

# The Sins of Wages

By Leon Stein

Friends of Harold Geneen may rest assured that he will be able to get by. Last year he got a \$19 a week increase. If he had been paid at the Federal minimum wage rate, he would have been getting, for forty hours, \$64. A \$19 increase would then have meant a boost of 30 per cent.

Actually, Harold Geneen makes more than the minimum, so that he got much less than a 30 per cent boost. Even so, there is nothing to worry about. What difference does \$19 make if you're getting \$15,640 a week? Or, to put it another way, what difference does \$988 a year make when you're making \$813,311 a year?

That's what Harold got. There is a lesson for all Americans in the story of this man who began as an accountant and worked his way through Mayflower Associates, Lybrand, Ross Brothers and Montgomery, American Can, Bell and Howell, Jones and Laughlin Steel, Raytheon Manufacturing to become chairman of the board and chief executive officer of International Telephone and Telegraph Corp., which more recently has achieved notoriety as I.T.T. The increase last year in Harold's compensation, including salaries and bonuses but not expenses, etc., brought him up to \$814,299 a year.

The President has called upon all Americans to sacrifice equally in the fight on inflation. Harold's sacrifice is clear. While his raise was only \$988 in 1973 he could have held out, under the 5.5 per cent freeze formula, for a boost of \$44,732.11

What do men like Harold Geneen do for their country to merit compensations three and four times that which the President of the United States gets—officially?

In Mr. Geneen's case it may have

been his ability to walk in and out of offices in high governmental places without hardly knocking, which few ordinary Americans can do. Others are in charge of armies of men they put to work to produce airplanes whose cargo doors pop open when hardly off the ground. Some use advertising to create demands for new limited-life electrical appliances, while others manage the supply of electricity into brownouts and blackouts their high-priced executive ability is supposed to avoid happening.

Now, the President of the United States [has signed] the minimum wage bill—a bill similar to the one he vetoed last year. Its enactment is being rightfully hailed. Millions of working Americans desperately need this minuscule step forward for humanity.

But with it we have not yet established that justice for which all good men and women long and which this nation can well afford. The boost that has come through so much contention will insure for armies of labor \$80 a week while Mr. Geneen continues to get his, the oil corporations and consortiums continue to get theirs; the Russians continue to get our wheat; the battles continue in the supermarkets and at the gasoline pumps; and I.T.T., the milk trusts and others spread their largesse around where it counts.

The higher minimum wage rate, which under the new legislation would go to \$2.30 an hour by 1977, marks a major victory for the trade union movement. Now its greater task must become to spur the battle—on the political as well as economic front—for a national administration pledged to restore our American dream of justice for all.

*Leon Stein is editor of Justice, publication of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, where this editorial appeared.*