

Honest day's work amounts to poverty

By Lynn Stuart Parramore, AlterNet

Why should people in the richest country on Earth toil long hours for wages that would make Charles Dickens recoil in horror? A lot of Americans have been wondering the same thing.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2012, 1.57 million Americans earned the minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour. Millions more were just above that figure, and plenty actually ended up below it. Over 60 percent of the minimum wage earners in 2012 were in retail, or in leisure and hospitality, which includes hotels and restaurants.

If we raise the minimum wage, an estimated 28 million will get a direct or indirect benefit, because when the wage goes up bosses often raise the wages of workers hovering right above the new minimum. So one in five American workers will take more money home. It's not a silver bullet – employers will still try to avoid requirements by hiring contract workers and other tactics, and some workers will still end up exempt. But it's a start.

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