

What We Won in Petaluma

Ben Boyce, Living Wage Coalition Coordinator and Marty Bennett, Co-Chair

On November 6th, the Petaluma City Council unanimously passed a Living Wage Ordinance proposed by the Living Wage Coalition. The Council vote was the culmination of a two-year campaign to implement living wage legislation in Petaluma, the second largest city in the North Bay. Implementation of the living wage law is an important victory for working people in Petaluma and a major step towards creating a public consensus across the region in support of the living wage. We thank our community allies: religious leaders, union supporters, LWC members and friends, and public officials who participated in the campaign.

The Petaluma Living Wage Coalition began meeting monthly in mid-year of 2004, and moved forward to launch an extensive public education campaign. The first step in the formal approval process, in December 2004, was the council's approval of the fiscal impact study prepared by the UC Center for Labor Research and Education. In the summer of 2006 we sponsored several well-attended community forums and educational events. Simultaneously, Living Wage Coalition members collected over 2,000 signatures in support of the ordinance at community events, farmer's markets, church services, and local supermarkets.

The legislation was introduced to the City Council in September and, in coordination with our community allies and political leaders, we made the proposed law a central issue in the fall City Council elections. Notably, every one of the seven candidates for the City Council supported our proposed ordinance. Moreover, the Living Wage Coalition developed a coordinated media strategy and kept the issue in the public eye for six months by letters to the editor, an opinion commentary in the Petaluma Argus-Courier, and numerous radio interviews on local and Bay Area stations.

The coalition received endorsements from many local organizations such as Petaluma

Tomorrow, the League of Women Voters, Sonoma County Conservation Action, the Petaluma Federation of Teachers, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 675 (which represents city workers). We were very pleased that, after several meetings with the Petaluma Chamber of Commerce intergovernmental affairs committee, the Chamber endorsed our proposed legislation. We believe the 6-0 vote by the City Council and unanimous backing of the ordinance by Council candidates are an indication that support for living wage laws is widespread and that the issue has entered the mainstream in North Bay politics.

The Petaluma ordinance is the third living wage law implemented in the county. Like the laws approved in Sebastopol (2003) and Sonoma (2004), **the Petaluma ordinance requires that the City, City contractors, and firms receiving substantial economic assistance from the city pay their workers \$11.70 an hour with benefits or \$13.20 without.**

The law that covers full-time and part-time city workers has already resulted in more full-time hires by the City and will likely discourage recent city employment practices of replacing full-timers who retire with part-time workers. The legislation covers bus drivers working for a contractor operating the City's transit system. These workers received a substantial wage hike that will certainly increase retention and training and improve the quality of the transit services. The legislation also includes a responsible contractor provision that ensures that all major City contractors have an excellent record of compliance with federal and state labor, health and safety, and environmental regulations.

In addition, included in the legislation is a "labor relations neutrality" provision which ensures the right of workers for City contractors to organize a union (another

(Continued on page 2)

Petaluma Sheraton Workers Sign First Contract!

Eileen Morris, Petaluma Tomorrow

Seven years after they began their struggle, workers at the Petaluma Sheraton have negotiated a three-year union contract this September.

The Sheraton is the first union hotel in the North Bay. The contract, which covers 95 employees, includes life-changing provisions for health coverage, retirement accounts, vacations, increased earnings, job security, better working conditions, and recognition of seniority--including provisions that will allow workers tangled in Immigration and Naturalization red tape to return to their jobs when issues are resolved, and provisions to allow part-time workers to qualify for health coverage and other benefits.

The union movement for workers at the Sheraton began even before the hotel had begun construction. The hotel's developers approached the city of Petaluma for

(Continued on page 5)



Rabbi Michael Robinson, 1925 – 2006

INSIDE . . .

(Article on page 3)

Petaluma 3rd City to Adopt LW Law	... 2
Rabbi Michael Robinson Honored	... 3
LW Laws Are Good Public Policy	... 3
Forum With Economist R. Pollin	... 4
Graton Labor Center	... 5
Waging Victory	... 6
Head Start Workers Stand Up	... 6
Membership Form	... 7
Citizens Can Raise The Wage Floor	... 7
Building a Faith-Based Movement	... 8

Petaluma Third Local City to Adopt "Living Wage" Law

Tobias Young, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, November 7, 2006

Petaluma's City Council on Monday voted unanimously to adopt a "living wage" law, joining two other Sonoma County cities that have passed similar ordinances in the past three years. The 6-0 vote, which followed more than a year of negotiations with labor groups, requires a minimum wage of \$11.70 an hour with health benefits, or \$13.20 without, for the city and for workers with companies doing substantial business with the city.

Marty Bennett, co-chairman of the Living Wage Coalition and executive director of the nonprofit New Economy Working Solutions, said he was grateful for the unanimous support. He said the next effort will be to pass a living wage law countywide, now that Petaluma has joined Sonoma and Sebastopol as local cities with

living wage laws. "Certainly now we'll be setting our sights on the county of Sonoma," he said. "We think a majority of the Board of Supervisors are ready to support this. We think the 6-0 vote here and the consensus that emerged here certainly reflect countywide opinion." He pointed to 1,500 cards of support the Living Wage Coalition turned in to Petaluma and support from organizations ranging from Sonoma County Conservation Action to the North Bay Labor Council as evidence.

After discussing the law at several meetings over the past few months, the Petaluma council worked out several concerns to reach consensus. The city removed nonprofits from the proposal after several programs, such as those delivering

meals to homebound seniors, said it would threaten their programs. The Living Wage Coalition will continue to work with the nonprofits and community leaders to generate additional funding so the nonprofits can voluntarily comply, Bennett said. The council also excluded existing leases and dropped a requirement that private businesses that accept city money not interfere in union organizing. The council is expected to consider that issue separately. The ordinance is projected to cost the city and its contractors about \$163,000 annually and result in higher wages for 27 workers, including about a dozen bus drivers working for a contractor operating the city's transit system. If nonprofits had been included, the potential annual cost would have been \$220,000. ■

What We Won...

(Continued from page 1)

means to achieving a living wage), free from interference by the employer. This is an important issue in Petaluma, since in 2004-2005 there were three major disruptions of City garbage services when employees of Empire Waste Management, the City garbage hauler, staged one-day sick-outs to protest employer interference in their campaign to organize a union and win collective bargaining rights.

Finally, the Living Wage Coalition believes Petaluma can become a regional model for progressive urban policy designed to promote sustainable, in-fill, city-centered development, the "Smart Growth with Equity" approach. City staff estimates that during the next 20 years the City will increase by 15, 000 residents to a population of more than 72,000.

The City Council will soon approve an excellent revision of the general plan which will encourage Smart Growth. Over the last five years the Council has approved progressive policy initiatives such as an urban growth boundary, a jobs-housing linkage fee for large commercial development, the allocation of 30% of redevelopment tax increments to affordable housing, and smart zoning codes in the downtown core.

In the center of the City there are two large

redevelopment districts of more than 2,500 acres along the Petaluma River. City officials estimate that firms in the redevelopment districts will create more than 3,000 jobs over the next two decades.

The Living Wage ordinance covers employees of firms receiving more than \$100,000 in direct city financial assistance. We believe our legislation will improve job quality and promote the creation of good jobs with benefits by firms in the redevelopment districts. Increasing wages will enable workers to live near their workplace by making housing more affordable.

Moreover, the implementation of a Living Wage Ordinance complements an earlier "public subsidy accountability" agreement brokered by the Living Wage Coalition for the Petaluma Sheraton Hotel and Conference Center in the Marina. In 2000, in return for \$2.75 million in redevelopment funding and tax abatements, the developers of the hotel agreed to pay a living wage and to remain neutral if their workers chose to organize a union. Subsequently, more than 100 workers joined UNITEHERE 2850 after the union won an election in 2005. The union signed the first contract this past September and workers at the Sheraton will make hourly wages of at least \$11.50 an hour plus benefits.

The Living Wage Ordinance and the

Sheraton public-subsidy agreement together firmly establish the principle that when a private developer is provided City economic assistance, the jobs that are created should provide a living wage and benefits.

Politically, we believe our living wage campaign contributed to building a broad coalition of labor, environmental, religious, Latino, and community-based organizations in Petaluma to support a "Smart Growth with Equity" policy agenda. In the near future these organizations can collaborate to protect the urban growth boundary, to support mass transit, and to regulate "big-box" development.

The Petaluma living wage campaign is an important stepping-stone for the next logical objective, which is to pass a countywide Living Wage Ordinance as part of the Bay Area campaign to establish a regional wage norm. (Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland, San Jose, San Francisco, and Marin have implemented living wage laws.) In Sonoma County, we have passed living wage laws in three of five supervisorial districts; **The Supervisors have expressed an interest in a County Living Wage Ordinance.** Implementation of living wage legislation in Petaluma will unquestionably influence other cities in the region like Novato, Windsor and Santa Rosa, where we will propose living wage legislation. ■

Rabbi Michael Robinson Honored

At the Peace and Justice Center Annual Dinner, Barbara Tomin, Shomrei Torah Synagogue, November 11, 2006

... "I've struggled to keep my integrity and to do what I needed to do and be what I needed to be in a difficult world." he said, and that he did, and that he was--in our most difficult world.

From confronting segregation to gay marriage to nuclear proliferation, the environment, peace and social justice... Michael Robinson did it, lived it and worked for it.

As a ten-year-old boy Michael showed the world (and himself) his courage of commitment. On the bus, in his hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, with his beloved nanny Estelle O'Hannon, he chose to sit with her in the back of the bus, which was the only place she could sit. He never returned to the front seat. At Dr. King's request he brought a group of rabbis to St. Augustine, Fla. to march--they all ended up behind bars--his first arrest, but

certainly not his last.

He was an articulate and powerful speaker and often shared the podium with Dr. King. Together they marched in Selma. Demonstrations, marches ... they were all part of the life he shared with his children and remarkable wife, Ruth--an excellent artist in her own right, his partner, his soul mate. Together they shared their life values and often his life work. Their idea of a family outing was often a peace demonstration or protest march.

In 1982 Michael and Ruth traveled across the country--Ruth speaking about the economics and politics of world hunger and Michael about the nuclear freeze. It was often a family affair. Michael also went to the most dangerous areas of Nicaragua during the Contra War to protect the people by the power of witness.

Locally, Michael was a leader - in the

Living Wage Coalition - saying at the Sebastopol City Council when the first Sonoma County Living Wage Ordinance was passed: "It's the right thing to do. It's a stand for economic justice and democracy." And organizing and sleeping in his car during the 'Sleep-In' when Santa Rosa declared it against the law for the homeless to sleep in their cars.

Michael's moral clarity, his truthful and articulate speech, his intelligent analysis, and his courage of commitment both lost and gained him congregants and friends, and engendered the incredible love and respect in which we hold him here today. Those actions and many more define Rabbi Michael Robinson's courage of commitment. The way he lived his life--that is his legacy. That is why we are honoring him tonight. Now it is up to us if his legacy is to be a living legacy. ■

Living Wage Laws Are Good Public Policy

Ben Boyce and Marty Bennett, Reprinted from the October 11, 2006 edition of the Petaluma Argus-Courier

... A "living wage" is a self-sufficiency wage which enables a family to pay for housing, medical care, transportation, childcare and food without relying on public welfare or private charity.

The proposed ordinance, which is similar to legislation passed in the cities of Sebastopol and Sonoma, mandates a wage of \$11.70 an hour with health-care benefits for employees of the city, city contractors and firms receiving substantial economic development assistance. The wage level represents a conservative estimate for a living wage in Sonoma County given rapidly rising health care and housing costs. The ordinance does set a community standard well above the poverty level state minimum wage, currently at \$6.75 an hour.

Twenty-seven workers will be covered by the law, including a dozen part-time city employees such as Tiny Tots program pre-school teachers and 15 city bus drivers employed by MVP Transportation. These are ordinary working people who will have a better quality of life as a direct consequence of the proposed ordinance. Moreover, nearly 100 workers at the

Petaluma Sheraton hotel now earn approximately \$11.50 an hour plus benefits due to an agreement between the city and the hotel developers brokered by the Living Wage Coalition in 2000.

Over the last decade, 140 cities and counties have implemented living-wage laws in response to the growing national crisis of low-wage work. The results are in. The living wage is good public policy. The dire warnings issued by opponents predicting adverse consequences have not been borne out by numerous credible academic researchers.

The costs for implementing our proposed ordinance are prudent and fiscally manageable. According to a study by UC researchers commissioned by the city, the total costs are less than 1 percent of the annual city budget. Moreover, the living-wage legislation will likely improve the quality of public services. A study of the impacts of the 2000 living-wage ordinance at the San Francisco International Airport showed that employee turnover declined, absenteeism decreased, and productivity improved.

Contrary to claims by critics that living-wage laws lead to increased unemployment and business flight, a recent study assessing the Los Angeles living wage ordinance, passed in 1997 and impacting 10,000 workers, indicates that job loss was minimal, and the benefits tangible for the workers covered. Other studies conclude that there is no decline in the number of firms bidding for city contracts, nor is the ability of a city to retain or attract employers paying decent wages limited by the implementation of a living-wage law.

Finally, public education by the living-wage movement about the costs to make ends meet in a given region has contributed to increased awareness about the inadequacy of the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour. As a result, 22 states have increased their minimum wage to levels above the federal minimum and six states will likely approve ballot initiatives to increase their state minimum wage in November. By implementing a living-wage law, residents of Petaluma will join this grassroots national movement to raise the wage floor for America's working poor. ■

“Raising The Wage Floor” - Are workers actually better off when wages are kept low?

Forum With Economist Robert Pollin,

Bonnie Petty, SEIU Local 707 Member

Some economists theorize that rising wages will cause job loss and other unintended consequences which are actually more harmful to workers, thus offsetting any gains by the higher wages.

Robert Pollin, professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, was in Petaluma recently to discuss the economic impacts of living wage ordinances. He disagrees.

The September 20th event, sponsored by the Sonoma County Living Wage Coalition and held at the Petaluma Regional Library, coincided with the Coalition’s campaign to pass a living wage ordinance in Petaluma.

Pollin, co-author of **The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy**, began by briefly recapping the history and the moral basis of living wage ordinances. But Pollin’s expertise as an economist was made clear as he explained that all the arguments against such ordinances, in all their various forms, really boil down to this: that the increase in labor costs will cause three negative unintended consequences:

- 1) Layoffs, so that some workers will actually be much worse off;
- 2) Cause business to relocate, causing more job loss;
- 3) It’s a “budget buster,” requiring local agencies to cut services elsewhere that benefit those same workers, while private businesses will have to pass on the costs to customers, driving away business.

Based on Pollin’s own research and that of several of his colleagues, Pollin has shown



**Economist Robert Pollin
LWC’s Raising The Wage Floor Forum
September 20, 2006**

that costs *relative to a company’s or agency’s overall operating budget* simply do not rise to the level of necessitating layoffs or deterring business. Pollin’s research in the early 1990s began with prospective research and analysis, gathering then-current statistics in areas where a living wage ordinance was being proposed. A decade later, the research of those same areas after passage clearly demonstrated that Pollin’s original projections had been accurate.

In his original findings, Pollin projected that, overall, business affected by a living wage proposal would see only a 1% increase in costs, relative to their overall operating costs. This, in spite of the fact that the affected workers would be receiving, in some cases, as much as a 75% increase in their personal wages. A 1% increase is one that could easily be absorbed by the company wanting to win the contract, or which could be negotiated

with the agency in the contract process. Another finding was that in the subsequent research it was found that there was absolutely no change in the number of companies that sought and won contracts with the agency and there was no downward change in the level of contracts that were awarded. In other words there had been *no effect* in terms of businesses looking elsewhere when a living wage law was in effect in a certain jurisdiction. Nor did the overall costs become so onerous that they couldn’t be absorbed in one way or another.

Why was this true? Quite simply, Pollin says, these companies want the contracts with the cities and counties. They were willing to make the adjustment to get the contracts.

“So, my overall conclusion,” Pollin says, “is...that the unintended consequences just don’t happen. They haven’t happened. The reason is very simple...living wage laws are designed [so] that the benefits are concentrated among the low-wage workers and their families—that’s the intended consequence—and the other unintended consequences don’t happen because, [though] there are costs, the costs are widely diffused.”

And so, Pollin argues, the real basis of the broader living wage movement is one of dignity and respect for workers; it’s a struggle about economic justice - defining standards of fairness for workers. President Roosevelt understood this when in the 1930s he proclaimed: “No business which depends for its existence on paying less than a living wage to its workers has any right to continue in this country.” ■

Head Start Workers *(From page 6)*
year of letter writing, frequent meetings with politicians and eight months of difficult negotiations, workers resorted to direct action by holding an informational picket outside the well-publicized annual CAP Poverty Conference, a demonstration which drew the notice of the press. The message of the workers outside was carried into the conference by panel participants representing the Living Wage Coalition and its ally, EBASE (East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy). The annual CAP conference, which focuses on the

achievements of CAP in addressing the problems of poverty in the county, was overshadowed by the unresolved labor dispute within CAP itself.

After months of delays, the management came to the table within weeks after this very highly visible public action. The new contract provides more protections for workers on issues such as overtime, layoffs, seniority raises and brought wages up closer to a living wage standard! Workers now have a voice at Head Start. SI SE PUEDE! ■

THANKS!

Editors: Ben Boyce and Barbara Giordano
Layout: Portia Sinnott/MS+ assisted by Mary Ruthsdotter
Contributors: Ben Boyce, Marty Bennett, Eileen Morris, Barbara Tomin, Tony White, John Atlas, Peter Dreier, Charlotte Shimura and Bonnie Petty

**Labor and materials donated by
SEIU 707**

Graton Labor Center Protects Immigrant Workers

Tony White, Living Wage Coalition Member

While pundits and politicians call for extreme measures to curb illegal immigration and punish illegal immigrants, members of a local community have developed a solution for a pressing economic and social issue.

Every day Latino workers congregate on the main street of the west county town of Graton, seeking employment. While this daily gathering of a predominantly male work force posed problems for local businesses and raised health and safety issues, community activists and the workers have come together to organize a labor center, El Centro Laboral de Graton.

Thanks to this grass roots organization, workers seeking employment are assigned a number for that day, while a paid staff member negotiates pay and working conditions with potential employers. This creates a more stable environment for employers who need workers, while providing the day workers with a dignified way of finding employment and protecting their rights.

Since its inception six years ago, the Centro Laboral has received generous

donations of equipment and volunteer time and now has a site for a permanent office, as well as two paid labor organizers, Davin Cardenas and Carlos Lopez. Student volunteers from Santa Rosa Junior College and Sonoma State University have also provided English lessons to help workers communicate on the job or prepare themselves for a GED.

The Center's decisions are made by members of the Board, a mixture of community activists, clergy and workers, which is currently seeking funding in order to become a more permanent community center and nonprofit agency. Besides establishing a hiring hall for workers, the center also provides limited assistance in housing, health care, legal services and counseling.

Facing these same issues, Healdsburg, San Francisco, Oakland and Mountain View have also established day labor centers. The Graton center is a member of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network which protects labor rights and advocates for all undocumented workers. Today there are more than 139 worker centers in 80 different cities, towns and rural areas across

the United States (29 in California alone), providing a bridge between communities, employers and immigrant workers.

Rather than ignore the presence of day workers and their contribution to the economy, or adopt a strictly law enforcement posture, the people of Graton have created a multicultural, community-based solution which attempts to meet the needs of the local residents and the day workers. By working with local agencies and providing the workers with information and training, the Center helps integrate these low-wage workers into the work force and to become productive members of our society. A work in progress, it is based on mutual respect and a sense of social justice.

The recent adoption of a Living Wage Ordinance by the city of Petaluma, joining Sonoma and Sebastopol, the increase in the minimum wage in California and six other states, and a likely increase in the federal minimum wage by the new Congress will help low-wage earners. In Graton, the Labor Center provides hope and support for day workers in Sonoma County. ■

Petaluma Sheraton Workers Sign . . . *(Continued from page 1)*

financial assistance (a loan of up to \$2.75 million) to help them meet construction and on-going operating expenses. Members of the Sonoma County Living Wage Coalition began to educate the City Council and the community about some of the unintended consequences implicit in the proposed deal.

Yes, a Sheraton would bring increased tax dollars to the City's General Fund and increased patronage of many Petaluma businesses, but unless workers were paid well and had benefits, the public sector would end up subsidizing Sheraton operations: Sheraton workers would find it necessary to access a variety of assistance programs, including the Healthy Families Program, affordable housing programs, food stamps and other programs.

After much negotiation and concerted lobbying by the Sonoma County Living Wage Coalition and a variety of local labor

and religious leaders, the Petaluma Council agreed to make the loan, on condition that hotel management remain neutral if employees sought to organize. Nevertheless, the road to union representation was bumpy. An arbitrator ordered a new election, judging that management had interfered in the first election in 2004. The hotel changed hands and came under the management of Rim Hospitality, which was at first reluctant to abide by the City-imposed union-neutrality provision, but did in the end comply.

While Sheraton employees will earn significantly more than most of their non-union counterparts (\$11.50 per hour for Sheraton housekeepers versus the average wage in Sonoma County of \$9.67, for example), they will still be challenged by Sonoma County's high cost of living. However, unlike many of their non-union counterparts, Sheraton employees will have health insurance, which will protect both them and the County from catastrophic emergency health care costs.

In addition to better pay, the Sheraton employees will have better job protection and better working conditions. Employees now have a grievance policy and protections from unfair disciplinary actions and termination. Both management and union negotiators say they are happy with the working relationship they forged in the 10-month negotiation period. This promising collaboration with management, local educators, and the Living Wage Coalition is working to create employment ladders within the hotel by providing ESL and adult education classes for workers.

The Living Wage Coalition urges all members and organizations you are affiliated with to patronize the Sheraton! This is the only union hotel in the North Bay and an excellent facility for conferences, meetings, and family events!

Contact Matt Andress, Director of Sales and Marketing, 707 283-2931, matthew.andress@sheratonpetaluma.com or visit www.sheraton.com/petaluma ■

Waging Victory

John Atlas and Peter Dreier, The American Prospect Web Exclusive, Nov.10, 2006

On November 7, voters in six states approved measures to raise state minimum wage levels by \$1 to \$1.70 an hour and index them to inflation. These initiatives not only put more money into the pockets of low-income workers, they also increased voter turnout among urban and working class voters in key states, especially Missouri and Montana, where Democratic candidates for U.S. Senate won narrow victories that put the Democrats in control of both houses of Congress.

The key sponsors - labor unions and the community organizing group ACORN -- view these victories as stepping-stones to getting the new Democratic-controlled Congress and the Bush administration to support a significant increase in the federal minimum wage. The proponents also consider the coalitions they forged to mobilize voters as building blocks for an even stronger grassroots effort in 2008.

In Missouri, Proposition B -- which will increase the state's minimum wage from the current federal base of \$5.15 an hour to \$6.50 and index it to inflation - passed in every county, winning 76% of the state. The measure was supported by all age groups and all income levels, according to an exit poll. At the same time, Missouri Democrat Claire McCaskill narrowly defeated the incumbent, Republican Jim Talent, in one of the nation's most closely contested Senate races. In Montana, voters passed Initiative 151 by 73%. It raises the state minimum wage to \$6.15 and requires annual cost-of-living increases. The overwhelming support for the initiative, led by the state's labor movement, helped contribute to Democrat John Tester's cliffhanger victory over incumbent Senator Conrad Burns. During his campaign, Tester emphasized his past support for a minimum wage hike and Burns' long history of opposition to such measures in the Senate. Similarly, in Ohio 65% of voters approved Issue 2, which will boost the state's minimum wage to \$6.85. Meanwhile, in the Buckeye State's Senate race, Ohio Congressman Sherrod Brown won a decisive 55% victory over two-term incumbent Mike DeWine. Arizonans approved Proposition 202 with 66% of the

vote. It will give an estimated 345,000 workers, about 13% of the private sector work force, a raise to \$6.75 an hour. In Colorado, Amendment 42, which boosts the minimum wage to \$6.85 for 138,000 workers, garnered support from 53 % of voters. Nevada voters endorsed a \$1 increase in the state minimum wage -- to \$6.15 an hour - by 69%.

The key proponents of the minimum wage strategy around the country include ACORN, the AFL-CIO and its state affiliates, SEIU, the United Food and Commercial Workers, the National Education Association, Jobs with Justice, and a variety of church groups.

In addition to the six minimum wage victories, the legislatures in another six states -- California, Arkansas, Michigan, North Carolina, and Florida - raised their state minimum wages early this year. As a result, 28 states and the District of Columbia have now passed legislation or approved ballot initiatives raising their state minimums above the federal minimum. Several of them -- including all six that passed Tuesday as well as Washington, Vermont, Florida, and Oregon -- include cost-of-living adjustments, which require the state minimum wages to rise with inflation.

Nancy Pelosi, who will be Speaker of the House in January, has pledged to hike the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour as one of the Democrats' first acts after taking control of the House and Senate. Some unions, community organizing groups, and policy experts believe that with the Democrats now in a stronger position in Congress, they should not only push to raise the federal minimum wage to \$7.25, but also fight to include a path-breaking cost-of-living adjustment so that inflation doesn't continue to erode the purchasing power of the minimum wage.

John Atlas, president of the National Housing Institute, is writing a book about ACORN. Peter Dreier teaches politics at Occidental College and is coauthor of Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the 21st Century and The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City. ■

Head Start Workers Stand Up For Their Rights

Charlotte Shimura, SEIU Local 707

Head Start is a nationally successful child care program which has been proven to boost the life chances of the children who participate in it. Unfortunately, Head Start child care providers in Sonoma County with 7-12 years' worth of experience and college credits earn less than \$10.50 an hour and many rely on Medi-Cal, Healthy Families and public assistance. About 50% of the providers are Latino, as are 80% of the children they serve.

These awesome and dedicated workers taking care of 550 low-income children deserve better. Unionized for 7 years by SEIU Local 707, in 2005 SEIU made a commitment to organize the providers into a strong, vocal group. The workers were ready. Many had definite gripes against the administration and felt they were treated with little dignity or respect. For example, workers were laid off last summer with only a few weeks notice, causing great hardship, even though the agency knew for four years when funding from a First Five Grant would end.

It was puzzling that, administered by Community Action Partnership (CAP) and funded mostly with federal funds but also receiving some state funding, Head Start Sonoma County paid workers far less than Head Start in many other Counties (while CAP administrators' salaries remained very healthy). It was true that the Bush Administration has been decreasing funding to Head Start, but why did other counties manage to keep workers' wages higher? It was the opinion of many workers that CAP simply wasn't as interested in Head Start as they were in their other programs.

Head Start workers began meeting and sending petitions and letters to the HR Director, the Director of Head Start and CAP Director. They attended CAP board meetings where they were greeted politely, but received no response to their problems or questions. A community group, Voces Cruzando Fronteras, filed a Community Grievance against Community Action Partnership and was also ignored. Going even further, management regularly violated the election agreement. After a

(Continued on page 4)

Join the Living Wage Coalition ! !



Annual Membership Rates

Name	Individual	\$30
	Family	\$50
Organization	Supporter	\$100
	Sustainer	\$250 and up
Address	Benefactor	\$500 and up
	Student/Low Income	\$10
City/State/Zip	Phone /Email	

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ _____.

Check here if you do not want your name distributed (very infrequently) to other progressive organizations

Please make checks payable to: **Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County.**
The Coalition is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit; Contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowable by law.

Citizens Can Raise The Wage Floor By Acting Locally

Martin Bennett, Executive Director NEWS, New Economy Working Solutions, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, September 4, 2006

Governor Schwarzenegger recently signed a bill to increase the state minimum wage from \$6.75 to \$8.00 an hour by 2008, despite the fact that he had vetoed similar legislation twice before. Wealth and income inequalities have reached levels not experienced in California since the 1930s. Raising the minimum wage can ease such problems such inequities create.

The federal government has refused to address the widening economic divide. This has fueled movements in the states and at the local level to raise the wage floor for 15.5 million low-wage workers.

A recent study by the Public Policy Institute of California reveals declining living standards for California's poorest families. Between 1969 and 2004 the inflation-adjusted family income for the bottom 10th percentile of working families--about \$15,600 in 2004 dollars--decreased by 12%, and income for the bottom 25th percentile decreased by 4%. The top 25th percentile received a 41% increase, and the top 1% received a 59% increase during this period.

According to the California Budget Project, one in three families with children in California in 2002 were among the working poor, and did not make incomes sufficient to provide for basic needs. The decreasing purchasing power of the state's minimum wage, first adopted in 1913, is

one of the main causes for growing inequality. The value of the state minimum wage peaked in 1968, and if annually adjusted for inflation, the minimum would be \$10.05 an hour today.

The AFL-CIO and organized labor, as well as citizen organizations like ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, and the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, (70 faith, labor, and community organizations), are leading a grassroots mobilization to raise federal and state minimum wages. In a recent public opinion survey the Pew Research Center concluded, "raising the minimum wage has broad public backing that crosses all social, regional, and political categories."

Driving the movement to reverse the rising economic inequality at the local level are campaigns to implement living wage laws. During the last decade more than 141 cities and counties have implemented living wage legislation that requires local government and firms receiving a government contract or subsidy to pay a living wage to their employees. Wage levels are set at twice or more the federal minimum wage and vary as supporters calculate basic family budgets for a given region including costs of food, housing, healthcare, transportation, and childcare.

Living wage campaigns initiate a public dialogue about what is a self-sufficiency wage for a particular region and the costs

of growing inequality and working poverty such as increased demands by low-wage workers for income supports like food stamps and Medi-Cal. Most importantly, living wage campaigns make a moral appeal that resonates with most Americans: work should be fairly compensated and a job should not trap you in poverty, but provide a ladder out it.

In California more than 25 cities and counties have implemented living wage legislation. Two cities in Sonoma County, Sebastopol (2003) and Sonoma (2004) have passed living wage laws. The Petaluma City Council in early November unanimously approved the third, which requires the City, city contractors, and firms receiving substantial economic assistance from the City to pay their employees \$11.70 an hour with benefits or \$13.20 without.

Americans are not powerless during eras dominated by the concentration of wealth and power. Reforms to regulate business and labor markets, such as prohibiting child labor, mandating minimum wage and maximum hours, and implementing workplace health and safety standards, started at the state and local levels and then shaped national policy. Governor Schwarzenegger's decision to boost the state minimum wage is best seen as a response to a growing grassroots movement seeking economic justice for low-wage workers. ■



Please consider becoming a member today. Use the enclosed form or visit www.livingwagesonoma.org

PO Box 427
Santa Rosa, CA
95402

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

Faith, Poverty and the Future of California: Building a Faith-Based Movement for Economic Justice

On October 25th and 26th California Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (California CLUE) held its first annual conference in San Francisco. Drawing engaged clergy and lay social justice activists from many denominations, the purpose was to build a faith-based movement for economic justice in California. Keynote speakers were author and journalist Barbara Ehrenreich (**Nickled and Dimed** and **Bait and Switch**), and civil rights legend Rev. James Lawson.

The conference was attended by much of the Bay Area labor leadership. John Wilhelm, president of UNITEHERE, the national hotel worker's union, spoke movingly about the new labor movement's discovery of an ally in the progressive religious community. The consistent theme of the conference was deepening the faith-labor alliance and how that can revitalize the unions and deepen the spiritual practice of the religious community.

Topics covered included: Using Our Prophetic Voice to Push for Immigration

Reform; Framing Our Issues: Economic Justice is a Moral Issue; Faith & Politics: Moving Public Policy Campaigns in Your Congregation; Speaking Truth to Power: Using Moral Authority to Influence Key Decision-Makers; Building a Strong Faith/Labor Partnership; Healthcare is a Human Right: Solutions to the California Healthcare crisis.

Sonoma CLUE will hold a public forum in January 07 in support of the workers at Memorial Hospital in Santa Rosa. □

Meetings

Living Wage Coalition

Third Tuesday of every month
6:30 - 8 pm, SEIU Local 707
600 B St. at 10th St., Santa Rosa

Accountable Development Coalition

Third Monday of the month
6:30 - 8 pm, SEIU Local 707
600 B St. at 10th St., Santa Rosa
sabrina.ross@gmail.com

How Else Can We Help?



*Speakers
Resource Materials
Inter-Denominational
Events/Forums*

For planning help or more info please contact:

Ben Boyce, 707 545-7349 x 220
ben.boyce@sbcglobal.net

Committees

Research and Legal

Marty Bennett
707 939-8933, mbennett@vom.com

Sonoma Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE)

Ben Boyce, 707 545-7349 x 220
ben.boyce@sbcglobal.net

Newsletter Production

Barbara Giordano