



放眼天下

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I ♥ LIBERAL STUDIES



Artificial wage increase produces pernicious consequences

Pay increments by nature should be something made to the satisfaction of all. Not only would employees feel happy but employers would also be delighted as such increases would stimulate a corresponding increase in consumption, thereby boosting their businesses. This in turn would boost investment and create more job opportunities. So a benign circle can be formed. However, it must be pointed out that a pay rise that is not in accordance with the market mechanism but merely imposed by government diktat can overshoot the mark, and bring undesirable consequences in its wake. The result would be the emergence of a vicious circle. In the end workers, employers and even the whole society would be hurt. It seems that such a tendency is beginning to manifest itself both on the Mainland and in Hong Kong, deserving of concern and attention.

Hong Kong is to impose a minimum wage which is something new. But recently negative effects have gradually begun to show up. As reported, many franchise business operators have fallen into a predicament in their businesses, and those in remote areas are worst hit. It is estimated that about 10% of the 7-Eleven outlets are likely to go out of business. The problem of job losses as a result of implementing minimum pay for employees surely should be addressed sincerely. To make it even worse, some homes for the aged and the nursing sector in general are also feeling the pressure. As a result, some of the services may have to be closed. The aged or disabled people affected may become homeless.

Even ordinary citizens will suffer from inflation accelerated by imposition of a minimum wage. Many restaurants and security companies have no choice but to increase their charges to offset the burden of higher labour costs. In fact, this is most unfavourable to people at the grass-roots, including the minimum wage earners. Everything becomes more expensive after the wage increase. Proportionally grass-roots people suffer the most. This fully shows the regressive nature of the effects.

The lesson here is that unnecessary intervention in the operation of the market will definitely be retaliated by market. It is really satirical and sad that this should ever happen in such a place as Hong Kong which is known as the freest economy in the world. Now, since Pandora's Box has been opened, other controversies will arise such as whether a worker should be paid for his lunch time and given paid annual leave and whether maximum working hours should be set. Such controversies are endless. In the end the government may have to introduce more and more regulations. As a result, the market will become more and more rigid, and more and more small- and medium-sized enterprises will have to close down. It seems the situation cannot be reversed, so more controversies and problems can be expected. The government will inevitably sink deeper and deeper in its policy mire.

At the same time, controversy is also building up on the Mainland over how much pay rise is adequate. This was started by some officials who claimed that, to attain the goal of doubling workers' wages set in the 12th Five-Year Plan, an annual average 15% pay rise must be aimed for. Needless to say, this is some empty talk uttered in vain. For, after all, wages are decided by the market. Hence the pay rise goal cannot be met without enforcement, and in this case the claim is empty talk. On the other hand, if the task cannot be carried out in practice even with enforcement, then it is also empty talk. Therefore, it may be all right to talk about doubling wages or annual pay rise as forecast figures, but it is neither scientific nor feasible to set them as policy targets.

As a matter of fact, it is impossible for the government to ensure an enterprise's

business performance such as the average annual growth of profits. Then how on earth can the government or enterprises ensure the wage increases? What is more contradictory is that recently relevant government departments on the Mainland have frequently "summoned" enterprises in various industries urging them to take the country's overall interests into consideration and not to raise prices for the moment. But the reality is that, if workers wages are to be sharply increased by 15% when under current circumstances land prices keep steadily going up while prices of raw materials are soaring, those enterprises which really take the country's overall interests into consideration will sooner or later die.

Problems like these have led some people to suspect China is going back to the centrally planned economy. This in fact is not the case. For, with all its problems such as rigidity and inefficiency, a planning economy is still a logical system of balance: changes in consumer goods prices, land prices and wages are made in such a way so as to attain overall uniformity. But the above-mentioned problems point to an order-less economy which is neither planned nor market-oriented: each government department simply does what it can and needs to do. So much so that some want to increase wages while some others want to control prices of consumer goods; some want to increase land prices while others want to curb housing prices; some want to reduce energy consumption while others encourage people to buy cars and electrical appliances; some want to put oil prices and electricity charges under control while others want to raise the price of oil products and thermal coal. What is lacking is effective central coordination. It goes without saying what will happen in the end if things are allowed to go on like this. All in all, it is now the time for both the Mainland and Hong Kong to review their economic policies.

26 April 2011

WORDS AND USAGE :

- ① To sb's satisfaction ; to the satisfaction of sb (idiom) - In a way a particular person feels pleased or satisfied with. (使...感到滿意)
Examples: 1. He won't get paid until he completes the job to my satisfaction. 2. The war came to an end, to the satisfaction of everyone.
- ② Overshoot the mark (idiom) - go beyond what is intended or proper; go too far. (弄巧成拙, 做得過分)
Examples: 1. You add a little cayenne pepper, but be careful - it's easy to overshoot the mark. 2. She clearly overshoot the mark in her estimate of how long the job would last.
- ③ Show up (phrasal verb) - To become easy to see. (變得明顯, 顯現出來)
Examples: 1. At times like these, the true character of the man shows up. 2. Something odd has shown up on the X-ray.
- ④ After all (idiom) - Used to add information that shows that what you have just said is true. (畢竟; 究竟; 歸根結底)
Examples: 1. You should be patient with him; he is a child after all. 2. Can't I stay up late tonight? After all, there's no school tomorrow!
- ⑤ It goes without saying (idiom) - Something that you say when you believe that what you will say next is generally accepted or understood. (不言而喻, 理所當然, 無須贅言)
Examples: 1. It goes without saying you'll be paid for the extra hours you work. 2. Of course, I'll visit you in hospital. It goes without saying!

中文基本功

打敗太平軍非僅曾氏之功 左李駱僧等也盡最後努力

四月二日晚上, 港台《古今風雲人物》續講曾國藩, 說他與其弟曾國荃攻下南京, 太平天國之「亂」即已平定, 國藩以功封侯, 國荃封伯。兩位主持人這樣說, 未免太簡單了。

其實, 曾氏兄弟於同治三年(一八六四年)之所以能攻下南京, 是靠李鴻章、左宗棠在江、浙用兵, 牽制了太平軍主力。此外, 曾氏兄弟, 對太平軍的石達開、賴文光、陳得才等部, 一直束手無策。石達開連敗湘軍, 由江西、湖南打到四川, 最後被四川總督駱秉璋所擊敗。至於賴、陳二將, 就在曾氏兄弟攻陷南京前, 於中原各省屢敗清軍。陳得才因其部下叛變, 將所部歸降清將僧格林沁, 才服壽身亡。賴文光與捻軍聯合, 打敗僧格林沁, 將其擊斃; 他的失敗, 是往後的事了。至於曾氏攻下南京後, 廣東仍有太平軍活動, 到同治五年(一八六六年)才由左宗棠「平定」。把曾氏兄弟攻下南京就說太平天國之「亂」已「平」, 由曾氏包攬全功, 太不全面了。

曾、左、李、駱等軍人同太平軍作戰也

非一帆風順, 他們都是屢敗屢戰。以左、李為例, 他們都擁有洋槍隊, 這就是所謂「常勝軍」和「常捷軍」了。這些英、法、美僱傭兵同太平軍作戰雖則船堅炮利, 也不免損失慘重。「常捷軍」主將美國人華德就被太平軍擊斃; 法國艦隊司令, 於清、英、法三國聯軍進攻寧波時也被擊斃。曾、左、李等清軍, 以曾氏的湘軍損失最大, 所以曾國荃攻入南京時, 實行大屠殺以為報復, 曾國藩於是有了「曾剃頭」的稱號。

清廷雖然很欣賞曾國藩組織湘軍; 順帶也讓李鴻章在進攻太平軍時組織「淮軍」。李鴻章在同治二年(一八六三年)攻下蘇州, 即獲清廷賞賜太子太保銜, 穿黃馬褂, 顯然因為此仗對配合曾國荃攻南京非常重要。清軍攻下南京, 不但曾國荃封伯, 李鴻章和左宗棠也封伯。在滿族統治者眼中, 二人之功僅次於曾國藩而已。當然, 這也是滿洲貴族害怕漢人擁兵自重, 尤怕曾氏一軍獨大, 故用分化手段, 令他們互相牽制, 無法齊心合力對付清廷也。

容若



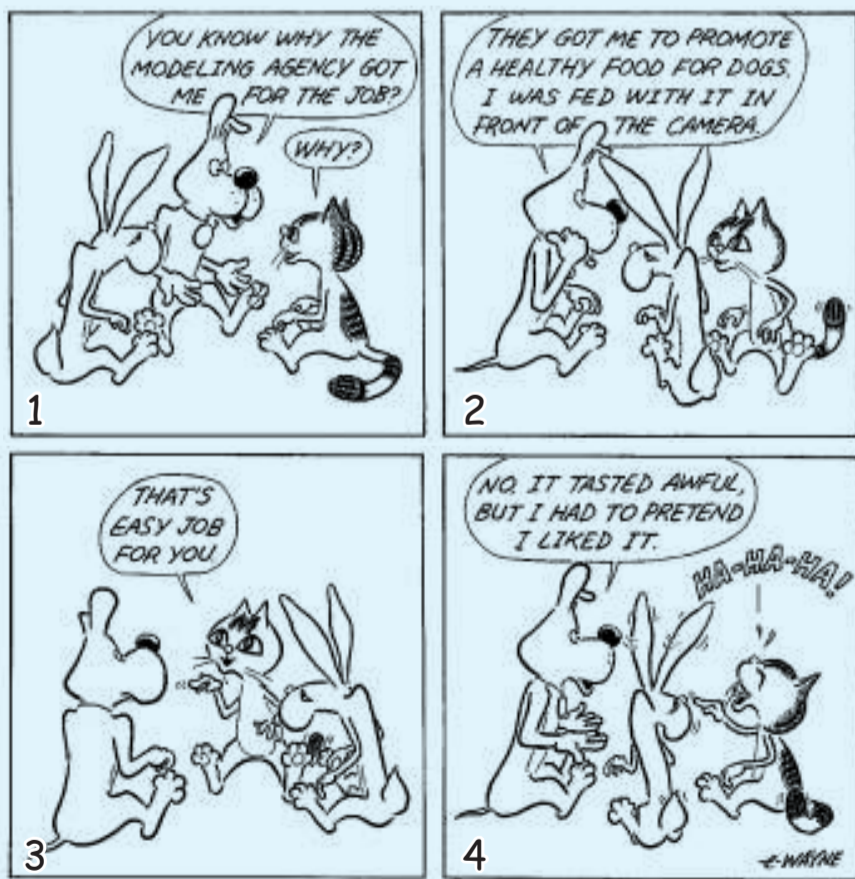
觸景立畫

香格里拉 天葬台



一種古老的信仰, 認為將遺體置於山丘頂端的天葬台上, 直面深遠天際與厚重雲彩, 等待神聖之物啄食, 只留白骨, 便可獲得靈魂的昇華。擁有任何信仰均是一種幸福, 那些依託着信仰的靈魂亦會獲得身後安寧。
汪澄澄

Soho Diary



Avoid Sugar (1)

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In The New York Times(《紐約時報》), I read a story with a frightening title: "Is Sugar Toxic?"

It is written by Gary Taubes and has been one of the most popular stories on the Internet edition of the newspaper recently.

The story is about a lecture posted on YouTube, given by Robert Lustig on May 26, 2009. The lecture is called "Sugar: The Bitter Truth".

I did not listen to the lecture. I read the story.

The story is simple and in a way sounds like what most mothers in Hong Kong would say to their children: "Don't eat sweets. They are bad for your health."

"Why it is bad for health?" their children might ask.

"Because sugar is not healthy," some mothers might say.

"How about sweet soup like green bean soup?" the children might ask.

"They are different." Some mothers might say and add, "anyway don't eat sugar."

The writer of the story in The New York Times is more specific. The Internet version of the story is nine-page long and part of it is not so easy to understand.

In short, sugar might be the cause of some kinds of cancer. So its negative effects are more serious than people previously thought.

In the past, it was said that sugar could make people get fat. And that is why so many Americans are fat. They eat desserts (甜品) and drink too many canned drinks with high sugar content.

If a person is overweight, that person is less healthy and might have heart problems.

人為加薪惡果多 違反市場添煩亂

增加工資本來應是皆大歡喜之事, 員工固然好, 而加薪後收入上升消費增加生意興旺, 老闆亦開心。由此還可帶來投資增加而令就業上升, 形成了經濟的良性循環。然而卻必須注意, 如果加薪不是順應市場機制行事, 而是人為作政策性催谷, 則將帶來惡果疊疊弄巧反拙。還可能形成惡性循環, 令工人及老闆以至全社會俱受其害。這種傾向, 看來在中國內地及本港, 均已開始出現並應引起關注。

本港實行最低工資乃新鮮事物, 但近日已逐漸顯露了由此引發的負面效應。據反映許多特許經營商的營運已陷入困難, 偏遠地區更成為重災區, 估計有約一成的7-11便利店恐怕會面臨結業。保了工資卻失了工作的問題, 確實需要認真對待。情況更為惡劣者是, 一些安老院及護理服務行業同感到壓力, 結果很可能是部分行內企業要面臨倒閉, 所收容的老弱殘疾人士, 或會陷於無處容身之困境。

即使一般市民亦蒙受通脹加快上升之苦。許多餐飲業及保安業, 都無奈要由加價來轉嫁工資成本上升。這樣其實對低層包括拿最低工資的一群最為不利, 工資加後百物騰貴, 而這一群從比例上看受損最大, 充分顯露影響的累退性質。

這個教訓是無必要的干預市場運作, 必然遭到市場報復, 而在號稱擁有全球最自由經濟體系的香港出現, 更屬諷刺和可悲。而且潘多拉盒子已打開, 由此還引發了其他的相關爭議, 如飯鐘計薪, 有薪假期及最高工時等, 爭議沒完沒了, 政府或被逼出台監管日多, 市場則日益僵化, 被迫結業的中小企業隨之上升。何況情勢看來已難於回



▲最低工資政策落實後, 引發通脹及勞資糾紛等連鎖效應

頭, 爭議及問題必陸續增加, 政策泥濘也會越陷越深。

適逢此時, 內地也爆發了有關加薪幅度的爭議。事緣有官員稱, 為達到「十二五」規劃時期工資收入翻番的目標, 要努力爭取工資年均增長一成五。當然, 這是說了等如白說的空話, 因為工資最終要由市場決定, 如果不強制執行, 則說了沒有作用, 但如強制執行, 也實際上執行不了, 說了同樣沒作用。收入倍增及年均工資增幅等, 如作為預測數據還可以, 如作為政策目標則既不科學也不可行。

事實上, 政府不可能保證企業收益如利潤的年均增幅, 那麼政府或企業又怎可保證工資的增幅? 更為矛盾者是, 最近有部門不斷「約見」各行業, 要求以大局為重而切勿在此時漲價。然而現實就是, 若工資大升一成五, 在地價持續上漲而原材料急升的情況下, 以大局為重的企業遲早會自取滅亡。

上述各種問題, 令有些人懷疑中國是否退回中央指令計劃經濟。事實並非如此: 計劃經濟縱有各種各樣問題, 如僵化及效率欠佳等, 但仍是一個合乎邏輯的平衡系統: 物價、地價及工資等等的變動都各有依歸而達致全局統一。上述問題所顯示的走向, 是非計劃非市場的無序經濟: 各部門各盡所能各做所需, 有的要漲工資, 有的要控物價; 有的要漲地價, 有的要壓樓價; 有的要節能減耗, 有的要鼓勵買車買電器; 有的要控燃油電價, 有的要按國際價來定石油電煤價, 所缺乏的就是有效的中央協調。再如此下去會出現什麼情況已不言而喻。總之, 兩地都到了要從根本上檢討經濟政策之時。

2011/04/26 大公報社評

「十二五」規劃最低工資年增要逾13%

本港最低工資政策於5月1日起正式實施。如之前傳媒預測, 負面問題正在逐步顯現。在內地, 根據國家「十二五」規劃提出的要求, 城鄉居民收入增長要達到7%以上, 與經濟發展同步。人力資源與社會保障部相關官員之前提出, 「十二五」期間要努力實現最低工資標準年均增長13%以上。

今年以來, 內地已經有至少14個省市開始調整最低工資標準, 大多數省市的漲幅標準在百分之十以上, 部分地區甚至超過百分之二十。內地對於工資標準調整是否會繼續推高CPI也有同樣擔憂。有學者認為, 如果工資增百分之十, 物價則

省市	調整前	調整後	漲幅
北京	960元	1120元	17%
上海	1120元	1300元	16%
天津	920元	1160元	13%
吉林	820元	1000元	22%
江蘇	960元	1140元	18.5%

單位: 人民幣



將會最少上升三至四成, 並與工資漲幅互相帶動, 形成螺旋上升式惡性通貨膨脹, 勢必加劇國內經濟問題的嚴重性。

美國在上世紀70年代同樣出現過物價/工資螺旋式上漲的惡性通脹的情況。從1969年12月爆發經濟危機, 到1982年12月經濟復蘇為止, 美國約有13年的時間停留在通脹的陰影下。平均每3年多就有一次衰退, 實際GDP的增長速度平均只有2.9%, 而其他時期的經濟增幅平均為3.87至5.69%。與此同時通貨膨脹率前

所未有地高漲, 年平均通貨膨脹率達到10.46%, 而美國戰後各經濟階段的平均通貨膨脹率為2.33%至3.54%。