

TOUGH TIMES FOR THE AMERICAN WORKER: THE CHALLENGES HE CONFRONTS



These are indeed difficult times for the American worker. The economic sluggishness has brought a number of challenges that he is confronted with. However, he would be well prepared to face them if he knew what really those challenges were. The challenges are varied, from the simple to the complex, from the weighty to the pedestrian, but burdensome or light; together they make a formidable package and have to be confronted. The foremost problem, without doubt, is that there is not enough work to go around. 8.3 percent unemployment rate in July means that the jobless have a lot to worry about. The second problem is long-term unemployment. Officially the recession has ended, yet three years after its demise, the unemployed are still unemployed adding to the ranks of those who have been out of jobs for a very long time indeed. Last month, statistics revealed that 5.2 million Americans were still searching for a job since the last six months and more. This brings us to challenge no three. Workers have to continue working well beyond their retirement ages, unsure and uncertain of when they can call it quits. They just don't seem to manage to save enough to ensure that they have enough for the rest of their lives. The prime reason for them finding themselves in this situation is because of the pay freezes and pay cuts that they have had to endure owing to the recession. The fourth challenge that most workers find frustrating is accepting shoddy, tacky jobs, because the good jobs are not available. Most workers find such jobs demeaning and humiliating. A worker said that after being laid off from a desk job, he had no choice but to accept janitorial work at a local auto plant. "For two weeks, I was sent to fill in for someone at another building where my only work for eight hours was to empty the wastebaskets and sweep the floor twice per day. The rest of the time there was literally nothing to do, and I had to look busy doing it. Those were by far the longest days of my life." As if not having jobs or poor paying jobs or shoddy jobs was not enough, the American workers also has to tolerate and endure bad bosses. A survey by staffing service firm OfficeTeam found that one in two workers confess that they have had to put up with an insensitive and bad-tempered boss. "Bad bosses aren't necessarily bad people, but they certainly can make work challenging for those who report to them," said Robert Hosking, executive director of OfficeTeam. Last but not the least, and there will be lots of differing opinions on this last challenge, the worker is losing the protective shield of the unions which are one a decline. Although employers have always emphasized on the disruptive side of the unions there is little doubt that they bolstered the wages of working- and middle-class workers. Worker exploitation in any form was frowned upon and employers had to face the collective wrath of the union. Official estimates state that the decline of unions accounts for about one-third of the wage inequality in America. The forecast for the future is not too bright. For all the tall promises, the outlook is bleak and likely to remain so for the next several years.