

Dear Comrades, Friends, and Fellow Workers,

When I turned 16, I got my first job. I worked at McDonald's as a hostess where I was in charge of cleaning the lobby and the bathrooms.

Are you right now thinking, ick?

You shouldn't be. I loved it. Every single minute of it. I made those plastic yellow booths gleam...even on gloomy days. And I often imagined people gasping in joy when they walked into my bathroom. I was, and am, very skilled at cleaning.

Following my time in fast food, I went on to wait tables, teach children math in an afterschool program, enter data into financial systems, and write. At each of these jobs, I've had moments where I hoped people gasped in joy at the work I'd done. But I didn't work for gasps. I worked for money. To live.

Every worker needs to be paid.

But how much should you make cleaning a bathroom?

So many people have jumped in to answer this question. Economists, philosophers, political theorists, historians, revolutionaries, capitalists, and even nerdwallet.com. Forget theirs, here's mine—every job should pay enough for a home, food, and a boat—my version of the Lawrence Textile strike's call for bread and roses. All of us, seriously *all of us*, should be paid at least enough to afford a house and hamburgers for the work we perform, whatever that work may be. But houses and hamburgers don't fully cut it. We should also be paid enough to enjoy those things in life that thrill us, like taking off into the ocean on a small fishing vessel for the day. To catch some fish. To catch some sun. To not be cleaning a bathroom.

Call it bread and roses. Call it life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Call it the American Dream. Life isn't about profit, it's about fishing and basketball and reading, and all the things we write songs and poetry and plays about.

So why do we never get the boat?
Why, instead, does this happen?

Three men in the United States are richer than 160 million of us all together.

My answer is SHIFT HAPPENS.

In the words of UAW President, Shawn Fain, "It is long past time to stand up for the working class."

Standing Up,
J. Albert Mann

Fain, Shawn. "UAW Shawn Fain: "It is long past time to stand up for the working class." Jacobin, September 16, 2023, <https://jacobin.com/2023/09/shawn-fain-speech-uaw-stand-up-strike-working-class-unions-uaw>. March 3 2024.