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A Measure of Fairness: The Economics of Living Wages and Minimum Wages in the United States

Robert Pollin, Mark Brenner, Stephanie Luce, Jeannette Wicks-Lim

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In early 2007, there were approximately 140 living wage ordinances in place throughout the United States. Communities around the country frequently debate new proposals of this sort. Additionally, as a result of ballot initiatives, twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia, representing nearly 70 percent of the total U.S. population, maintain minimum wage standards above those set by the federal minimum wage.In A Measure of Fairness, Robert Pollin, Mark Brenner, Jeannette Wicks-Lim, and Stephanie Luce assess how well living wage and minimum wage regulations in the United States serve the workers they are intended to help. Opponents of such measures assert that when faced with mandated increases in labor costs, businesses will either lay off workers, hire fewer low-wage employees in the future, replace low-credentialed workers with those having better qualifications or, finally, even relocate to avoid facing the increased costs being imposed on them.The authors give an overview of living wage and minimum wage implementation in Louisiana, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Massachusetts, and Connecticut to show how these policies play out in the paychecks of workers, in the halls of legislature, and in business ledgers. Based on a decade of research, this volume concludes that living wage laws and minimum wage increases have been effective policy interventions capable of bringing significant, if modest, benefits to the people they were intended to help.

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