

# Point of View

## BLACKS AND THE MINIMUM WAGE

By Norman Hill

With black teenage unemployment at an appalling rate of nearly 45 percent and with the overall black unemployment rate hovering at close to 17 percent, the need for immediate answers to joblessness is clear. Black political leaders continue to be in the forefront of the struggle to enact legislation which would provide for adequate jobs programs and jobs training designed to prepare jobless blacks and unemployed black teenagers for meaningful employment.

Yet, the sad reality of a government in which the Senate and White House are controlled by conservative Republicans is that all meaningful government initiatives for providing decent employment are blocked. Thus, some black political leaders, frustrated

by the intransigence of the Reagan Administration on the jobs front, are grasping at the few straws that seem to provide some immediate prospects for employing our jobless youth.

One recent example of such frustration is the decision by the Conference of Black Mayors to support the Reagan Administration's bid to install a summertime sub-minimum wage for youth. On the surface of it, a youth sub-minimum wage has its attractions. Wouldn't employers be more likely to hire young black teenagers if they could pay them less than the \$3.35 minimum now imposed by law? Wouldn't such a lower wage result in the freeing up of more money to hire larger number of workers?

In point of fact, however, a youth sub-minimum not only would pro-

vide little relief for jobless black teenagers, it would be disastrous for semi-skilled and unskilled black adult workers. Employers would have every incentive to fire black adults, many of whom have families to feed and replace them instead with teenaged workers. New openings for unskilled

*Norman Hill is President of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, a national organization of black American trade unionists. He recently returned from a two-week fact-finding trip to South Africa.*

and semi-skilled jobs which pay \$3.35 minimum would by pass black adults.

Moreover, black and white teenagers who would be paid a \$2.50 minimum wage would nonetheless have to pay full fares to travel to work, full prices for meals while on the job, and full expenses for school and entertainment. A youth

sub-minimum wage, moreover, would not guarantee that young workers would be provided with needed on-the-job skills training. Indeed, there already are existing mechanisms through which an employer training inexperienced young workers can pay them at a below minimum-wage

rate which takes into account the teaching of on-the-job skills.

There is also little evidence that the establishment of a sub-minimum wage would lead to increased hiring. After all, today's minimum wage is, in effect, already a sub-minimum wage. It has not been raised from \$3.35 an hour since January of 1981. In the three-and-a-half years since that date, inflation has shrunk the value of the dollar by over fifteen percent. Thus, the minimum of \$3.35 an hour is today worth less than \$270 in real terms. Yet, has this lower standard resulted in increased hiring of workers? The answer clearly is "no." In

point of fact as the minimum wage was falling in constant dollars in 1981 and 1982, the number of jobs was decreasing and the unemployment lines were swelling.

Happily, many prominent black leaders recognize the perils of a youth sub-minimum wage. In a statement issued in May, the Congressional Black Caucus asserted that the Reagan proposal for a "youth opportunity wage" is in fact an "employer opportunity wage" which will help businesses and not disadvantaged youths. The black members of Congress asserted that it was "inadequate access to training and education and the failure of the economic recovery to benefit the poor" which was the true cause of unconscionably high levels of minority youth unemployment. The Congressional Black Caucus statement has been endorsed by the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the United States Student Association, the

National Coalition of Black Democrats, and the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

The Reagan plan for a sub-minimum will only have the effect of taking money away from young wage-earners and will pit father against son, and mother against daughter in a cruel competition for low-skilled jobs. Instead, blacks and all working people should join together in supporting legislation proposed by Rep. Augustus Hawkins of California. Rep. Hawkins' bill would pay for part-time and summer jobs for high school dropouts who agree to complete their education.

Only through education, jobs training, and skills training will young blacks and whites learn the skills necessary for a lifetime of meaningful employment. Diversions such as a youth sub-minimum wage do nothing to address this fundamental need. The youth sub-minimum wage medicine prescribed by President Reagan is nothing more than poison.

## Editorial

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, the peacemaker, the presidential candidate, the Black man, is making history in more ways than one. Besides having remained active in the running for the presidential nomination to the end, the Rev. Mr. Jackson has taken it upon himself to go to Lebanon to negotiate the release of a young Black Air Force Officer and succeeded, has gone to Mexico, El Salvador, and Cuba to negotiate peaceful settlements to situations which had not been successfully negotiated by our governmental officials.

From the beginning it was quite clear that Rev. Jackson could not muster enough delegates to win the nomination. However, it clearly evolved that the Rev. Jackson represented a power to be reckoned with. His "Rainbow Coalition" came together rather quickly. His oratorical ability proved to be an asset to his campaign. He presented issues that clearly should have been presented to the higher powers. Few professional politicians have before listened with the same kind of attendant ear as they have during his campaign.

Our wish is for the Rev. Mr. Jackson to be successful in his endeavors to bring about peace, goodwill, and cooperation throughout the world.

May he live long and serve best.

The views expressed on these editorial pages are those of the artists and authors indicated. Only the one indicated as the SENTINEL-VOICE editorial represents this publication.

**DON'T  
SURRENDER  
TO  
CONDITIONS...  
HELP  
CHANGE  
THEM!**

©1984  
BRANDON JR

BLACK RESOURCES INC.



More people have survived cancer than now live in the City of Los Angeles. We are winning.

AMERICAN  
CANCER  
SOCIETY

This space contributed as a public service.