

# EDITORIAL/OPINION

## Sub-wage no solution

President Reagan has come up with a proposal to chop the minimum wage for teenagers this summer from \$3.35 to \$2.50 per hour. Supposedly, this reduction would encourage employers to hire more of those under 20 and create additional jobs at the same time. We doubt this will occur.

Black unemployment, as everyone knows, is high and getting higher. Black teenage unemployment is astronomical; current estimates put it at 45%. In March, 1984, that figure translated into at least 500,000 Black teenagers looking for either part-time or summer work.

Reagan says lowering the minimum wage will create 400,000 new jobs, yet we fear the incentive for employers will be to "trade in" their minimum-wage adult employees (who are now getting \$3.35 per hour) for those under 20 who could legally be paid less.

Currently, at least 5 million American workers are getting the minimum wage. Adults

make up 70% of this group and the majority are women. Often, these workers are supporting a family on the minimum-wage pay check. They need the job to survive.

This is not to say teenagers shouldn't have these jobs because they don't need the income as much. But it doesn't take a mathematician to see that paying \$2.50 per hour is more attractive to most employers than paying \$3.35. Who needs the job the most isn't likely to be an employer's prime consideration.

Reagan's proposal addresses this problem by penalizing employers who fire older workers in order to hire younger, less expensive, help, but significant loopholes exist. So much so that the proposal is called the "McDonald's Bill" in government circles.

We suspect that multinational fast-food chain and others like it would benefit much more from a sub-minimum wage than unemployed teenagers.

## Black victory discounted

The recent attention paid to Ed Leek's political defeat by political writer, Foster Church, discounts the role the Black community played in Margaret Carter's victory and the organization it took to get her elected.

The tone and attention of Church's opinion puts a political halo over Leek's head and surrounds him with an aura of innocence. Certain facts, which the *Portland Observer* disseminated during our pre-election coverage, need to be considered when assessing Leek's loss.

This defeat in District 18 was orchestrated by a combination of the unity in the Black community, his abrasive and arrogant personality, and the issues he supported which were not in the best interest of all residents in District 18.

His arrogance was displayed throughout the campaign. On the morning of the last day to file for political office, Leek called Ronnie Herndon and asked for support if he decided to run for Multnomah County Clerk. Herndon said "No," and Leek filed for re-election as State Representative for District 18.

Representative Jim Hill sent us a "letter to the editor" May 9th, disassociating himself from Leek who used a picture of Hill in his campaign literature without Hill's permission.

The unethical use of title by Leek's former legislative assistant (May 10, *Portland Observer*) resulted in an official reprimand by the chair of the Democratic party of Oregon.

Leek raised eyebrows in the community when he campaigned in New Hampshire for George

McGovern. He was representing a district where the rainbow coalition of Jesse Jackson's candidacy drew its colors.

In the *Willamette Week* newspaper's legislative ratings, Leek was scored "below average" by 24 individuals including lobbyists, reporters, legislative staffers and legislators.

Leek was also part of the legislative process that signed the "Juvenile Detention" bill into law. The effect was the release of a teenaged rapist, to the dismay of our Woodlawn neighbors.

Too much credit is given to the Alliance for Economic Development's endorsement of and donation to (\$1,500) Margaret Carter's campaign, coupled with her recent victory. We doubt if any of its members voted in District 18. There is not enough attention being paid to the support of Black Oregonians for Business—a political action committee which funds Black politicians who can balance business concerns with progressive change for Afro-Americans in Oregon. Also, let's not forget the money Carter's campaign raised in teas, coffees and from neighborhood contributions which far exceeded the money from the Alliance.

Ed Leek's concern for progressive reform in the state need not keep him awake at night. Margaret is accessible and answerable to all. For someone who bears no grudges, a congratulatory phone call or letter to Carter remains to be written or heard.

## Miskito problem misunderstood by America

(Continued from page 2, column 4) tacks and the technology involved took the Sandinistas by surprise."

The government's response to the contra activity was to clear a free-fire zone along the Rio Coco (a river along the Nicaragua-Honduras border). This displaced 40-some Indian villages, according to Wilde, and though some Indians were glad to move away from the contra attacks, some were not happy with the relocation.

"They took the Indians to a settlement camp they called 'Tasba Pri'—it means 'free land' in the Indian language—about 50 miles south of the river. There were about 8-9,000 people. They had to walk overland because there are no roads in the area. These are the 'forced marches' Jeanne Kirkpatrick (U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.) talked about."

Adding to the propaganda value of the resettlement was the fact that an additional 8-9,000 Indians went north into Honduras instead. Wilde said, during 1982, these refugees

were massed into one camp in Honduras, overseen by the U.N. High Commission on Refugees. "Conditions were bad. The contras used it as a recruiting ground."

The Honduran Government has since allowed some of the Indians to settle villages further up the river. Meanwhile, contra attacks into Nicaragua continued; Miskito still in Nicaragua would provide information to the contras and the Sandinistas would then come in, arrest the Indians for "complicity" and jail them.

This set up a vicious cycle that further deteriorated the relationship between the Indians and the Sandinista government, she said.

"By November, 1983, there were about 400 Miskito prisoners in the Managua area," Wilde said. "There were trials, some under rather questionable circumstances, but there were no executions," she stressed.

Mediation began between the churches and the Sandinistas. "They were receptive. On December

1, 1983, they let everybody out of prison. They declared a general amnesty for the Indians. There are about 15-20,000 in Honduras now; only a few have returned."

Wilde emphasized the situation now is one of "slow building of dialogue" between the churches and the government. "The government has just remarkably realized their mistake with the Indians," she said. "They seem to have stopped the sweep arrests. This indicates a change in policy."

(Continued next week)

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"They said I have an acute case of Reaganitis."

## Nature of Black families debated

by Dr. Manning Marable  
"From The Grassroots"

Last month's "Black Family Summit Conference" held in Nashville, sponsored jointly by the NAACP and National Urban League highlighted perhaps the major social controversy discussed within the national Black community. As outlined in their conference announcement, NAACP executive director Benjamin L. Hooks and League president John E. Jacob noted that the sessions would endeavor to set "priorities and strategies to preserve the strengths of Black families."

Behind the conference call was a series of disturbing social statistics on the current plight of Black families. Since 1964, the percentage of two-parent families has dropped from 75 percent to 53 percent. The Black divorce rate is double that of whites, and about half of all Black males over age 18 have never been married, separated, divorced or widowed. More than half of all Black children are now born out of wedlock, compared to only 21.6 percent of all Black children in 1960. Since 1960, the number of Black families headed by women has increased by over 300 percent, and over 60 percent of these families live in poverty. In the past eight years, the number of Black families without fathers has increased by 700,000. Even Black middle class families, once touted as nearly a "majority" of all Black households, have declined according to Urban League statistics to only 16 percent of all Black families. The conference generated a number of papers on a variety of themes, from "Patterns of Child Rearing" to "Jobs and Economic Security," but failed

largely to resolve the basic contradiction—what is happening to Black families, and why?

The current debate concerning the Black family is curiously a repetition of a two-decade old controversy surrounding the "Moynihan Report" of March, 1965. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor (now Democratic U.S. Senator from New York) drafted memo, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," which argued that "at the height of deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the family. It is the fundamental source of weakness of the Negro community at the present time." In a ream of statistics, Moynihan noted darkly that one-fourth of "Negro births are illegitimate"; one-quarter of all Black households were then "headed by women"; and that Black youths "consistently perform poorer" on intelligence tests than white children. For Moynihan, the statistics declared that the Black family's pathological development since slavery had created a generation of Blacks who were "inadequately prepared for life" in capitalist America.

In the past decade, a new generation of liberal and radical sociologists—Andrew Billingsley, Robert B. Hill, Joyce Ladner, Frank Reissman, and many others—have attempted to correct the myths about Black families. Billingsley has observed that the sense of cooperation, the importance of community and a commitment to the common good which were part of early Black family life

during slavery has continued into the twentieth century. The Black community itself is an institutional extension of family life. These internal structures develop for Black children "a sense of mastery," a set of interpersonal skills, and acquire social and technical ability. The ultimate socioeconomic and political function of the Black family, Billingsley asserts, is to perpetuate the continued existence of Black people, to provide the necessary cultural, social and intellectual foundations to preserve the community's integrity, and to help to promote the improvement in the immediate material environment in which Blacks must exist.

In *The Strengths of Black Families*, Robert Hill observes that Black families manifest stronger kinship bonds than white families, a social trait illustrated "in the higher frequency to which Black families take relatives into their households." Hill argues that this tight kinship network provides crucial emotional and economic strength which is missing in a middle class, nuclear family unit. Moreover, the extended family creates great flexibility in family roles, in part dictated by economic necessity. Children learn to assume key responsibilities at an earlier state of development than white suburban youth. And surveys of low-income Black families also indicate a "high achievement orientation," according to Hill. A majority of Black working class and poor parents provide support for the children to succeed in school, contrary to Moynihan's thesis.

## Sub-minimum wage cheats teens

By John E. Jacob, President National Urban League, Inc.

Congress will shortly consider a bill proposing to allow employers to pay young people under the age of 22 a \$2.50 hourly wage during the summer months—25% below the current minimum wage.

The National Urban League has long opposed a youth subminimum wage, based on careful study of the issue. Our position reflects the evidence that employers do not currently make use of legal exemptions to the minimum wage laws, the danger of displacing adult workers, and the refusal of employers to hire disadvantaged youth, among others. When considering this bill, Congress should ask why a subminimum wage would create

jobs for disadvantaged youth when an array of tax credits and other generous incentives to employers would weaken the wage base of all workers without creating many new jobs for disadvantaged youth. It would simply stigmatize them as second-rate workers earning second-rate wages.

If Congress is determined to go ahead with some form of sub-minimum wage legislation, it should be limited to a carefully targeted pilot project, involving no more than a handful of cities for a sharply limited time period, and it should have as its purpose research into the direct and indirect effects of a sub-minimum wage.

The experiment should be restricted to teenagers only—it is

unreasonable to expect 22-year olds, many with family responsibilities, to be denied even a minimum wage that produces below-poverty-level income for year-round workers. Worker protection must also be built into such an experiment—health and safety laws must be complied with by employers, and the young workers in the experiment should be exempted from taxes, including the social security tax, to restore some of the income lost by the differential wage rates.

The subminimum wage never was a good idea. It still isn't. It would be tragic for Congress to enact sweeping legislation of this sort without first testing it in a carefully designed pilot research program of temporary duration.

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