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THE POVERTY LINE

Wal-Mart Asks its Low-Wage Workers to Donate Food to its Low-Wage Workers

November 18, 2013
by Joshua Holland

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If you want to know why the campaign for a living wage has escalated so dramatically in the past few years, look no further than [this story in The Cleveland Plain Dealer...](#)



In Ohio, Wal-Mart asked its employees to donate to co-workers who can

CLEVELAND, Ohio — The storage containers are attractively displayed at the Wal-Mart on Atlantic Boulevard in Canton. The bins are lined up in alternating colors of purple and orange. Some sit on tables covered with golden yellow tablecloths. Others peer out from under the tables.

This isn't a merchandise display. It's a food drive – not for the community, but for needy workers.

"Please Donate Food Items Here, so Associates in Need Can Enjoy Thanksgiving Dinner," read signs affixed to the tablecloths.

The food drive tables are tucked away in an employees-only area. They are another element in the backdrop of the public debate about salaries for cashiers, stock clerks and other low-wage positions at Wal-Mart, as workers in Cincinnati and Dayton are scheduled to go on strike Monday.

Is the food drive proof the retailer pays so little that many employees can't afford Thanksgiving dinner?

Norma Mills of Canton, who lives near the store, saw the photo circulating showing the food drive bins and felt both "outrage" and "anger."

"Then I went through the emotion of compassion for the employees, working for the largest food chain in America, making low wages and who can't afford to provide their families with a good Thanksgiving holiday," said Mills, an organizer with Stand Up for Ohio, which is active in foreclosure issues in Canton. "That Wal-Mart would have the audacity to ask low-wage workers to donate food to other low-wage workers — to me, it is a moral outrage."

Kory Lundberg, a Wal-Mart spokesman, said the food drive is proof that employees care about each other.

It's proof that the lower end of our labor market is hopelessly broken, with full-time workers unable to make ends meet.

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Wal-Mart's profits, like those of other low-wage employers, are already subsidized with public assistance that allows their workers to get by. [Studies](#) have found that a single Wal-Mart store in Wisconsin costs taxpayers between \$900,000 and \$1.7 million per year in public benefits.

As I [wrote recently](#) of McDonald's workers' reliance on the safety net, "This isn't how a 'free market' is supposed to work. These workers are selling their labor for less than the cost of production — less than what it takes to provide basics like food, shelter and health care. Low-wage employers are in turn keeping the cost of their products artificially low by socializing a chunk of their labor expenses."

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Joshua Holland is a senior digital producer for BillMoyers.com. He's the author of *The Fifteen Biggest Lies About the Economy* (and *Everything Else the Right Doesn't Want You to Know about Taxes, Jobs and Corporate America*) (Wiley: 2010), and host of [Politics and Reality Radio](#). Follow him on [Twitter](#) or drop him an email at [hollandj \[at\] moymoyersmedia \[dot\] com](mailto:hollandj@moymoyersmedia.com).

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Newest **Community**



Elaine Clisham • an hour ago
So why aren't you yelling at all the people who patronize Walmart -- because, low prices! -- and thus perpetuate this? Anyone who shops there is complicit. How do we move people away from this kind of predatory retailing, especially people of lower incomes who really rely on those prices? Forcing a "living wage" will raise those prices (how much is arguable), and many of the people who will be forced to pay more won't see the benefit in their taxes. Could you provide a comprehensive flow chart showing that imposing living-wage standards eventually benefits everyone?

Alternative solution: charging back the employer of everyone who works full-time but still relies on public assistance. Is that doable?

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