

Look it up

Written by Bruce Enberg

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'Look it up', this is something you'll never, ever hear from the right. They love their talking points that they treat as facts, as they do with any opinion that pops into their heads. Even when they quote an actual real number, they never put it into context.

The big headline today on the rightwing 'news' sites is that the workforce non-participation total is now 89 million. They are implying and hoping you will accept this to mean that there are 89 million unemployed people (all on welfare of course). This is simply nonsense. The number represents everybody over 16 who isn't institutionalized or in the military. Even if you are a 100, you are counted as a potential worker if you have stayed out of the nursing home.

If you look it up, the non-participation number 10 years ago was 73 million, and it has gone up every month since at a steadily increasing rate. Gee, what has happened over the past 10 years that might affect this number? How about baby boomers retiring at an accelerating pace, and a new boom in millennium kids coming of age? The millennium generation is actually larger than the much ballyhooed baby boom.

The right is constantly saying that Social Security and Medicare are going broke (and must be scrapped) because everybody is living longer, but no mention of this affecting the non-participation rate. Of course not everybody is living longer, there is a pronounced demographic divide. People who need to do actual work (shower after work, not before), they aren't living longer. They work until they die. The well-off are living much longer, and they can afford to retire young, swelling the non-participation number.

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That's not to say there aren't millions of people who want jobs but can't find one. Have you heard of out-sourcing? You can work for 40 years in your field and wake up to find that your employer has outsourced your entire industry. Going back to school at 60 to learn a new trade is generally not an option since you have to pay for the tuition yourself with little chance of ever paying it off. Especially since many people you know have 'learned a new trade' several times since Reagan ,and are still paying the student loans. Having your Social Security check garnisheed to pay the corporation that holds your student loan is not an attractive prospect. Student loans are forever, 'mortgage' means 'death pledge'. Republicans like that concept.

The millenniums face a similar conundrum: is college worthwhile? Half of recent graduates are either unemployed or working at Best Buy because all of the new jobs (and most of the old ones) are in India, Philippines or China. But for the un-educated, the service industry isn't growing either. People can't buy services with no job, or a job at half the living wage. Ross Perot's prophetic vision included this gem, "we can't have an economy by giving each other haircuts".

The really frustrating thing is that these aren't particularly complex problems. Obama overstated the difficulty in his convention speech, but he's finally starting to hammer home that the real problem is the Republicans and their billionaire masters. Look around, China is booming, Germany is booming, Brazil is booming. Why are we sliding headlong into decline? What is the difference between us and them? It's not education, it's not the burden of carrying non-whites like the racist right insists. Except for Germany, the booming countries don't even have white people. The advantage they have over us is that people like Mitt Romney aren't in power. They don't believe in Trickle Down economics, they operate on the Alexander Hamilton model. There's a reason Hamilton is on the ten dollar bill without ever being President.

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The Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers that I used for this piece were accessible from the link provided by the right-wing 'news' article. The link was only there to make them seem credible, they don't expect anybody to use it, and they certainly don't expect their readers to realize that their 'news' about the number is just BS.

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