

Community for fair wages and to stop wage theft

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Work is considered the salvation from poverty. In an economy where we see a growing gap between rich and poor, it's more important than ever that work come with dignity and livable wages.

While Congress sits on a federal minimum wage bill, recently 13 states used their power to increase their minimum wage. In Iowa, not only has our minimum wage remained the same, but enforcement also is too lax to even ensure that workers receive the minimum they are owed.

Wage theft, or the non-payment of legally owed wages, is rampant in the United States, and it's rampant in Iowa. Iowa Workforce Development, our state enforcement agency, has a budget that only allows for one investigator, which means that hundreds of cases of wage theft are closed by inaction.

Wage theft exists right here in our community.

Omer Salih worked at a factory in Iowa City through a temporary agency and was shorted nearly a week of pay. He tried to resolve the problem for months, without success. Finally, with the assistance of volunteers from the Center for Worker Justice, Omer recuperated the wages he was owed.

Valentin Ruiz is still struggling to recuperate his pay. His boss, Dick Claussen, simply stopped paying Valentin's wages for the work he performed as a welder at CWM Welding in West Liberty. Valentin filed a claim with Iowa Workforce Development, and won a March 2013 judgment ordering Claussen to pay Valentin \$1,392. Today, in spite of the ruling and support from CWJ, Valentin is still waiting for his pay, and Claussen continues in business.

Six workers at the Sheraton Hotel reported that they were not paid the full compensation they were owed, at the time of their separation from employment last fall. In response to delegations of workers and CWJ community allies, three of the workers have received their pay, so far.

These are only a few of the stories that workers have brought to CWJ in the past few months. We have witnessed similar stories in local restaurants, construction companies, factories, hotels, and cleaning services. Wage theft undermines good employers who comply with wage and hour laws, and keeps hard-working people in poverty.

The good news is we can do something about it. We can unite with community allies to help workers like Valentin and the Sheraton workers to confront unfair business practices, and recover unpaid wages. The Center for Worker Justice has helped area workers recover more than \$5,000 in unpaid wages in the past several months.

Secondly, we can pass a state minimum wage law raising the current \$7.25 to a livable wage, and pass state legislation for stronger enforcement on wage theft. Finally, our municipalities can pass ordinances that use city powers to deter wage theft.

We're uniting to stop wage theft. Join us.

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