

## Fast-food condemnation

### Trade unions grill the nation's burger joints

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WHAT do you say to a teenager with a job? Answer: “A Big Mac, fries and a Coke, please.” At least, that was the joke in happier times. Today’s question might be: “What do you say to a single parent with two jobs and no health insurance?”

The old stereotype that burger-flipping is how teenagers earn pocket money is no longer true, if it ever was. Half of fast-food workers during 2010-12 were aged 23 or over, according to John Schmitt and Janelle Jones of the Centre for Economic Policy Research, a think-tank. Only 30% were teenagers; 1% of them were 65 or more. Of the non-teenagers, around 85% had graduated from high school and over a third had some higher education. Many have costly responsibilities; more than one in three is bringing up at least one child.

On August 29th, shortly before Labour Day, protests were staged outside more than 1,000 fast-food restaurants in 60 American cities. Protesters called for the minimum wage to be raised to \$15 an hour, up from \$7.25. (That is the federal rate; some state minimum wages are higher.) The “Fast

Food Forward” campaign has grown rapidly from its beginnings last November in New York, when 200 workers went on strike for higher pay and unionisation (...)

The protests mark the start of a nationwide movement that “has touched a nerve in America about growing inequality”, says Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has helped co-ordinate them. She adds that protesters are winning support from politicians, religious leaders and many poorly paid workers (...) Union leaders urge companies to look at the benefits of paying higher wages, such as reducing staff turnover.

Until recently, hardly anyone tried to organise fast-food workers, because none of them intended to stay in a McJob for long. That this is changing is a “sign of how desperate things have become for low-wage workers”, says Mr Schmitt.

Yet waving placards is unlikely to raise wages much. Although unemployment has fallen from a peak of 10% in 2009 to 7.4% today, there are still plenty of jobless Americans available to serve the burgers the strikers won’t. And if the cost of labour rises, firms may use less of it. “The burgers of tomorrow could be made by robots,” warns the Employment Policies Institute, which is funded by business.

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## CORRIGÉ DE L’ANALYSE DU DOCUMENT

WHO SPEAKS TO WHOM ?	WHAT ABOUT ?	WHAT FOR ?	HOW ?	BRANCHING OUT
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This article written a year ago is looking at an ever-increasing debated issue involving trade unions and business as a whole: the two parties have often been at odds, inasmuch as unionists are sometimes said to traditionally view multinational companies as devilish entities whose only goal is to make profit regardless of workers’ well-being and interests. The headline clearly suggests the unions’ irrevocable one-sided vision on this issue through the use of the noun ‘condemnation’ although we may wonder at first sight who is really doomed to be condemned and what the sentence could be. The heading’s pun hints at the general tone of the article, as the verb ‘grill’ comes as a reminder that the unions are gradually seizing power over fast-food chains. The double meaning of ‘grill’ – cook or question a person closely – and once again, we may note the journalist’s resorting to judicial lexicon – leads the path to an article that one might expect to be more of an editorial than a mere unbiased news story.

Thus in the picture Ronald McDonald unsurprisingly looks down as he embodies the McDonald's corporation's gradual loss of ground on social matters. Looking abashed and turning to the left (maybe left wing ?), his striped outfit might even echo that of a convict, looking back on to his past life with a disillusioned nostalgia which contrasts the unionist's blatant smiling face as he is holding a placard that reads 'living wage now'.

The article itself can easily fall into three main parts: past versus present, anger and perspectives, if any, for the future.

### **Past versus present**

It is clearly stated that times are changing in McDonald's restaurants. Young, diligent and dynamic employees are no longer at the core of the corporation's rapid growth. Mc Donald's has now become a company enrolling grown-ups with responsibilities. Gone are the days when its staff was mainly composed of students who gave credit to their employer for providing them good pocket money. Now, the barebones wages breed dissatisfaction and resentment from desperate adult workers.

### **Anger**

That's why a growing proportion of protesters are making themselves heard throughout the nation. Supporters from all sides, including the political sphere, seem to be joining the movement. The words 'growing', 'nationwide', 'movement', 'grown rapidly' are made to entice the reader to get some insight both of the workers' dire working conditions and low standards and the support they should be entitled to get. However these figures should be counterbalanced if one considers the infinitesimal minority they represent compared to the thousands of fast-food restaurant workers, who, as we are explicitly and implicitly meant to believe, might only remain silent for fear of losing their job and can easily be replaced by jobless citizens.

### **Perspectives, if any, for the future**

The final paragraph says it all. Unless the economy goes rampant as it once did, there is no perspective in terms of income raise. Robots – who may ironically resemble Ronald McDonald in the picture – will certainly replace human workers, condemning adult workers to low wages or unemployment. Among the two, which one will be the worst sentence? It is probably up to The Economist's highly educated readers among which policy-makers to pave the way for an answer that will suit both the business world and workers' demands. As a reader, we are thus expected to take part in this think-tank that is all the more tricky as it entails a moral dimension (cf religious leaders joining the protest) along with the need for progress.

## Branching out

Indeed, progress is undoubtedly at the core of this issue. What is at stake is to achieve social advancement and worldwide reconstruction of a booming economy that will benefit both workers and executives. A year after this article was published, politicians still seem to feel concerned with the issue. President Obama himself alluded to the protest in the speech he delivered on September 1st, 2014 at the Milwaukee Laborfest in Wisconsin. In his straightforward speech, he requests leaders of prosperous companies to grant their employees decent wages, and he encourages workers to keep fighting to offer their families a decent life. But it seems that as long as the balance of power between unions and executives is not achieved, progress, whether it is moral or economic, is condemned to be flipping up and down like a grilled burger.

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## GOING FURTHER

- ✚ L'étude de cet article vise à montrer non seulement que le sujet a été compris (l'idée principale + 3 thèmes ont été dégagés) mais aussi que la portée du document par rapport à la cible du média 'The Economist' est perçue. De plus, l'analyse des codes de fabrication d'un article de presse semble incontournable, avec notamment l'articulation entre le titre, la photographie, le lexique et le ton employé par le journaliste. Enfin, un '*branching out*' permet de montrer que la lecture du document ne se limite pas à une vision anecdotique dénuée d'intérêt mais permet de l'inscrire dans une problématique plus globale.
- ✚ Retrouvez le discours d'Obama mentionné dans le corrigé : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NntdCKpPeQ>
- ✚ Visionnez une vidéo reprenant les idées principales de l'article par le biais de témoignages : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYd5Jli\\_u7M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYd5Jli_u7M)
- ✚ Quelques expressions à mémoriser en anglais :

an ever-increasing debated issue	to entice the reader to + BV
dire working conditions	they should be entitled to + BV

we are explicitly and implicitly meant to believe that...	for fear of + V-ing
The Economist's highly educated readers among which policy-makers	to pave the way for
As a reader, we are thus expected to + BV	all the more tricky as

## SCRIPT DE L'ENREGISTREMENT

(voix d'Elizabeth Lardy, formatrice)

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