

A MINIMUM WAGE CAMPAIGN

FOR LOCAL GROUPS

A new weapon in the war on poverty was introduced into your community in February, 1967, and your local organization can play a big role in using the weapon. It is the newly amended federal Fair Labor Standards Act which is frequently called the Minimum Wage Law.

Some 32 million American wage earners are entitled to new, higher minimum wages; over 9 million are being covered by minimum wage regulations for the first time. This means that some of the poorest, most underpaid workers in your community are now entitled to a federally established minimum wage with, for many of them, time-and-a-half for overtime.

While most employers will obey the law, others, through ignorance or evasion, will probably not at first pay their employees the federally required minimum or time-and-one-half for overtime. And many of these underpaid employees, through ignorance or timidity, will not take the very simple steps needed to make the employer pay legal wages.

Your local organization can very easily do an important educational job that will (1) protect employers from the consequences of breaking the law, (2) put more dollars in circulation in your community, and (3) help the people in your community--Negro and white--who most need help, by making sure that they receive the wages that they are entitled to by law.

In putting on a minimum wage campaign you will be cooperating with the United States Department of Labor, which wants help from the community in enforcing the law. And at the same time you will be extending your influence among many groups in the community, most especially among low-

paid wage earners. A group that energetically extends itself to wage earners in the community will undoubtedly increase its prestige and membership.

Some Suggestions on How to Proceed

First read the leaflet "Some Simple Facts About The Fair Labor Standards Act," which explains the background of the Act, the minimum wage regulations in general, and the way to report possible violations. This leaflet is written for laymen, not lawyers or economists, and can be understood by everyone in your organization.

Then go through the rest of the material in the kit, using the table of contents as a guide. Some of the material offers further explanations and information for you, some can be used in your campaign.

Then at a meeting of your group have two or three people who have studied the kit explain the law and a possible campaign to the entire membership.

Here are some things individuals can do to help publicize the law.

Be certain that everybody in your family or among your friends who is an employer understands how the law affects him. Look in the list of publications and send for leaflets explaining the law in relation to specific industries.

Look for the brown-and-white poster, of which there is a sample in this kit, in all places of employment that you enter as a customer. Covered establishments are supposed to display it. If it is not displayed and you think it ought to be, speak to the employer.

Carry copies of the poster to your church, club, union or fraternal organization to publicize the law. Additional copies are available from your nearest office of the Wage and Hour Division of the U. S. Department of Labor.

Ask individual wage earners whom you know about wages and hours in their places of employment, and tell them about the law's new regulations.

Here are some things your organization can do to help publicize the law and inform people about how they can secure enforcement.

Become familiar with the kit and with the basic provisions of the minimum wage law.

Form a committee--it need not be large --of people especially interested in wage-hour enforcement.

Look at your community with new eyes. Where are low wage earners working? Is there some chance that they are covered by the law? What other groups or individuals can give assistance in reaching low wage earners?

Issue a news release to announce your committee's interest in minimum wage enforcement and your willingness to help all workers.

Co-sponsor with such organizations as unions, civil rights groups, human relations councils, neighborhood centers a general meeting of wage earners or of wage earners in a particular industry. You may call upon the nearest field office of the Wage and Hour Division for a speaker if your meeting is large enough. Even if you have an expert at a meeting, make sure you have a general understanding of the law so that you can explain it to the people in your community in a way that they will understand.

Arrange for distribution of the leaflet "You Should Know About Minimum Wages" through schools. The booklet can be read by any schoolchild from about the fourth grade. The leaflet would make a good basis for an elementary school civics or history lesson. It should be sent home to parents. The longer leaflet, "Some Simple Facts About the Fair Labor Standards Act," is suitable for high school classroom use.

Ask for time to explain about the law at church meetings, club meetings, etc. Concentrate on those organizations which tend to have contact with low income persons. Even if you can get only five or ten minutes to talk at the meeting you can do a lot.

Distribute appropriate leaflets or posters to all members of the meeting. Make sure to tell them where they can go for more information or more material.

Interview complainants or workers with whom you have made contact where it is convenient for them. Get as much of the information suggested in the sample information form as possible--in some cases this will not be much. If you have reason to believe or if the worker feels he has a legal complaint report the information to the nearest Wage and Hour Division. The workers, any individual, or a group may make the report.

Keep records. Names, addresses, phone numbers, places of employment, to whom did you talk in the Wage and Hour office, what action did Wage and Hour take.

Follow up with the Wage and Hour office if you filed the complaint--with the worker if he filed it. Be understanding, but request as speedy action as possible.

Where back wages are involved, urge the Wage and Hour Division to get a full settlement.

Remember, throughout, not to mislead workers or give them false hope. Offer information, assistance and follow-through--not promises. Remember that technicalities will have to be ironed out by the Wage and Hour Division.

The work you do in publicizing minimum wages will help your organization in other activities by earning you the trust of people you may not have been in contact with before. If you are successful in helping the employees of even one establishment to get the wages they are entitled to, you can go back to them and talk with greater effect about problems of interest to you such as school desegregation, community relations, or organizing a union.

Here is a chance to cooperate with the federal government, with employers, and with white and Negro wage earners in an enterprise from which everyone will benefit. Success in such an undertaking can be a source of pride to the individuals and organizations that brought it about.