

Workshop Agenda

How Much Is Enough?: The Self-Sufficiency Standard

Conversation (20 minutes)

The Minimum wage: How'd we get here?

Exercise (20 minutes)

Does it Add Up? Does the minimum wage still make sense?

Calculate whether or not you think the family in the profile your group receives will make it, given the wages they are earning and the assistance they are receiving.

Conversation (10 minutes)

What's the problem with the minimum wage? Make a collective list of expenses that the minimum wage and public assistance are not taking into account. What might a more just minimum wage and public assistance program take into account?

Conversation (20 minutes)

Myths of the minimum wage:

Myth #1: Working steadily at a job is enough to stay out of poverty.

Myth #2: Voodoo Economics: the poor will get richer if the rich get richer, through the trickle-down effect.

Myth #3: Poor folks in the US are better off than pretty much everyone else in the world.

Myth #4: Only the poor get public assistance.

- **Break for Ice Cream - (15 minutes)**

Play Oprah Winfrey interview with Ben Cohen (5 min)

Myth #5: Good Wages are Bad Business.

What might be some of the benefits for *businesses* of good wages?

Exercise (15 minutes)

Calculating Self-Sufficiency: How would you define a self-sufficiency, or equity wage? Return to chart made of what minimum wage doesn't take into account, earlier. What else would we have to take into account for a truly just minimum wage, one based on minimum needs?

Wrapping Up, Moving to Action (30 minutes)

Myth #6: We can't do anything about it.

1. There are Alternatives. The self-sufficiency standard, which we just calculated, is one. But how else could we calculate minimum basic supports? What kinds of institutions and policies might help get us there?
2. There are Successes. Successful living wage campaigns (Harvard Living Wage sit-in, for example). Play a clip from *Occupation* video (Razsa and Velez, En Masse Films, 2002).
3. What can we do? What's going on in our community that we can get involved in? If there's nothing going on, how can we start something? Brainstorming.

Self-Sufficiency Standard Factoids

“A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. We are called to play the good Samaritan on life’s roadside; but...One day the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be beaten and robbed as they make their journey through life. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

There is nothing to prevent us from paying adequate wages to schoolteachers, social workers, and other servants of the public...There is nothing but lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen whether [s]he be a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer. There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum--and livable--income for every American family.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. “Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,” 1967.

Rising economic tides do not lift all boats.

Adjusted for inflation, the minimum wage in 2000 was lower than in 1950, despite a decade of record-breaking economic growth.

Poverty is a childhood disease.

1 in 6 children overall, and 1 in 3 African-American and Latino children, is growing up poor - - even by the (inadequate) official poverty measure. There is a strong link between the percentage of full-time workers being paid low wages and high child poverty rates.

The gender wealth gap is wide.

The typical minimum wage earner is an adult woman. While women make up just under half of the total workforce, two out of three minimum wage workers are women.

The racial wealth gap is wider.

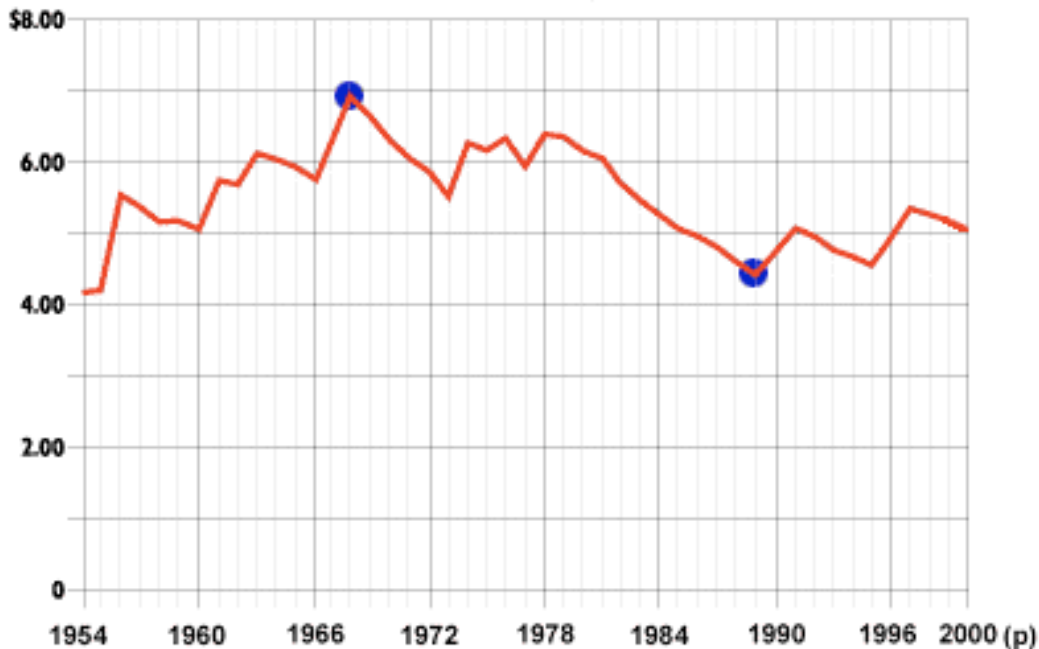
White non-Hispanic families had a median net worth (household assets, including home equity, minus debt) of \$94,900 in 1998, while nonwhite or Hispanic families had a net worth of \$16,400--one sixth that of whites.

Inequality is bad for your health.

The US is the richest nation on earth, but it is the only major industrialized nation *not* to assure health care for all its citizens, whether through a public, private, or mixed system. The US ranks 32nd in child mortality under 5 years old--we’re tied with Cuba and Cyprus, and behind Canada, Australia, Israel, Singapore, South Korea, and all of Western Europe. Lack of health insurance is generally associated with a 25 percent higher risk of death. Uninsured women are nearly 50 percent more likely to die four to seven years following an initial diagnosis of breast cancer than insured women.

The Federal Minimum Wage:

The Value of the Minimum Wage, 1954-2000 in 1999 Dollars



The federal minimum wage was enacted in 1938 in order to put a firm floor under workers and their families, strengthen the economy by increasing consumer purchasing power, create new jobs, foster economic growth in lagging region, and prevent a “race to the bottom,” with employers moving to the cheapest possible labor state.

In 1938, the Federal Minimum wage brought a family of three with one full-time worker above the poverty line. It was calculated by ... But now, a household’s heaviest financial burden is housing... The minimum wage doesn’t bring one worker with one child above that line. The minimum wage is now a poverty wage.

In addition, the federal poverty line drastically underestimates people’s actual needs. The MS. Institute estimates a “minimum needs” budget for a single worker without employment health benefits at \$16, 550 (or \$7.96 an hour). For a single parent with two children (again without health benefits), MS. calculates a minimum needs budget of \$32,999 (or \$15.86 an hour). The self-sufficiency wage varies by geographic area, but in Rensselaer county, the self-sufficiency wage for a single worker is \$7.06 an hour (\$1129.60/month), \$13.31 an hour (\$2129.60/month) for a single parent with an infant, and \$17.71 (\$2833.60/month) for a single parent with an infant and a preschooler.

Minimum wage information and images adapted from the AFL-CIO report, “Raising the Minimum Wage: Talking Points and Background.” Available online at <http://www.aflcio.org/mediacenter/resources/upload/minimumwagefactbooklet.pdf> [Accessed May 18, 2009].

Other information adapted from *The State of Working America, 2000-2001*, available online at http://www.epi.org/pages/books_swa2000_index2/ [Accessed April 18, 2009]
Self-Sufficiency wages calculated for 2002.

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