

# Minimum wage the struggle for living wages



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Minimum wage jobs are typically jobs that do not require a college degree or education. Non-managerial positions usually pay minimum wage. Jobs that required little skills were considered to be minimum wage jobs, but, a warehouse worker doing manual labor might make well above minimum wage because the jobs were physical and hard work.

In the past many laborers would work a whole day just to earn \$1, and today many people feel that although we now have laws that legislate how much a worker can be paid, many workers barely earn enough to take care of their families. It was very interesting to find out how the wage laws were created. The first wage laws started in Australia and New Zealand as liberal social welfare measures. The United States wage laws followed a similar era, after the “ The Great Depression”.

The Great Depression was the longest and most severe economic depression ever experienced by the western world. It began in the United States soon after the New York stock market crash of 1929. During this period workers suffered from exploitation in sweat shops, workers were over worked and underpaid. Workers in these sweat shops were often abused mentally and physically. There were no laws at this point to protect workers from being taken advantage of.

Williamson 2

Businesses needed outside regulations in order to prevent them from abusing their power over their workers. At this point in history workers had no choice but to work under these conditions, in order to feed their families. During this time many of the males worked in factories. The women usually

worked in sewing factories or cooking and cleaning for the rich families. Some women were even forced into prostitution to take care of their children.

The first government mandated law that defined wage regulations was the "Davis-Bacon Act of 1931, which was a U. S. federal law which established the requirements for paying prevailing wages that regulated hourly wages, usual benefits

and overtime pay paid to the majority of workers, laborers, and mechanics within a particular area. The Davis-Bacon Law pertaining only to individually funded projects.

Even after this law many were still being under paid and over worked until the presidential election of 1936.

In 1936 after winning an historical election by a landslide, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) into law in early 1938. The Fair Labor Standards Law introduced regulations to protect American workers from being exploited and created a mandatory federal minimum wage of 25 cents an hour in order to maintain a minimum standard of living, efficiency and general well being.

The new law was good news to thousands of workers whom had suffered the conditions of the sweatshops working for a fraction of that amount. The employers

Williamson 3

however, were opposing this new law and argued that the Fair Labor Standard Law would hurt employers (The Great Depression 19).

The Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA) determined the way employers paid wages:

The Fair Labor Standard Law made it possible for adults, who would work for the same wages as children to be paid fairly.

The FLSA put an end to child exploitation by setting standards that help get children out of working in the sweat shops, as a result many children could return to school. to employees:

To determine whether a particular employee is exempt from the FLSA minimum wage and overtime pay requirement.

To help determine employee benefits and health coverage.

The FLSA help young workers and their parents and educators to understand the FLSA child labor law provisions that dictated the hours a youth can work and the jobs they may not perform.

The FLSA helps employers to determine which work related activities are considered " hours worked" and the hour for which employees must be paid.

FLSA set guides on how many breaks a worker could take, because many time in the pass workers would worker all day in the heat or in cold weather without getting time to eat and drink.

Today with these standards in place many Americans get fair wages and benefits, and most know what these guides are.

Williamson 4

Over the years minimum wage has made a slow progression to increase American workers livable wages. With each president there would be controversy over to raise or not to raise minimum wage. Just as in the past controversy the employers were worried about how the raises would affect their businesses, and as times changed a new debate was placed front and center.

Today the debate would be focus on the fair wages of “ illegal aliens”, that term has been upgraded to “ undocumented workers.

During the Era of George W. Bush, the campaign “ We can help” was started because many undocumented immigrants reported that employers were ignoring the minimum wage law, and denied the workers overtime pay, many employers illegally docked their employee’s pay for the cost of tools or transportation.

Some workers were forced to work without pay before and after their shifts. There were undocumented workers earning only a \$1 an hour. Violations typically robbed workers of about \$51 of their pay per week. The new campaign pointed out that all workers, even undocumented workers deserved to be paid for their labor. The campaign was designed to improve jobs and the lives of all workers in America. To give those who are silent and exploited the courage and means to speak up (Greenhouse).

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Today many companies have moved factories overseas, where there are no wage laws. Adults and children are still being exploited and under-educated to work, so they may help support their families.

Williamson 5

In the years since the Fair Labor Standards Law was introduced the federal minimum wage is revised every few years to account for inflation and the rising cost of living.

In 1997 President Bill Clinton introduced legislation allowing states to set their own minimum wage scale. Wages may be influenced by other factors as in tradition, social structure, and environment.

Minimum wage is higher in some states because the cost of living is higher in those states. Fourteen states and a number of cities have set their own minimum wage rates that are higher than the federal level.

The state of Washington has the highest minimum wage in the United States at \$8.00 an hour. The states of Georgia and Wyoming have the lowest minimum wage at \$5.15 an hour.

Today, some people still feel that if minimum wage which currently \$7.50 an hour is raised it would have a negative impact on the economy while labor activists call on Congress to raise minimum wage (Gorman).

The Pros and Cons of increasing minimum wage is a highly debatable subject. The Pros say it will increase the standard of living, motivate

employees to work harder, stimulate consumption. The Cons still say the rich get richer and the poor stay broke.

The Cons say it will exclude competitors and certain laborers, doom small business, and cause increased inflation. Many believe that if the United States raises minimum wage, more

companies will move overseas where they can pay workers less to do the same work causing thousands of Americans to lose jobs. Increasing minimum wage could cause small businesses

Williamson 6

to pay more, causing the business too much over head cost, as an end result causing many small businesses to lose their business. When minimum wage jobs pay a higher rate, there is

competition for minimum wage jobs, which makes it harder for entry level worker to enter the job market (Williams).

The federal minimum is currently pays the full-time minimum wage earner just \$15, 000 a year. Any wage increases would go directly to the workers who spend money immediately because they have to. They spend their earnings on the basic necessities like food, gas, rent, and clothing (Herzenberg). People who earn minimum wage struggle daily to make ends meet, they struggle for a fair wage that they can live on a " Living Wage".