

# Bernie Sanders's Workers Wanted \$15 an Hour—So He Cut Their Hours

On Friday I mentioned the [ongoing labor dispute](#) between the workers and management of Bernie Sanders's presidential campaign. The longtime advocate of raising the federal minimum to \$15 an hour is finding that it's easy to complain about greedy employers until you become the one having to make payroll.

Presidential campaigns are labor intensive and require an army of low-skilled workers who are willing to work long hours performing rote and mundane tasks. But as Sanders has discovered, paying for such labor can be expensive.

Sanders initially agreed to hire many of his union workers at a salary of \$36,000. For a 40-hour workweek that salary equates to an hourly wage of \$17.31, well above the proposed \$15 minimum wage. But when the workers are putting in 60 hours a week—as almost all campaign staffers do—their hourly wage drops to \$11.54.

Federal law requires that if a salaried worker earns less than \$47,476 a year (an hourly wage of \$22.83) and works more than 40 hours a week, they must be paid overtime. Overtime pay is set at not less than 1.5 times the regular pay rate after 40 hours of work in a workweek. If Bernie's workers were to put in 60-hour weeks they are eligible for an extra \$25.19 per hour for the extra 20 hours, an additional \$27,008 a year. That would bring their total yearly salary to \$63,008.

But for most full-time workers, salary is merely part of their full-time compensation. That is true for Bernie's employees. According to the [Washington Post](#), under the current arrangement, the Sanders's campaign pays all premiums for

salaried employees making \$36,000 or less per year. Those making more are covered at a rate of 85 percent.

Bernie's campaign manager Faiz Shakir offered to raise the pay to \$42,000 annually and extend the workweek to six days, but the workers balked because the increase would put them into the pay bracket where they would have to pay 15 percent of their healthcare premiums.

While the labor dispute is still ongoing, management has found an obvious solution—cut worker hours. As Shakir said, “As these discussions continue, we are limiting hours so no employee is receiving less than \$15 for any hours worked.” But that's not what the workers appear to want. They seem willing to put in the extra work because they need the extra money. But the minimum pay (\$15 an hour) for 60 hours of work is more than Sanders can afford—or, at least, is willing to pay.

For years, those of us who have warned about the harms of minimum wage have warned that increasing the rate would lead to reductions in workers' hours. That wouldn't happen, said Fight for \$15 advocates. Now, their socialist champion is showing that it certainly will happen because it's *happening in his own campaign*.

“When the [problems](#) with a government mandated minimum wage [are so obvious](#) that even a socialist's campaign can't help but acknowledge them,” [says Eric Boehm](#), “it should probably make you wonder if Sanders the politician is being willfully ignorant about one of his centerpiece proposals.” Unfortunately, this lesson in economic reality won't be a teaching moment for Sanders or his supporters. Instead, it'll be used as another example of why free enterprise can't work and why the government needs to take over even more of the economy. After all, if we can't trust a wealthy socialist to pay his own employees a “living wage” how can we expect “fairness” from the capitalists?

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