

EDITORIAL

WE CAN'T RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE—
IT'S A TEACHING TOOL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



IT MAKES TEENAGERS WAGE EARNERS
BY HIRING THEM AS WAGE LEARNERS



WHAT ABOUT ALL THE OLDER WORKERS
TRYING TO SUPPORT FAMILIES ON \$3.35/HR.?



ADULT EDUCATION!



WASSERMAN
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Minimum wage is coming up

With budget deficits and welfare reform high on the political agendas of both parties, legislation to increase the minimum wage is particularly important. Hearings in both Senate and House committees considering minimum-wage increases are scheduled for this month, and bills should be brought to the floor of both houses by late summer or early fall.

In the '60s and '70s, the minimum wage generally provided a family of three enough income to escape official poverty. But with the current minimum still at \$3.35 per hour—it was last increased in 1981—it now falls \$2,100 short of the official poverty level. In fact, the minimum wage's real value is now at its lowest level since 1955. A full-time, year-round worker earning the current minimum will bring home \$6,968 a year, only 77 percent of the estimated poverty threshold of \$9,044 for a family of three.

An increase of one dollar—to \$4.35 per hour—would again bring the minimum wage about up to the poverty line for a full-time, year-round worker with two dependents. Tying further increases to changes in inflation would keep it there.

Conservatives argue against an increase in minimum wages—and, in fact, for its elimination—on the ground that higher minimums mean fewer jobs for unskilled teenagers, especially blacks. The evidence for this is questionable, but even if there were some truth to it, the fact is that some 70 percent of those earning minimum wages are 20 years or older, with 48 percent over 25. And while blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately represented, 83 percent of those earning the minimum wage are white—and 63 percent are women.

Higher minimum wages would not mean fewer jobs overall. It would mean fewer people needing public assistance, and it would give unemployed youths a slightly greater incentive to find work. Conservatives should understand this. Since greed is their operative principle, doesn't it make sense to make work more attractive than welfare?

South Korea surges toward democratic government

In a stunningly sudden—though in some form inevitable—reversal of its long-standing denial of democratic rights, South Korea's ruling party capitulated last week to opposition demands for direct presidential elections and other democratic reforms. The decisive step was taken by Roh Tae Woo, handpicked successor-designate of Presi-

dent Chun Doo Hwan, a former general who seized power in 1979 after his predecessor, Park Chung Hee, who led an army coup in 1961 and then had himself elected president, was assassinated. Roh's bold move instantly ended South Korea's political crisis, which only a few days earlier seemed intractable.

As in the Philippines and Haiti, South Korea's Reagan administration-supported dictator was defeated with minimal force by a population solidly united in opposition to the regime. Led by increasingly determined student demonstrations, all sections of South Korean society joined in demands for freedom of the press, the right to organize political parties and for various social reforms.

Since 1948, when the notorious Syngman Rhee was installed as the Republic of Korea's first president, students have played a leading role in opposition movements. In 1960, Rhee was forced out of office after 125 demonstrating students were killed by police, setting off nationwide protests and ushering in South Korea's only period—nine months—of relatively democratic rule. In the years since the mid-'60s, reflecting the modernization and growth of South Korea's economy, the number of colleges and universities has grown from 70 to 201 and the number of students from 109,000 to 1,277,000. And the students, in a society with a deep respect for education and learning, have become the nation's best organized and most effective political force.

Like Japan, South Korea has been a nation of economic miracles. Since the '40s, per capita gross national product has grown from less than \$200 to \$2,200. In 1965 there was only one car for every 2,600 people and .8 telephones per 100; now there is a car for every 85 people and 14 telephones per 100. Last year South Korea's economy grew by 12.5 percent, and it is now growing even more rapidly. This has been made possible by a combination of massive American aid, accessibility to the most modern technology and a culture of discipline. But despite a rapidly increasing standard of living, dissatisfaction has been widespread.

In its own way, and despite vastly different economies, South Korea's experience is similar to Poland's in 1980. In both instances, an increasingly educated and literate working population found the continued denial of civil liberties and political rights unbearable. In both nations the political system was conflicting too sharply with the nation's needs. Unfortunately for the Solidarity movement, the presence of Soviet troops frustrated their victory.

The South Koreans have been more fortunate. A combination of the massive popular movement, the need for stability and international respectability before the 1988 Olympic games in Seoul and an American administration increasingly sensitive to world opinion about its support of right-wing dictatorships made this initial victory possible.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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LETTERS

Clarity

YOUR PAPER HAS ALWAYS BEEN LUKEWARM ON gay issues, but your editorial "AIDS Plan Merits Thought..." (ITT, June 10) shows your homophobia clearly. While you take the Reagan administration to task at every turn on other issues, you're in bed with them on AIDS.

Your editorial spouts the same tired refrain that privacy must be "weighed against the threat to another's life that failing to test and notify entails." Testing will protect no one. In fact, it may lull "negatives" into thinking that safer sex rules do not apply to them. Testing is an expensive way to tell people the same thing. If you test positive, you either stop having sex or use condoms. If you test negative, you either stop having sex or use condoms. Testing, discrimination aside, is an expensive farce.

It's absurd that your June 10 issue carried articles on an obscure leftist in Portugal and Wall Street mergers but no report on the Third International Conference on AIDS. Your AIDS coverage is too little, too late. My money can be better spent—discontinue my subscription.

Marshall McClintock, Ph.D.
Arlington, Va.

AIDS slippery slope

YOUR EDITORIAL ABOUT AIDS TESTING (ITT, JUNE 10) is misguided and wrong. The issue is an important measure of one's political approach to the AIDS crisis. And it has already been politicized, like it or not, by right-wing political forces who correctly see AIDS, and AIDS antibody testing, as a tremendous opportunity to advance their authoritarian (and racist, sexist and homophobic) political agenda. For us to withdraw from this battle, as your editorial advised, means giving up the high ground and seriously weakening further efforts to stop the spread of AIDS.

Immigrant testing for infectious diseases may have ample precedent, as you say, but does that make it morally right? There's a rich irony in the prospect of the USA (single largest exporter of AIDS in the world today) screening out immigrants who carry the AIDS virus. And what about the thousands of persons, eligible for immigration amnesty under the Simpson-Rodino Bill, who will be denied and deported because they were exposed to AIDS while living in this country? What if their native countries, following the U.S. example, refuse to take them back? Your editorial is irresponsible in endorsing immigrant testing, without making mention of the tragic results that can be expected to follow.

Your concern for persons unknowingly exposed to AIDS by other AIDS carriers is meaningless as long as you accept the view that their main defense is widespread testing. How will testing (either voluntary or mandatory) serve to protect them? By itself, it will not. In order for testing truly to protect these "unknowing victims," you must publicly report the test results and, since no amount of reporting will reach everyone, you must physically isolate the AIDS virus carriers. I doubt if this is what you had in mind, but other pro-test advocates have thought it through more completely. Senators Jesse Helms and Alan Simpson have both pointed out, approvingly, that the logic

of testing leads to detention and quarantine. They're for it; we're against it. But if we both embrace testing as a technique for AIDS control, we've started down the same slippery slope.

Education always has been, and remains, our best weapon against AIDS. It is more effective, and no more expensive, than testing. It doesn't discriminate, require lists, or give falsely alarming nor falsely assuring "scientific" answers. It assumes that we are all at risk and should all adopt similar lower-risk practices.

Franz Martin
Los Angeles

There is no AIDS test

ITT SEEMS UNLIKELY TO START CALLING THE Somozan bandits in Nicaragua "Freedom Fighters" or Oliver North "a misguided patriot," but on an issue that strikes much closer to home for many of your readers, your June 10 editorial buys into the language used by this dreadful administration to misdirect attention and effort in the AIDS crisis.

To talk of an "AIDS test" or to say that persons whose blood contains HIV antibodies are "infected with the AIDS virus" is to concede the premises of people who want to round up unpopular minorities, eliminate opposing views and otherwise turn the mainstream against the Bill of Rights (the drug and pornography scares work to the same ends). The most important thing to say in any discussion of AIDS testing is that *there is no AIDS test*. The present blood test does not register the presence of HIV, the virus widely (but not universally) declared to cause AIDS. It indicates only the presence of HIV antibodies—exposure, not infection.

Although the popular media (along with ITT) has begun to make the leap from "HIV antibody positive" to "infected with AIDS," the implications of testing positive are completely ambiguous. The person so labeled may or may not be infected, may or may not be infectious, may or may not go on to develop AIDS. True, the Centers for Disease Control propose that a certain percentage of those with HIV antibodies should be placed in each of these categories, but at this point, for any individual, a positive test is a warning signal, nothing less but nothing more.

Since a sexual partner may have had the virus but no antibodies at the time of testing or may have been exposed after testing, to rely on test results is a poor way to protect health and life. "To test and notify" offers only the illusion of security to the unexposed and certain damage to the people who will certainly be stigmatized. The only

effective civil liberty here is the right to precise information on how to avoid exposure. You don't need to know the antibody status of another person to insist on the use of a reliable condom or to content yourself with massage and masturbation. Anti-sex, anti-ACLU crusaders like Nat Hentoff are simply using people's fears of AIDS to further another agenda.

Today we have cancelled a recent two-year renewal of our subscription and gifts to both our families.

G.P. Gilbert, J.M. Matthew
Jersey City, N.J.

Editor's note: We did not mean to withdraw from the battle for AIDS education. Education is more important than testing at this point, but the issue has been politicized by those hoping to capitalize on public ignorance and fear of AIDS. We believe this may have tragic consequences as legislatures are stampeded into programs that ignore the advice of the medical community and others most knowledgeable about the disease.

It is certainly true that near-hysteria in some quarters about AIDS is fueled by homophobia, but AIDS is not a gay disease, it is simply a disease that in this country initially struck the gay community. Now, however, the incidence of new cases of AIDS infection among gays is declining sharply, thanks to educational efforts, while the disease is beginning to appear among the general population and may well begin increasing exponentially without adequate education.

The priority for public funding should be for educating the public and for research for a cure for AIDS. But testing is also important. There is an AIDS test, no matter that it is imperfect. Test results must be kept confidential where that is possible. But in principle we see no reason why an AIDS test for immigrants is different from similar tests that have long been mandatory for venereal and other diseases. This is the position the American Medical Association took at its recent convention. We agree with it.

Feticide

JOEL BLEIFUSS' READING OF THE ATTEMPT TO ban amniocentesis in India as a result of peoples' preference (7,999 out of 8,000) for aborting female fetuses (ITT, May 20) raises some vital questions.

If abortion isn't murder, there is little basis for complaint that more female fetuses are aborted than male fetuses. If human beings are not destroyed through abortion, then what can parents who abort female fetuses be accused of? Sexual discrimination against non-persons? The de-

struction of x-chromosomes?

On the other hand, if "female feticide" through abortion is considered "new-found evidence" for those practicing "infanticide," as the article states, then abortion is the murdering of babies by more technologically advanced means than were previously available.

Abortion on demand gives women a degree of control over their lives. It is considered necessary by a lot of people who know first-hand what happens to many unplanned and unwanted children and their parents. But it is also the destruction of human beings. Bleifuss has pointed out this contradiction. We have a choice. We can make abortion unnecessary and impossible. Or we can accept our complicity, for any number of reasons, in this particular form of murder.

Joe DiStefano
Philadelphia

Crime and racism

SALIM MUWAKKIL'S PIECE ON THE GROWING black prison population (ITT, June 10) offers a chilling commentary on the inability of the left to speak persuasively about serious social issues. The rising rate of imprisonment for black men speaks volumes about the marginalization of the black poor, but hysterical innovations of genocide, racism and the legacy of slavery have little weight with a crime-weary public. Most people in prison are victimizers as well as victims. Their violent behavior undermines civic and neighborhood life, most of all in the communities where they live. Criticism of the justice system that does not offer a persuasive program to reduce predatory behavior by low-income males will inevitably be regarded as utopian. It is sad that not one person quoted in the article spoke of the need for jobs, improved education and other programs that might improve the conditions of low-income people. We need redistributive justice, not campaigns to open the prison gates.

Moreover, attributing black imprisonment to "racism" plays right into the hands of conservatives who see criminality as an integral component of black lower-class culture. Differential rates of imprisonment are a telling commentary on our history of racial injustice, but solutions must start from the recognition of crime as a serious problem. No society, capitalist or socialist, can tolerate widespread victimization of law-abiding citizens in streets, apartments and public conveyances. If non-coercive measures cannot be developed to reduce criminal behavior, imprisonment will be demanded by an irate and fear-ridden public.

Mark Naison
Brooklyn, N.Y.

SYLVIA

SOME POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ABUSIVE TELEVISION WATCHING.



People who keep their fingers pressed on the Remote control button so that they can watch every T.V. SHOW AT ONCE, ARE RARELY CALLED TO TESTIFY AT CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS.

7-17

by Nicole Hollander

