**Child labour is back**

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Child labor is back. That’s because rich corporations and their political parasites want it back. What better way, they doubtless imagine, for penniless, unaccompanied migrant children to spend their time than performing dangerous tasks in slaughterhouses or moiling with toxic cleansers in factories? What else are these kids going to do with their time? Go to school? Not likely, if our oligarchs have it their way. Corporate billionaires need workers, especially post-Great Resignation, when millions of employees, after remembering thanks to covid that life is short, basically said “You can take this lousy job and shove it.” As a result, it’s a tight labor market, despite the Federal Reserve’s best efforts to boost unemployment, to wit, Fed chairman Jerome Powell’s interest rate increases, his volley in the class war that backfired, potentially taking down the banks (poetic justice that could ruin us all). And a tight labor market means higher wages. Our corporate bigwigs don’t like that at all, and thus eye child workers all the more eagerly, because they can pay them peanuts.

Also jumping on the tawdry child labor bandwagon are states like Minnesota and Iowa. There, GOP legislators want exceptions to child labor regulations, so kids can work longer hours and to “protect employers from liabilities due to sickness or accidents,” per the proposed bills’ language, as RT reported February 24. Washington even lends a hand – with a new rule in January, lowering the age of professional truck drivers from 21 to 18. So now, according to CNN January 19, 18-year-olds can drive semi-trucks across state lines, because “the US government is setting up an apprenticeship program for young truckers.” This will lead to many more collisions and other potentially lethal events, but the feds don’t care – like Powell, they see a class war to win for the billionaires, so road safety? A thing of the past, innit?

If you ask cui bono? The answer isn’t these luckless teenagers. It’s the industry, which needs roughly 80,000 more drivers. Currently 49 states and Washington, DC license people under 21 – but not to cross state lines. So this program seems like fixing a mere technicality, right? Wrong. What’s never mentioned is raising truckers’ wages. That would solve the staffing shortage tout de suite. But the American Trucking Association is so shy about mentioning this, it hasn’t murmured a peep, and so our brave government officials, taking their cue from industry’s reticence, tiptoe around it too.

The Truck Safety Coalition has vociferously criticized moves to have kids haul semis across state lines, going back to September 2020, CNN reports. That’s when the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration first proposed a pilot program to allow people 18 years and older to do interstate truck driving; but it wasn’t implemented until November 2022. Youthful truckers boast an extremely high accident rate, so you’ll be relieved to know these apprentices won’t be permitted to drive trucks carrying toxic materials, thus decreasing the chances for innumerable mini-East Palestine catastrophes across the country.

“We’d like to see Secretary Buttigieg demonstrate a genuine commitment to safety and publicly commit to terminating the program…after the first fatality or serious injury,” said Truck Safety Coalition executive director Zach Cahalan to CNN. Good luck with that, Zach. To judge from Buttigieg’s delayed and reserved reaction to the recent train derailment fiasco and the earlier Southwest Airlines flight cancellation mess, he ain’t too concerned about anybody other than the big companies he supposedly regulates. Even though one University of Michigan study showed “a 500 percent increase in injury crashes for truck drivers younger than 21 compared to truck drivers overall.”

Excerpted: ‘Child Labor is Back… with a Vengeance!’ Courtesy: Counterpunch.org