

## The Power of the Pipe

by Dominic Brogsdale

The seed, the spout, the coca plant  
Created by mother nature  
The hands, the minds, the evil  
Those among mankind  
The cocaine powder, the baking soda, the crack  
To countries it travels  
One example, diverse areas, across America  
Within the inner cities  
The man, the woman, the children  
A human being  
That inhaling, that snorting, that vein  
Just that one time  
That stimulant, that hook, that feeling  
That addiction!  
That want, that need, that craving  
No... those lives  
Once father, once mother, once together  
Now that drug  
In thoughts, in plans, in mind  
Now that drug  
Causing anxiety, causing anger, causing aggression  
Causing another hit!  
The child, the teenager, the drug dealer  
The selling  
The chaos, the drama, the money  
The dead bodies  
The funeral, the tears, the cycle  
The police  
To jail, to prison, too many lives  
For too long!  
These blocks, these neighborhoods, these areas  
Across the world!  
But how, from where, from whom  
A mystery?  
This plant, this beauty, this turning  
This deadly!  
My life, your life, other lives  
In utter ruins!  
The deaths, the people, but this is...  
The power of the pipe!

## The Myth of the Deficit

Commentary

By Rana Odeh

Republican governors in Wisconsin, Ohio and New Jersey are attacking public service unions and blaming them for the states' budget deficits. Limiting collective bargaining by public employees is by no means going to solve the deficit problem. State budget deficits are caused by recessions rather than collective bargaining rights. The Republicans are taking advantage of the recession to justify major cuts in social services and working class support networks. Public service unions are now the only major threat in the labor movement that anti-union politicians want to dismantle.

According to John Nichols of *The Nation*, the January 2011 estimates of the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau showed a surplus of \$123 million for the current fiscal year. The state's budget turned into a deficit only after the big tax cuts that Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker has granted to big corporations. And now he turns around and blames the deficit situation on public service unions.

A state's deficit is affected by two variables: the level of spending and the level of tax revenues. During a recession, tax revenues naturally decline because more people are unemployed, therefore they are not paying income tax. With more foreclosures, property tax revenues go down, and with more unemployment sales tax revenues also decrease. This has nothing to do with public sector unions or state employees.

At the same time, during a recession, state expenditures naturally increase because unemployment leads to an increase in demand for social services that are funded by the state. With a higher demand for welfare benefits, the state ends up spending more during a recession than during periods of high economic growth. Again, this also has nothing to do with public sector unions and everything to do with the recession.

The tactic used by Republicans to crash labor unions is very clever. They focus on tax cut policies to gain popular support amongst the working class, but they give a disproportionate advantage to big corporations, insurance companies and banks. The overall result is a huge decrease in state tax revenues, which they then use as an excuse to cut spending and to attack public service unions. What the Republican working class and members of the Tea Party fail to realize is that there is absolutely no politician who is working in their best interest. Budget cuts and the Wall Street bailout negatively affect us all, working Democrats and Republicans alike.

Big corporations are practically blackmailing states into offering them tax advantages in order to not relocate their business to another state or even another country. So, states are racing to the bottom in order

to attract big corporations and lure them in with tax incentives, which is ruining state finances and giving corporations even more leverage to get what they want. An end in the near future to the government big corporation alliance does not seem promising considering the recent Supreme Court decision that removed limitations on corporate funding of elections. One politician does a favor here, one corporation does a favor there and the alliance continues to ignore the rest of the American population while it violates our democracy and human rights.

If Republicans are serious about deficit reductions, they should go after those who caused the recession in the first place. It is hedge funds, investment banks and other Wall Street speculators that caused this economic meltdown. The irony of the situation is that it is the perpetrators of the economic crisis that got bailed out rather than punished and now Republicans want the American working class to pay the price for Wall Street's fraudulent behavior. It is precisely the stock market crash that has ruined state pensions, which is putting a huge hole in state budgets. State employees' pensions that are invested in financial markets have experienced a serious decline since the beginning of the crisis. States, however, are committed to providing the retirement benefits that they have promised their employees, but now Republicans are attacking public service unions so they can put an end to the democratic bargaining process. This is the extent to which Republicans are willing to go in their support to Wall Street against the interest of the American people and the American economy.

The only solution to increase tax revenues and decrease government spending is to ensure that everybody who is willing and able to work has a job opportunity available to them. Budget deficits are the direct result of economic recessions. So, if we take care of the recession, the deficit will take care of itself; it is as simple as that. The government has already spent more money bailing out big banks than it would cost to give all the unemployed a full time job with benefits. There is no excuse for this counterproductive behavior, because the bailout was ineffective, and financially much more burdensome than directly employing all the unemployed under a New Deal type program.

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## My Journey From the Top to the Bottom

From Page 4

The drinking continued and worsened. I would find myself passed out in a gas station parking lot occasionally with my car running. I am certain that I was going to get more alcohol, but by the grace of God didn't reach my goal. I look at it as God's gift to me and someone else out there whose life could have ended because of my irresponsibility and selfishness.

My marriage was going downhill and I separated from my husband. I felt like I didn't need him. We had been together for 12 years. I got into a new relationship with a felon drug dealer. Right up my alley. Now, seeing that almost everything he ever said to me was a lie, I feel silly and so regretful. He was very controlling and didn't like me to compete, model, or leave the house for that matter. Of course this increased my depression to the point where I didn't want to leave the house any-ways. I tried to steal his pills when I could find them and would sneak alcohol.

I was an alcoholic by this time, but these were the only ways I could escape the reality of my life. I tried to end the relationship on several occasions, but when he told me he had lung cancer I couldn't leave. I stayed for two years when I finally had to go to the VA mental hospital in Chillicothe. I had no money now because he stole it all and left me struggling. I was there for 3 months working in a drug and alcohol treatment program as well as a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I was put on mood stabilizers and felt much better. I had been evicted while I was there and lost all my belongings, and I had wrecked my car so that was gone, too. No husband and no home to provide my children with.

I started a program for homeless women trying to get back on their feet. It was called the Amethyst House. I stayed for two months, and decided the environment was too controlled for me and I was too good for that. I didn't realize as I was walking away with my suitcase that I had nowhere to go. I even called my ex-boyfriend, and all he did was take me up to the homeless shelter. I felt like the lowest of the low. It was definitely my rock bottom. I got a job working a couple days a week for \$25 a day. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing. That job did not last

long because my depression had kicked back in, and so did the alcohol abuse. My life was in shambles. My family wouldn't talk to me. I had no husband or place to spend time with my children. My husband told me that they had even quit asking about me. My heart is still broken to this day, because I am still homeless. I don't have enough money to get a place, no car, and even when I did find and look for apartments they wouldn't rent to me because of my past record.

This is May 2011. I have been a homeless veteran since September 16th, 2010.

A blessing came in the beginning of February when my husband's dad and step-mother opened up their home for me to stay in. They are helping me get back on my feet. They are the closest thing to family I have ever had, except for my husband and children who I left behind on my own. I will never stop regretting that. Fortunately my husband is still around and helps me every time I need something.

I like to believe that everything happens for a reason. I believe that you have to fall down in order to get back up and be a better you. God has always been my one and only father. I turned my cheek to him out of embarrassment and a sense of no self-worth. My relationship with Jehovah (God) is growing every day. I have even changed the type of music I listen to because I know that I was influenced by the words and glamorous, risky lifestyles.

My story is embarrassing to me because of the situation that still lies in my everyday life. God is working with me and giving me more and more when I put Him and His kingdom first. The reason my story still weighs heavily on my heart now is because I'm back in school, having friends, and nobody knows the reality of my life, and even worse my past. My life was definitely taken for granted. I was on top and took myself straight to the bottom while everyone watched me go down.

I hope that this story may somehow get to someone who needs to see how life and its disadvantages can attack anyone. The devil is still alive and working hard. God does not make bad things happen to us. He gives us the free will to decide to fall under temptations.