

Minimum Wage - 2007

The concept of the minimum wage was first enacted in 1938 as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act to reduce poverty, which along with the National Labor Relations Act established principles of worker justice to ensure that workers would receive fair wages and be treated justly. The current minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour has been in effect for the past ten years. Taking inflation into account, the buying power of the minimum wage, \$10,300 for full-time year-round workers, is at its lowest point in fifty years. One tank of gas at the current minimum wage requires the pay for nine hours of work.

On January 10, 2007, the House of Representatives passed, with an overwhelming bipartisan majority, legislation to gradually increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 per hour. This increase would benefit more than nine million women, who make up almost two thirds of full-time, year-round minimum wage workers, helping them move out of poverty.

Support for fair labor practices and worker's rights are among the earliest of the Women of Reform Judaism social and economic justice positions. In the 1930's, Women of Reform Judaism spoke out against child labor and during the 1940's the organization called for support of the Fair Employment Practices Commission. In the eighties we sought legislation for pay equity in the United States and Canada, family and medical leave, and urged employment practices that met current family needs. In 1996, WRJ called on its members to speak out against global labor abuses in the garment industry. More recently we have called for a living wage for workers and labor protections for migrant and service workers and have opposed the erosion of fair labor practices and standards.

WRJ now urges the Senate to pass legislation to increase the minimum wage, without any amendments that would provide tax cuts for business or jeopardize worker protections. We also urge President Bush to sign the minimum wage legislation.

Much community activism was dedicated to passage of minimum wage legislation.