

# Point of View

## Black Fathers

There were twenty men and women on the ship that brought the first group of blacks to America in 1619 to toil in the fields. Anthony and Isabella were two of them. They were lovers. The next year they were married.

Soon, a son they named William was born. They became the first black family in America. The bond of tenderness between them would be tested again and again in the pit of captivity. Slavery would try to deny black fathers like Anthony the right to provide the love and protection Isabella and William desperately needed. But, it could not stop black fathers from caring about their families.

*My name is Thomas Duckett. I am a slave who was sold from a plantation in Maryland to a sugar plantation in Louisiana in 1850.*

*I long to hear from my family how the ar geten along you will ples to let me know how the ar geten along for god sake let me hear from you all my wife and children are not out of my mine nor night.*

Excerpt from

*From Black Fathers With Love*

## South Africa: Whither U.S. Policy?

By Norman Hill

The Rev. Leon Sullivan's recent call for U.S. firms to sever all business ties with South Africa focuses renewed attention on the deteriorating situation in that strife-torn land. It also illustrates the growing frustration among anti-apartheid activists in this country at the absence of a coherent U.S. policy regarding South Africa.

Since Congress voted to override the President's veto on sanctions, the Reagan Administration has virtually washed its hands of South Africa. And while it must be acknowledged that the U.S. has limited leverage in a nation as powerful as South Africa, the Administration's do-nothingness has only served to strengthen the hand of the repressive regime in Pretoria.

Recent developments do not bode well for South Africa's oppressed black majority. National elections

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in May gave President Botha's ruling National Party a resounding victory, seriously weakened the liberal opposition, and increased conservative and right-wing representation in the whites-only Parliament. The year-old state of emergency, which has kept thousands of activists underground or in jail, has virtually vitiated organized, grassroots political opposition. Black trade unions, the best organized and potent vehicles for change, report increased government efforts to undercut and

exploit their activities. On the economic front, the void left by the withdrawal of numerous Western companies is being filled by business from Israel, South Korea, Taiwan and other Asians countries. Recent reports indicated that many of these companies — not bound by the Sullivan Principles to better train, promote and care for black workers — exploit South Africa's reserve of cheap labor and give nothing back to the community in terms of social or educational programs.

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## To Be Equal

Five years ago the nation was debating a youth sub-minimum wage and conventional wisdom said that high wages caused a lack of competitiveness and a loss of jobs.

Today, the debate centers on the long-overdue raise in the minimum wage.

Congress is considering action that would raise the minimum wage in steps from the current \$3.35 an hour to about \$4.65 in three years.

The current minimum wage has not been raised since 1981. But the cost of living has risen 28 percent since then. In effect, that means the minimum wage has been cut by 28 percent over the last six years.

Moreover, the imposition of U.S. sanctions appears to have dampened anti-apartheid activism in this country. This prevailing inertia seems to stem for the assumption that nothing more can be done and the demoralizing impact of Botha's election-day triumph.

But, as Rev. Sullivan suggests, much more needs to be done, now more than

ever. As the standard-bearer of democracy in the world, the United States must be at the forefront of an international effort to chastize, ostracize and criticize the loathsome apartheid regime. The U.S. must be willing to commit millions of dollars to help grass-roots, community organizations in South Africa working for democratic change, and those providing essential healthcare, legal and educational services to the victims of apartheid. In addition to direct aid, the Administration must openly

## Minimum Wage Rise Overdue

By John E. Jacob

Historically, the minimum wage has been at a level of fifty percent of the average wage for non-supervisory private workers. That



John E. Jacob

relationship held until the early 1970s, when it dipped below the 50 percent target.

And in the 1980s, the traditional relationship was drastically broken. Today's minimum is less than forty percent of the average wage.

What happened to the minimum wage duplicates what happened to other programs intended to provide the poor with minimum levels of aid. Inflation destroyed the value of welfare checks, unemployment benefits, and other stabilized payments.

Clearly, it's time to play catch-up now. The minimum wage is a good place to start

since raising it would enable many families to work their way out of poverty by earning a living wage.

Only about a third of all workers earning the minimum wage are teenagers. The rest are adults and many of them are family heads.

But there is a downside that can't be dismissed. A rise in the minimum wage will mean some job losses. Small businesses will be less likely to hire new people and will be more likely to lay off workers.

That has to be faced. There will have to be some

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A basic principle of a democratic economic system is a living wage. Today's minimum is not a living wage — a full-time worker making the legal minimum today earns about \$1,770 less than the poverty line for a family of three.

Because wage scales for many jobs are tied to the legal minimum, a rise in the minimum will have an important spill-over effect, raising wages of millions who are slightly above the official poverty line — people who are poor by any definition but the government's.

That's important because most new jobs are in the low-wage service sector, so a higher minimum will raise living standards for workers in the fastest-growing jobs.

kind of trade-off here, and the balance favors going ahead with a higher minimum.

The record of past increases in the minimum wage indicates relatively small job losses — far less than those predicted by opponents of the higher wage.

The best way to deal with that problem is to ensure training and skills programs that help low-wage workers move into better jobs. That's preferable to downgrading the wage scales to destroy workers' purchasing power and standard of living.

The minimum wage has not kept up with the cost of living, with the average wage, or with the wage necessary to stay out of poverty. It should be raised.

