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### Minimum Wage: Beneficial and a Right

Recently, minimum wage has been discussed in the news. Politically there tends to be two sides to this issue. Conservatives do not think we should pass legislation to increase the federal minimum wage because they think it will not be beneficial and think it will hurt businesses. On the other hand, liberals think it is necessary to increase the minimum wage and that the increase would benefit many people who need it. Furthermore, another part of this issue that is not always discussed is how we view work and our American rights. Most Americans do not necessarily think that workers in any full-time job should earn enough money to provide a decent life nor do they necessarily think of it as a right either. However, we should reconsider that initial viewpoint. For instance, Waltman suggests, “what is critical, though, is for there to be an indissoluble link forged between the obligation to work and the right to receive a living wage” (230). Therefore, increasing the minimum wage nationally is fundamental in recognizing that right and benefiting people in low-wage jobs.

One benefit of increasing the minimum wage is to help fight poverty. The United States still has people living in poverty. One strategy to combat poverty would be to increase the minimum wage. In looking at studies starting in the 1990’s, there are strong correlations with the minimum wage and poverty which results in a strong agreement among economists that increasing the minimum wage will have a positive effect on poverty (Konczal 33). Therefore, over the years, it has been shown that one of the benefits of increasing the minimum wage is

decreasing poverty.

On the contrary, there are many who believe an increase in the minimum wage will result in a decrease of employment or loss of employment. In addition, they believe it will end up hurting the people who it is claiming to help. Nevertheless, Konzal states, “but a wave of research since the 1990s finds little impact on employment due to a higher minimum wage, and some findings suggest that states with higher minimum wages see no negative employment effects at all” (30). Thus, he shows that despite the opposition believing that an increase in the minimum wage will harm employment rates the data shows otherwise.

Another common opposition to increasing the minimum wage is the view that people in low-wage jobs just need to increase their education. This view puts the blame on the individuals instead of the system. In addition, Wicks-Lim asserts, “ten years from now, the Labor Department expects that more than two-thirds (68.5 percent) of U.S. jobs will require only a high school degree. (This figure is virtually unchanged from today’s 69.3 percent.)” (21). Therefore, the view that an individual should just increase his or her education falls short from the facts.

Further, the argument for education being the key solution does not factor in who will take over those jobs the theoretical educated workers leave behind. Training and education is not a completely bad idea, but it is not the complete solution either (Waltman 96). Also, the jobs with the largest projected growth are considered jobs that cannot be shipped overseas and are too hard to automate which means it is harder for a computer to replace a human in that position (Wicks-Lim 22). Thus, these jobs will need workers and an increase in the minimum wage will help those workers. Moreover, this reinforces that even though people are doing jobs that some may view as unimportant and not worthy of a decent wage, they in fact are jobs that need to be filled. As Waltman points out, “in short, someone would still have to empty the bed pans at the

nursing home, mop the floors at the veterinary clinic, and stock the shelves at Wal-Mart. Thus, no matter how much training there is, jobs that are rote and routine will still exist” (95-96). Hence, the workers deserve to be paid better because these jobs are necessary; therefore, the workers deserve to be paid well enough to provide for an adequate life.

Another fallacy in the argument against increasing the minimum wage is that to increase the minimum wage employers will have to dramatically increase prices of their goods. As Wicks-Lim affirms, “if such a restaurant raised its prices—a common way for businesses to adjust to minimum wage hikes—by between 1 and 2 percent, this would likely cover the cost of the minimum wage hike” (23). This equals to being at the highest about \$0.80 on a \$40.00 bill (Wicks-Lim 23). As a result, their research shatters the idea that in order to increase minimum wage it will cause prices to soar. Additionally, they do not like the idea of an increase in minimum wage leading to an increase in people paying for items (which is false), but taxpayers are currently paying for the government assistance programs that help people like low-wage workers afford to live.

Numerous people are against raising the minimum wage, and conservatives tend to be the same people who do not like government programs like welfare and food stamps. As Arnold declares, “employers of subminimum wage employees are in effect free riding on the taxpayers, just as in earlier times, they were free riding on the support provided by other family members” (202). Opponents of increasing the minimum wage may state they do not like the government essentially intervening in the free market, but the businesses do not seem to mind forcing their employees to rely on government assistance by paying low wages. Therefore, there seems to be a fault in their line of thinking.

Moreover, there is data that shows how much money could be saved if there was a change in the minimum wage. The savings could be significant: “increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 is predicted to save 7.6 billion annually in spending on income-support programs—and possibly more, given the conservative nature of this estimate” (Cooper, “Raising”). That is a significant number of dollars to save by shifting the focus to paying workers a number closer to what they deserve instead of forcing them to rely on assistance from the government. Also, this could give a boost to the confidence and feeling of worth of low-wage workers. As Waltman declares, “work gives most people a sense of accomplishment, which invariably makes them feel better about themselves” (87). Also, they can earn what they need instead of having to seek help.

Another aspect that has resulted since we have not consistently increased the minimum wage is the dramatic difference in economic inequality. Konczal acknowledges, “the effects of inequality are heavily researched and hotly contested. But one thing is clear: the falling value of the minimum wage is among the factors that have driven income inequality up over the past thirty years” (31). The minimum wage not increasing over the years has not been favorable. Also, we now have a higher rate of income inequality because we have denied people the right to earn enough money to take care of themselves. As Waltman claims, “furthermore, having not even a bare minimum of economic security reinforces people’s sense, on a daily basis, that they are somehow worth less than others” (3). Thus, the income inequality contributes to a feeling of inferiority and inequality in other ways, too. This income inequality should not be a pattern in America that we allow to continue especially if we profess beliefs like equal opportunity.

Opponents also tend to believe that the market should dictate the wages and the government should not be involved. However, that falls short, “had the minimum wage been

raised since 1968 at the same rate as growth in productivity—i.e., the rate at which the average worker can produce income for her employer from each hour of work—it would be nearly \$18.50 per hour” (Cooper, “Given”). Therefore, the data shows the market has not been adjusting wages proportionately. Instead workers have been growing in their productivity; but they have not been equally compensated for this increase.

Opponents may also argue that the people working the low-wage jobs are a majority of teenagers. However, Luce puts forth, “the vast majority of workers affected by minimum wage increases are not teenagers. As of 2012, more than three-quarters of workers who would be affected by a minimum wage increase were older than twenty” (218). Therefore, she shows that the opposite is in fact the truth that the majority of the workers are older than twenty years old. This makes it harder to dismiss the need for an increase of the minimum wage because we have to face that it does involve workers trying to support an individual or possibly a family. Therefore, one cannot simply dismiss the minimum wage as a means for paying teenagers that are earning money just to save instead of a means to provide a living.

As Americans we usually take pride in our country and the values we stand for as a nation. We often are taught to think everyone has the same rights and opportunities in our system. However, if we start discussing an increase of the minimum wage (as in the news recently) there tends to be a divide among the group discussion. People think it is not helpful and the government should not be involved or people think it is beneficial and there should be regulation. In contrast, what many do not discuss is the right as individuals we should have to work a job and to earn enough to provide a life for oneself adequately. Furthermore, there is enough data out there that shows the benefits of increasing the minimum wage that it is time for it to be implemented. Our society should not allow people in the lower classes to plummet as we

have been doing. We need to make a change to see this issue as a right that every American deserves and allow the benefits of increasing the minimum wage to take place.

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