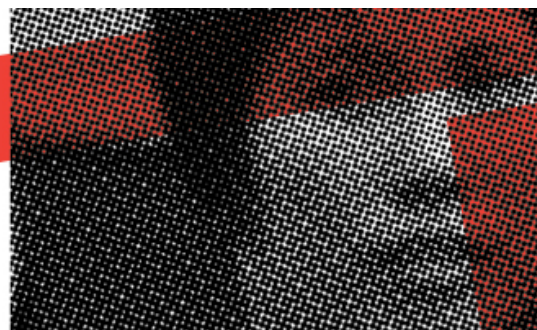


# AIN'T I A WOMAN?!



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## The Fight to End 24-Hour Workday Unites Us All

To monopolize wealth, the ruling class has used every possible scheme to divide the working class. Whether by race, gender, income, or education level - the divisions serve to divert people's anger away from those who hoard and steal wealth. As more working people succumbed to brainwashing that convinced us that there was more that divides us than what we shared in common, Trump ascended to power and fanned the flames of division, and exploitation worsened.

Without focusing on uniting working people, there is no way to fight against exploitation or the racism it gives rise to, or to truly eliminate the disparity of wealth between the haves and the have-nots.

What we need now is to build unity between working people. We have to go beyond fighting for economic demands only. There has been a push for an increase in minimum wage across industries. But as we have already witnessed from the several minimum wage reforms since the Obama administration, these reforms actually shattered the working class more than ever. Instead of resulting in an increase in real income for everyone, minimum wage increases left out those who don't earn the minimum wage, those who make more than the minimum wage, and those who are considered independent contractors. Most importantly, it intensifies divisions in the working class along industry, education, race, gender and age lines, as only a fraction of workers benefit from minimum-wage increases.

Divisions among the working class have exacerbated, allowing for the super-exploited underclass of workers to face even more wage theft and be forced to take on greater workloads. This lowers the standard for all workers. So, more and more workers of all trades are now asked to work longer hours, do three people's jobs or speed up our pacing. Or, more and more of us are out of a job or can't get enough hours. Meanwhile, racism still prevails, and the disparity of wealth has skyrocketed.

A real unifying demand would be to fight against long hours of work, which affects everyone--low-wage or high-wage, man and woman, union and non-union, immigrants and native-born, and regardless of education or age. Workers of all levels of income have been working longer and longer hours, with 24-hour workdays in New York's home care industry representing the most extreme. Long work hours not only destroys our health and families, it also causes others of us to become unemployed and underemployed, and decreases everyone's wage in the long run because we are divided and pit against one another.



It is no surprise that ruling-class representatives, like the self-proclaimed progressive Andrew Cuomo, passed several minimum wage increases in the past 5 years - but refuse to abolish the 24-hour workday for home care workers. It is also no surprise to see 1199 refuse to condemn the 24-hour workday even while their members and other workers picketed the union for 5 months demanding it do so. Or why many educators and activists avoid or downplay the banning of the 24-hour workday - the prime symptom of exploitation and racism - implicitly supporting the existing system of divisions and exploitation.

Let us not have the ruling elites and those who protect them at the expense of workers, fool us again. Only by uniting around the abolition of long working hours will we be able to increase the wages for everyone, combat unemployment and underemployment, and fight to end the divisions and exploitation of working people!

## Burning the Candle at Both Ends Lea Geronimo

The pandemic has revealed the precarity of our lives. Ever since COVID-19 shut down our public schools, I have been my son's remote teacher and therapist. Having to take on these additional responsibilities while working full-time took its toll. I was fired from my job due to the fact that my employer decided that taking care of my son was incompatible with taking care of my boss.

Life before the pandemic was hard but I didn't know how difficult life could become. In 2014 I was laid off from an office job and it was hard to find a new job that didn't demand a willingness to work 55 hour work weeks. I persevered and found a new job with reasonable hours that allowed me to leave work at 5 pm to pick up my son, which was helpful since shortly after I was hired, I learned my son had learning delays. I quickly learned that in order to allow me to leave at a reasonable hour I had to work harder and faster to get the work done. Before long, I was working so much it took a toll on my health. Even though my doctor was adamant about me working a reduced 4-day workweek my employer did not honor this order once the pandemic started and I was working from home. Since last March, working full time, maintaining my family's health and my son's education on top of all the usual household responsibilities, meant there were nights when I had to log into work in the middle of the night in order to get my deadlines done. The moment I could no longer be super-productive, my days at the job were numbered. Despite my best efforts, my boss fired me. Not only did I lose my income, but since October, I've been paying my insurance at a monthly

## Burning the Candle at Both Ends ...continued

premium of over \$1300 a month for me and my son. This does not include the copays, the cost of medicine and the deductible. This has truly been a hardship and fear for me. Without employment, how can my son and I survive?

As NYC goes back and forth-opening and closing the schools--I find myself scared not knowing if I'll be able to return to work if I'm at home as my son's teacher helping with the remote learning.

How did my life get so broken? Frankly, it was already broken before the pandemic. A return to life before isn't good enough as it wasn't working for the majority of working people in America. Like me, home attendants working 24-hour shifts were being robbed of their health and time. Office workers were already working more than 50 hours a week. How many more of us burning the candle at both ends--forced to work longer and longer hours in order to keep our jobs--what will it take before we see the call to end 24-hour workdays as our call too?

The bipartisan system has failed us. It is more apparent than ever that working people need to speak out and organize. This pandemic is clearly showing how these long hours rob us of our time to take care of ourselves, our families and our health, and fueling the inequality between those of us who struggle to live, and the 1% who own the wealth that the 99% of us make. It's time we get up and organize!



## Excerpt from "Inoculations: The Social Politics of Time, Labor, and Public Good in COVID-America" Jennifer Klein

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"...On May 1, 2020, Justa Barrios, a New York City home-care worker and labor activist, passed away from COVID-19. After working twenty-four-hour shifts for fourteen years, Barrios had injuries and compounding medical issues, including asthma, stomach difficulties, and heart problems. Her doctor determined that she could no longer work twenty-four-hour shifts. Yet when the home-care agency received a letter from the doctor requesting Barrios be assigned to eight-hour shifts, the agency dropped her. Barrios fought back. She found her voice in the "Ain't I a Woman?!" Campaign; comrades described her as a "fearless leader." Stemming from an alliance among female immigrants and US-born garment, plastics, office, and home-care workers, via workers' centers such as the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, this organizing effort has sought to end twenty-four-hour days—and the legally permissible practice of paying for only thirteen hours—in New York state through direct action, the courts, union arbitration, and state legislation prohibiting twenty-four-hour shifts. Women such as Justa Barros, Lai Yee Chan, Mei Kum Chu, Seferina Rosario, and Sileni Martinez see the "Ain't I a Woman?!" Campaign as a "new women's movement fighting for control over our time, health, respect and payment." As a cross-racial group, members chose to invoke Sojourner Truth, who tied together the causes of slavery abolition and women's rights, emancipation from coerced labor and from patriarchy, the dignity of women's labor and the dignity of release from work. But this legislation, which would seem so obviously humane and jarringly anachronistic, has been stalled in the New York legislature and ignored by Governor Andrew Cuomo for over a year."

## Letter to the President of 1199 SEIU DEAN WNY

Dear Mr. Gresham

The Disability Education & Advocacy Network (DEAN) of Western New York, implores you to support and advocate for bill A08064/S6640, which would end 24 home care shifts and replace them with 12 hours split shifts. The DEAN Network is a dedicated group of people with disabilities and their allies promoting community education, access, and advocacy. We have strong ties in the community, especially among the many service providers in western New York. Paying workers for only thirteen hours of a twenty-four-hour shift is wage theft. It unfairly compromises the well-being and livelihood of workers and people with disabilities.

A majority of home health workers are women, people of color, and immigrants. According to the SEIU website, the union champions and advocates for women's rights, racial justice, immigration reform, economic justice, and democracy. "[You] believe that women, people of color, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities all deserve to share in the American dream."

At this moment, home health care workers are instructed to work twenty-four-hour shifts, with eleven of those hours spent "sleeping or on a meal break," and unpaid. It is understood that the worker is not allowed to leave the client, but still must remain on the premises. In what other industry would it be legal to hold an hourly employee hostage at their workplace, inform them they cannot leave, yet not pay them wages? It is also understood that workers are to avoid assisting the client during sleeping hours, leaving the disabled person's quality of life and safety to suffer. Is this fair labor practices? Is this the American dream?

We are currently in-the-midst of a global pandemic, one in which New York was hard hit. Home health workers proudly provide care for clients that wish to retain their dignity and comfort by staying in their homes, while exposing themselves, their families, and other clients to this deadly virus. Not only have workers been unsupported to receive hazard pay, but they are forced to remain at work, unpaid for nearly half of their day-long shift. What benefit is gained from union representation that purports to, but does not advocate for basic rights of workers?

The current political landscape in this country is indeed historic. The rights of citizens weigh heavily on action taken by advocacy leaders in positions of power. We ask you to do right by health care workers supported by SEIU and take firm action in advocating for bill A3145/S0359, replacing 24 hour shifts with 12 hour split shifts. It is only through demanding and securing equality for all your represented workers that justice will be served.

## 1199SEIU's 24-Hour Workday Sets Dangerous Precedent for the Labor Movement

Bill Zeman, Treasurer, Citrus College  
Adjunct Faculty Union

In the last half century, trade unions in the U.S. have been increasingly incapable of advocating for their members. Leading this decline now is New York's 1199SEIU that is formalizing the exploitation of home health care workers and sets a dangerous precedent for our movement and labor rights.

The New Deal Era witnessed the ascent of the working class. Bolstered by aggressive organizing by the CIO, sit-in strikes that forced anti-union corporate giants to recognize the unions, by 1947 labor reached its peak with 15 million union members, 35% of the non-agricultural workforce. By the mid-1950s half of all union contracts included some kind of cost of living adjustments. By the mid-1960s the labor movement had created a large new middle class. However, the union busting of the Reagan Era was a symptom of the Conservative Revolution. During this period, union leadership and the rank and file became moribund and less enthused. Rather than fight against conservative policy, union leadership moved towards neo-liberal ideas like business unionism, where union leaders acted more like business executives than true representatives of the working class. This served Clinton and his New Democrats well as they paved the way for the corporate class began the race to the bottom. Good union jobs were outsourced to poorer countries with little or no union tradition and weak environmental laws. The number of union members fell to 13.5% by the year 2000.

The decline of secure industrial unions jobs created an opening for the booming growth of the service economy. But the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), instead of taking up the mantle of getting back to the strengths of the labor movement, its leadership also became as power hungry as the old industrial union leaders, caring less about the fate of workers members and more about getting their numbers up and member dues into the coffers. As one of my union representatives told me, "it is all about per caps", which is how mother organizations like the SEIU are paid their share of dues from the locals.

As a history teacher and the treasurer for the Citrus College Adjunct Faculty Union I am against the SEIU not fighting harder to give the home care workers 8-hour shifts instead of 24-hour shifts. Due to some of these same inequalities, I have recently been cut from 8 classes a year to 2 because the tenured teachers are taking more extra classes and enrollment is down. Most of the rest of my unit face similar cuts. The problems are the same, in our case, the full time teacher's union refuses to consi-

der limiting extra classes to give the part timers more steady work. The problems we face as underworked or overworked workers have the same root: corrupt union leadership combined with exploitative management. This is the regime we must topple.



Bob Angles, retired railroad electrician and longtime member of the IBEW union, speaks at the picket line in front of 1199SEIU led by home care workers calling on their union to support their demand to end the 24-hour workday.

Angles, representing Lower Manhattan Democratic Socialists of America, "When I heard that Governor Cuomo was promoting a 24-hour workday, I was surprised but I was not shocked. But when I heard that 1199 was promoting a 24-hour workday, I was shocked. When 1199 was formed more than 60 years ago, its mission was to advance social justice and economic justice for not just its members, but also for all workers. Shame on 1199 for straying so far from its mission. Shame on George Gresham for promoting the 24 hour workday for its own members."

### Cuomo Upholds 24-Hour Workday to Maximize Profits at Expense of Women Workers

For more than six years, Governor Cuomo has time and again blocked the efforts of home attendants who have been demanding an end to the 24-hour workday. Using his power and influence to maintain the 24-hour shift in home care to enrich insurance companies and home care agencies to the detriment of home care workers and those in their care, the Governor has revealed his true nature: anti-worker and anti-woman.

Cuomo launched his attack on home care workers in 2011 with his Medicaid Re-Design.

He inserted insurance companies into the home care system, obfuscating the flow of Medicaid funding and in the name of cost saving, giving these companies power to depress workers' conditions and patient care.

Soon after, hundreds of home care workers came forward to fight to end 24-hour shifts. In response, Cuomo directed his Department of Labor (DOL) to issue emergency regulations to uphold the 24-hour workday. Workers and organizations came together to beat back the emergency mandate.

When New York state's highest court ruled in March of 2019 that workers who do not get proper sleep and meal breaks should be paid for all 24 hours, hundreds of workers filed claims at the Department of Labor to recover those stolen wages. To this day, Cuomo's Dept of Labor has not recovered wages for even one of these workers.

COVID-19 only exacerbated the crisis as more individuals needing 24-hour care prefer to limit the number of people coming in and out of their homes. When workers alerted the state that agencies and insurance companies were flouting mandates meant to protect workers and the general public, Cuomo ignored their concerns and warnings.

Cuomo claims to be pro-labor and pro-woman, but his actions prove otherwise: he will stop at nothing to keep the 24-hour workday so he can ensure insurance companies maximize their profits on the backs of women workers. For four years, Cuomo benefited from having President Trump in the White House so he can divert all criticisms to DC. Now, with a change in leadership, Cuomo's shield has been cracked and working people have a chance to end the 24-hour workday here in NY and also to stop it from spreading like a cancer to the rest of the nation. We are calling on President Joe Biden to tell his friend Cuomo to finally end the 24-hour workday.

**Join us to make abolishing the 24-hour workday a rallying call that unifies all workers in 2021. Endorse the call to Biden [here](#) and join us to build up to March 8, International Working Women's Day!**