

A Moral Wage is a Living Wage

by Rev. Paul H. Sherry

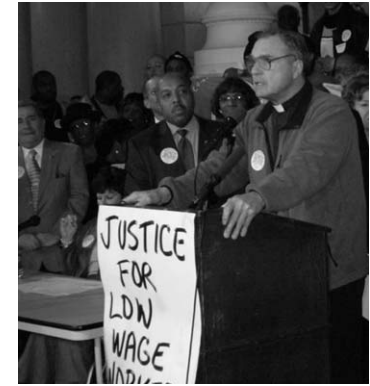
A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it!

That's the bottom line of the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, organized to raise the minimum wage at the federal level and in selected states. We are a nonpartisan campaign composed of faith-based, community-based and labor bodies. We believe with Martin Luther King, Jr. that "There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American (worker) whether he (or she) is a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer."

Though the federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$5.15 per hour, in recent months we have had significant success in a number of states, including Michigan, West Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and won increases in Missouri, Montana, Ohio, Arizona, and Colorado in the recent election. Now the Democratic House has passed a bill to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour. These recent victories and the victories we are anticipating in the near future have led us to believe that raising the minimum wage may well be the most viable instrument available today to combat the poverty that afflicts so many of our nation's people.

Why have we had this success in a time of political and social conservatism? Part of the answer is good organizing. But more importantly, legislators are increasingly aware that people from all walks of life and points on the political spectrum are morally offended by a wage that keeps families in poverty rather than helping them climb out of poverty. Given that awareness, a growing number of legislators are increasingly eager to get on the right side of an issue whose time, finally, has come. Raising the minimum wage is a moral imperative for the very soul of our nation.

It is immoral that workers who care for children, the ill and the elderly strug-



photos: LetJusticeRoll.org

Minimum wage history

When The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was enacted during the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, it was designed to eliminate "labor conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers." Place that visionary statement—that strong commitment—against the current federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour (a wage that places a family of three about \$6000 below the poverty line) and we will see rather quickly, and dramatically, how we have turned on its head the very purposes that the Fair Labor Standards Act was enacted to accomplish. Indeed, rather than eliminating labor standards detrimental to the maintenance of a minimal standard of living, the current minimum wage reinforces those conditions.

One other bit of history. We all remember Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech on the Washington DC

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Rev. Paul H.
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