

OPINION

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Lifting Communities by Raising the Minimum Wage

The fight for \$15

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Day in and day out men and women all over our country work hard at their jobs—but hardly have anything to show for it.

As the debate over income inequality and narrowing the ever-widening wealth gap continues to dominate our national and political conversations, private corporations and states are taking matters into their own hands, bridging the dueling divides of income and opportunity by increasing the minimum wage.

Target is reportedly raising employee wages this month to a \$10 minimum. This would be the



second wage hike in a year for the retail giant. Only a few weeks ago, the governors of New York and California signed bills that would gradually increase their states' minimum wages to \$15—the highest in the nation.

In the face of the Congress' refusal to increase the federal minimum wage, these gestures from private enterprise and legislative offices reflect a new reality in our post-recession economy: jobs are coming back, but, for the most part, they aren't the kinds of jobs that pay a living wage. Very often, they are not the kinds of jobs that serve as a platform to better paying work. And they are the kinds of jobs that predominately employ young people,

minorities and women—the most vulnerable members of our low-wage, slow growth recovery economy.

What was a Franklin Roosevelt era labor law meant to put a floor on poverty in America has become a low ceiling barring millions of American workers from present and future prosperity.

For 10 years, the National Urban League has advocated for a federal minimum wage hike tied to the Consumer Price Index, which tracks inflation by observing changes over time in consumer pricing for a variety of goods. If prices are going up—and they are—wages that don't reflect these hikes in prices translates into working-class employees never getting ahead and being forced to

make difficult choices to survive, provide for themselves and their family.

The current federal minimum wage stands at \$7.25. President Barack Obama, during a State of the Union address, said, "Let's declare that in the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty." Well, on \$7.25 an hour, you can bet they will. In fact, if the minimum wage kept pace with inflation, the current minimum wage would be \$19. We support a \$15 minimum wage, tied to inflation.

With more Americans surviving on minimum wage than at any other point in our history, to ignore the issue of wages is to ignore the problem of income inequality, and to ignore the struggles of men and

women left behind as the economy recovers. While I applaud the initiative taken by states and businesses to provide employees with living wages, we must put an end to the "vast, sporadic remedies" condemned by President Roosevelt.

The current patchwork of state minimum wages is not a solution. Congress needs to do its job. Republicans supported minimum wage increases under President George W. Bush, but have blocked all efforts to raise it since then. Rather than condemn a generation to a lifetime of poverty, let's afford them the opportunity to earn living wages and climb the economic ladder of opportunity and success.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Did the Vatican Just Throw Out Its Just War Doctrine?

A turn toward nonviolence

BY ERICA CHENOWETH

Last month, the Vatican hosted a conference on the theme of "Non-violence and Just Peace: Contributing to the Catholic Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence," organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace along with the global Catholic peace network Pax Christi International.

In their concluding appeal to Pope Francis, the 80 conference participants recommended that he reject Just War Doctrine as a viable or productive Catholic tradition. They also recommended that he write a new encyclical laying out the Catholic Church's commitment to nonviolence in all of its manifestations—including nonviolent action as a means of engaging in conflict, nonviolent conflict resolution as a way of re-



solving conflict, and nonviolence as the principle doctrine of the Catholic Church.

If such an encyclical follows, this is a big deal.

The just war tradition—which contains numerous doctrines morally justifying violence and war, as well as defining appropriate conduct during war—has served

for the past 1,500 years as the primary normative basis politicians have evoked (correctly or incorrectly) to validate their waging of war.

Because the Catholic Church developed the doctrine between the 4th and 13th centuries, the just war canon has had a monopolistic influence on the way people in the West think about war and violence—whether they know it

of violence.

Conference participants acknowledged the main sticking point for many skeptics of nonviolence—that promoting (or using) nonviolence can be difficult in the face of armed aggression.

Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi International and a participant at the conference, claimed that the group fully considered this challenge. Yet she argued

there are five primary reasons for this—among them the fact that contemporary weapons of war render obsolete any positive impacts that war might have; and what he calls "the compelling, thrilling saga of nonviolent action over the 60 years since Gandhi."

Indeed, among the arguments Pope Francis used to encourage the conference participants was the dramatic rise in the effec-

Because the Catholic Church developed the doctrine between the 4th and 13th centuries, the just war canon has had a monopolistic influence on the way people in the West think about war and violence—whether they know it or not. Consequently, many people now take for granted concepts like the right to self-defense, the importance of weighing the goals of war against its potential human costs, the need to exhaust other options before going to war, and the necessity of only fighting wars you think you can win.

or not. Consequently, many people now take for granted concepts like the right to self-defense, the importance of weighing the goals of war against its potential human costs, the need to exhaust other options before going to war, and the necessity of only fighting wars you think you can win.

Whether you're the President of the United States in D.C., a police officer on the beat in Denver, or a student in a self-defense class in L.A., these moral concepts have probably had a deep impact on your thinking and your experience when it comes to the proper uses

that the international community hasn't yet devoted resources to developing or discovering nonviolent alternatives to armed aggression because of our reflexive turn to violence as the only possible response. In her words, "as long as we keep saying we can do it with military force, we will not invest the creative energy, the deep thinking, the financial and human resources in creating or identifying the alternatives that actually could make a difference."

So—why is the Catholic Church reconsidering now? Reporter Terrence Lynne argues that

tiveness of nonviolent resistance over the past century—a trend we hear a lot around the halls of the Korbel School. In fact, one of the participants in this landmark conference was my colleague Maria J. Stephan, whose work on civil resistance in a variety of struggles around the world helped to provide a strong empirical basis for this conference.

How's that for engaged scholarship?

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