intervene, it would serve us well to remember that children cannot be expected to make sound nutritional choices when they cannot even spell their own names. So here’s an idea: integrate nutritional studies into a child friendly lesson plan. Make sure it works, then make it a core curriculum requirement that every child demonstrate sound nutritional choices upon exiting preschool and kindergarten. This will likely require a committee of educators and dietitians alike. If Hoke County schools would like to lead the charge, Ms. Maynor is probably still looking for a job.

U-Scan (cont.)

continued from page 1

According to Andrea Orr, who writes for Economic Policy Institute, “The country as a whole has lost 7.8 million, or 5.6% of its total jobs since the start of the recession. Because it should have created around 100,000 jobs every month just to keep up with population growth, there is a nationwide shortage of more than 11 million jobs today.”

Automated technology will continue to suffocate many employment opportunities. With numbers like these, it seems apparent that this technology is benefitting only the income of the corporations, which present it in the guise of saving time and money. We seem to be choosing an overhaul of the workplace similar to that of the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions.

A short agricultural history

In the late 1800s, about three quarters of U.S. workers were employed in agricultural fields. Machines became a very efficient means of farming for profit and began to replace the human worker in agriculture. According to Martin Ford, in 2010 the percentage of U.S. workers in agriculture was only around 2-3 percent. Professor Mark Perry at the University of Michigan, writes that between the years of 1790 and 1990, farming jobs decreased by 87.4 percent due to agricultural technology. This is a clear example of how technology has severely affected millions of jobs in a major economic sector.

During the late 1800s, individuals who were no longer needed in the agricultural fields of the south headed north to cities such as Chicago and Detroit. These cities housed automobile or meat packing factories and therefore new jobs. Although some field workers were able to find new jobs in the factories, many were permanently displaced. They arrived and remained in these cities homeless and impoverished as they watched the manufacturers’ profits continue to grow.

Throughout the 1900s, machines proved even more efficient than humans. By the 1980s a single machine could easily replace two or three workers on the assembly line, says Russell Rumberger in *Technology in Society*.

This led to even further layoffs. The newly unemployed were forced to find other jobs for which they were qualified. While some saw this as an opportunity to acquire new skills, most found employment in the service field, a field which allowed them to train on the job. Predictably, 5.5 million or 32 percent

of manufacturing jobs had been lost during the years of 2000-2009, reports Richard McCormack. With the help of technology, the numbers of human and unemployed will continue to grow.

The food industry, particularly fast food, is one of the largest employment sectors in the service industry today. The fast food work environment is incredibly fast paced and challenging. Employees must be able to multi-task while remaining courteous. Many people tend to this service need without extensive education. This industry provides jobs for people from all walks of life.

Unfortunately, McDonald’s is in the process of slowly replacing cashiers with self-serve kiosks.

Some claim these glowing kiosks will be a health benefit to hungry customers who will be able to investigate nutritional facts as they order. This is a far cry from the advertising of fast food chains ten years ago: fast food was then a cheap “on the go” option to quieting hunger, not a means of researching healthy eating habits as lines pile up behind you. It seems, the more trend-driven “sham wow” companies give us with technology, the easier it becomes for us to turn our heads away from the truth—that those kiosks eliminate human jobs.

Who’s working?

In *Consumer Reports*, Anthony Giorgianni explains his frustrations with the ever-increasing self-checkout lines in the grocery stores. The express lanes run by human clerks are slowly declining, and in turn, the lines are beginning to grow infuriatingly long. Many are opting for U-Scan out of frustration, not convenience. As Giorgianni states, “Now, instead of hiring real people, the stores are expecting me to do the work—and for no pay.”

The customer fulfills the role of an unpaid grocery clerk and the computer supervises. There may be a single clerk who watches over five to ten U-Scan machines at once. Corporations have found a way to hire a single individual to replace the work of several individuals with the aid of technology. Are the five minutes a customer saves truly worth the loss of thousands of jobs for others? Shouldn’t we be outraged that we are passively paying these companies big bucks to fire workers so we can do the work for free?

Automated technology has also led to hundreds of thousands of layoffs in the white-collar workforce. One of the larger layoffs due to automated technology of the twentieth century occurred



The computer that supervises you. Photo by Captain Comannokers.

in 1983, when Bank of America, one of the largest banks in the U.S., closed 120 branch offices, eliminating 5,000 jobs through ATM distributions and branch consolidations, according to Rumberger. In September of 2011, Bank of America announced that they would be cutting 30,000 more white collar jobs within a few years because the bank is too large and has too many employees.

Companies use automated technology as the new means of competition in corporate industries. In 2009, Ann Livermore, then executive vice president of Hewlett Packard, pointed out that people, not technology, are responsible for making errors. She states that HP will have programs to automate all kinds of things that once had to be done by humans: “The next five years will all be about who can best use technology to automate the delivery of services.” Shortly after Livermore’s statement, HP laid off 24,500 people. Their largest job cuts were known as “Mark Hurd firings”: Hurd was an HP corporate guru who fired employees in masses based on cost cutting principles.

The automated future

Why would corporations want to hire humans if they can get away with hiring computers as employees? Humans are complex; we have emotions, character flaws, sickness, death, conflicts of personality, and minds of our own. We are high maintenance; we must eat, have restroom breaks, take up space, and need light to work in. Human workers are money driven; we live on wages, retirement plans, and health insurance. Computers do not need most of these things to function in a workplace. In this calculus, would a profit-driven corporation really choose flesh over silicon?

It is important that we work *with* technology, not *against* technology. Computers should be used as tools, not replacements. People have the power to change society and the implications of a disappearing human workforce. It is important for individuals to recognize

what is going on and take steps to let the rest of the world know, *we are not buying it*.

People are waking up to the growing importance of self-sustainability and productivity. Individuals are taking back their right to do for themselves. Consumers are becoming more aware of their purchases. They are choosing to make educated economic decisions by spending money on local businesses, artists, and farmers. They have begun to realize that their local economy is where they can truly make an impact and “vote with their dollar.” In the reality of corporate domination, the most powerful vote we really have is how we choose to spend our dollars. But what happens when we—pushed out of work by machines—have no more dollars to spend?

North of Center is a periodical, a place, and a perspective. Read on to find out what that means.

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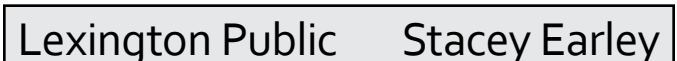
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