

how many employees had worked for the far-left Pacifica radio stations and—ingeniously—how many had worked for evangelical Christian stations.

Pandemonium! The Senator's questions "violate privacy rights," yelled PBS chairman Hank Cauthen. The head of the laughably named People for the American Way raised the specter of a "witch hunt." "It's frightening," he said. Don't you get goose bumps?

What's next? Will every business in the country be forced to turn its personnel records over to a bureaucrat on a moment's notice? Will banks be forced to reveal their customers' most intimate financial secrets to the tax police? Will loans have to be allocated by race just because powerful interest groups demand it, and carloads of data gathered and sent to the feds so they can prosecute the heretics?

All that is already the case, and it's making the "free" part of enterprise a sick joke. What Mr. Pressler asked of NPR is nothing like what businessmen—including landlords, lenders, retailers, and restaurateurs—have to put up with every day.

I'm a glutton for punishment, so I listen to NPR's absurdly biased programming most mornings. I've never once heard the businessmen's side of the discrimination racket. You wouldn't know there was one.

Thanks to the Americans With Disabilities Act, for example, an owner can't fire an employee who cusses customers or daily threatens suicide. These are protected mental disabilities, and national victimological radio heartily approves.

To the cheers of NPR, the hiring process now requires amazing agility. The interview itself is fraught with legal land mines. Ask a prospective truck driver if he's ever been a doper or a drunk, and the EEOC will require your firstborn son.

Businesses get hate mail from the government claiming they don't have enough minority this or that. The bureaucrats demand pay schedules, records, sworn testimony, and even family histories. They impose hiring quotas at every level of nearly every business in the country, and require encyclopedias of data for enforcement purposes. There is no right to refuse.

Meanwhile, virtually every means of determining basic competency has been outlawed. Forget intelligence tests. You can't even ask if the person can read. That might be discrimination against the dyslexic. And any practice, such as a written exam, that negatively affects a minority group is deemed unfair, illegal, and downright immoral.

Business could once hire, fire, and pay as its owners saw fit. That's the free market. Despite the sophistry of Washington thinktankers, there is no such thing as "commercial" as versus "private" property. Property is either owned and controlled by individuals, or it is not. And only owners know what array of workers they need to get the job done. Whom they hire is nobody else's business, certainly not the equality inquisitors'.

The federal government, and the enterprises it sponsors, are another story. When the taxpayers foot the bill, they have a right to every shred of information about how their dough is spent. If a U.S. Senator, elected by the people and responsible to them, wants to know about NPR's hiring patterns, I say great.

Does NPR discriminate on grounds of religion? Who can doubt it? And if Mr. Pressler wants to know the number of hairs on Nina Totenberg's head, fine. If she doesn't like it, she can push herself away from the public trough. The same goes for NPR. ■

---

***Business could  
once hire, fire, and  
pay as its owners  
saw fit. That's the  
free market.***

---

## **In Praise of Firing**

*by L.H.R., Jr.*

**Y**oung workers, fresh out of school, tend to be uneducated, untalented bums who drain the profits out of any business unlucky enough to hire them. That's what the employers I know think, and now we have empirical evidence that this view is widespread.

In a study at the University of Pennsylvania, managers of 3,000 firms nationwide were interviewed about their hiring and promotion practices. Overall, they called 20% of their workers lousy. One third of bosses said an amazing 25% of their employees were incompetent.

Liberals will say this is because schools are underfunded. I've got a better explanation. Businesses are no longer allowed to drop people from the payroll as they see fit. To remedy the problem, the glorious words "You're Fired!" need to ring again in the halls of commerce.

The labor market is supposed to be fluid, with young workers gaining experience in a variety of jobs at low wages. They used to be hired and fired, hired and fired, until they became truly valuable to society. If they learned, their wages rose to reflect a growing contribution to the firms that employed them.

But few young people today know anything about this process. For decades, the culture has lied to them about their prospects. Stay in school, said the public service announcements, and you'll be fixed for life. So they stayed, got a degree, and expected the fast-track to executive life. What they failed to learn was discipline, character, manners, and skills employers can use. Naturally, they blame this on the boss, and do even less work, of lower quality.

Employers can compensate for this only by paying low wages and reserving the right to fire—at any time and for any reason. But the minimum wage and union rules conspire to prevent low-wage employment.

And civil rights mania has effectively taken away the ability of business to fire. The EEOC, and the legions of lawyers that live off anti-discrimination suits, have given excuse-making employees legal permission to goldbrick. And today, litigious employees stay on the payroll until their net cost to the business exceeds the average cost of defending a discrimination lawsuit (\$60,000). But even this defensive maneuver doesn't always work. Class-action suits can cause bankruptcy.

---

***Practically  
anybody can file a  
suit charging  
"discrimination."  
If you're female,  
black, gay,  
disabled, or  
whatever, it's as  
easy as screaming  
"I'm a victim!"***

Is it inhumane to fire someone? No, it's simply a signal to shape up or find someone who values you more. Nor is it cruel to want resources to be used profitably. No business should keep unwanted employees on the payroll. It is the businessman's public duty to kick out the undesirables, so talents can be sorted out and jobs passed on to those who want them and can make use of them.

The right to fire is also the employer's guarantee that he won't have to suffer incompetency and resulting losses in perpetuity. And it works both ways. Employees can "fire" their bosses by telling them to take this job and shove it.

Yes, being fired is humbling. But it's also a chance to learn. People discover how to improve their work, the kinds of employers they don't want in the future, the types of work they are good at, and jobs they should stay away from. Taken in the proper spirit, they also learn to respect the property of others, and to defer to authority.

The pervasive threat of firing also balances power within the firm by checking the tendency toward laziness. If employers have no way to fire workers, the channels of authority break down. People grow resentful of instruction. They shirk. They demand perks before they've even learned to do the job. The firm collapses into a government-like bureaucracy.

No wonder our economy is in trouble, as legal restrictions have taken away the right to fire. Practically anybody, for example, can invent a rationale for "discrimination." If you're female, black, gay, disabled, or religiously non-traditional, it's as easy as screaming "I'm a victim!" Even white males can concoct a handicap to cover gross ineptitude. All this makes entrepreneurial capitalists lay out money for services they don't

---

***The Speaker has  
always represented  
the philosophical  
core of his party.  
But Mr. Gingrich  
doesn't come close.***

---

want, the essence of the command economy.

If we want to recapture American business for enterprise, and restore our prosperity, we must bring back the right to fire, and celebrate it. And we need to make sure it is exercised without restraint. Workers will learn to be more productive, managers will see their employees as assets, and instead of wasting 15 years of their life learning how to be victims, workers will prepare to do something decent for others. ■

## **Resign! Resign!**

*by L.H.R., Jr.*

**R**epublican Congressmen are going whew! over Bill Clinton's new, enlarged Mexican bailout. They won't have to vote for it and they can still get campaign contributions from the multinationals.

But thanks to a clearly unconstitutional act of executive power, the taxpayers are still on the hook through the "exchange equalization fund" and the International Monetary Fund. The total peso package will be some \$60 billion now. Will Republicans also stand by as the administration converts the Swiss-based Bank for International Settlements into that ancient dream of John Maynard Keynes, a world central bank?