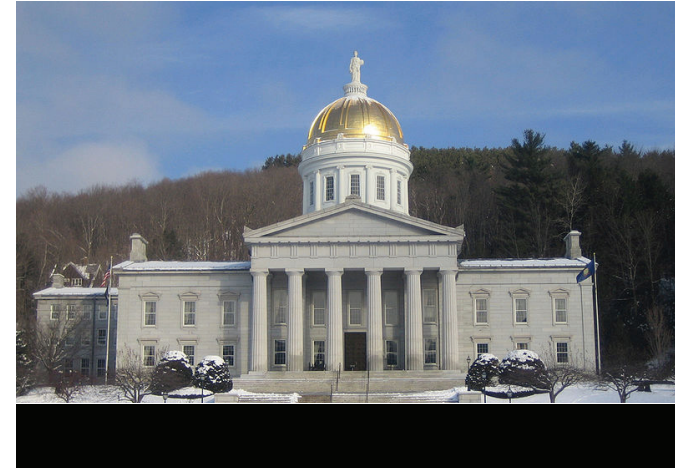


how wages are stolen:

- Paying less than the minimum wage
- Not paying for the amount of time worked
- Issuing a paycheck that bounces
- Avoiding payment of overtime
- Paying by the day or job
- Making a worker pay for a job
- Failing to pay a prevailing wage with government contracts
- Making deductions from paychecks
- Stealing tips
- Not paying a worker at all
- Failing to issue a final check
- And the misclassification of workers as independent contractors



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WAGE THEFT

every year
billions of
dollars in
earned wages
are stolen
from workers.

what is going on?

The theft of wages is epidemic in the U.S., and all of us unknowingly support businesses that steal. All workers are brought down by wage theft, not just the most vulnerable. One of the largest transgressions is the tens of billions of dollars taken each year in denied overtime.

Five realities greatly contribute to this theft. The first two are globalization and the growth of contingent labor (people working part-time without a contract). The final three are under-counting real unemployment, the shortage of good jobs, and hostility toward immigrants. Greed, racism and sexism show themselves here as well, along with short term business practices that focus only on expansion, cost cutting, and profit.

A major problem is that little is pushing back against these crimes. Laws are inadequate, confusing and fragmented, and what enforcement there is does not deter current wage theft. The Fair Labor Standards Act covers minimum wage, overtime, child labor abuses, and aspects of record keeping. But within the Fair Labor Standards Act there are all manner of loopholes, and whole occupations have been lobbied beyond the laws protection. The National Labor Relations Act seeks to enshrine labor peace in this context of robbery.

All of these laws—there are others—don't work together to prevent wage theft; they cover some workers, but don't serve to lift up all. Finally,



unions, which are a sure way of stopping wage theft, are weak.

The Department of Labor must not be allowed to fail. Since 1938 the Wage & Hour Division of the department has been charged with enforcing the Fair Labor Standards Act; the division has police powers, can enter a workplace and inspect records and interview people, it can immediately stop the exploitation of children, and seize goods until the law is complied with. Currently 750 investigators are charged with covering 130 million workers, in seven million workplaces. The division is hobbled so as to fail, and allow theft to continue.

This crime also takes place within a decade's long trend of workers not being paid for their on-the-job productivity; since the late forties wages have fallen even while productivity has continued to advance. We can wait for the government to hire more investigators, for them to do all they can, or we can act together to end this.

what can we do?

By organizing ourselves we can end wage theft. Many of the tactics that employers use to cheat workers out of wages are already illegal, it is just a matter of holding them accountable. But that is just a short term solution. By organizing a union workers can gain power in the workplace and make demands for a better workplace that improves our lives instead of dragging them down!

Contact the Burlington General Membership Branch to learn more, get involved, and take the first step to organizing a union in your workplace.

Resources:

www.CanMyBossDoThat.org
www.nelp.org -National Employment Law Project
www.workerscenter.org -VT Workers Center