

From middle class to bottom feeder: What the hell happened to American construction?

April 11, 2025

Some of us are old enough to remember when being a contractor in America actually meant something special. Sure, it was hard work—but it was honorable, and a skilled tradesman could make a decent living. They were able to support their families and take pride in building something that would last for generations. It was a win-win.

However, it didn't last...

Thanks to decades of globalist open-border policies, sketchy insider deals, and business-killing government regulations, the entire contractor system has now collapsed. And in yet another globalist turn, another path to the middle class has turned into a miserable dead end and a full-blown race to the bottom.

In a recent piece from New York Magazine, one contractor's story revealed just how bad the industry has gotten. His name is Ben Whelan, and his depressing story is the same sad tale that countless Americans in this once-thriving industry can relate to.

We'll break the entire saga down for you, minus the liberal fluff, and show you exactly how America's tradesmen are getting squeezed out of their own industry—and who's really to blame.

So, when did the bottom start to fall out? It all started unraveling after the 2008 crash. A once-booming and very competitive field turned into a chaotic scramble for survival, and that's when some very cutthroat underbidding and exploitation kicked into high gear.

The New York Times Magazine:

"It was alarming to start seeing that kind of activity on these jobs," Whelan says. Everyone he knew in the business was struggling to find work, and the bidding wars drove the profits to new lows. Sometimes, when he learned the winning bid, he was stunned — he would have lost money at that price. The price of roofing work, in particular, plunged. BTW Construction used to work on a few roofs a year in the down time among their bigger jobs. But they could barely compete in the market after 2009. A job that he priced at \$18,000 might be given to a company that charged only \$10,000.

But make no mistake, this wasn't just the market self-correcting—this was the start of contractors being priced out of their own trade by people who were breaking all the rules.

So how do these sketchy companies manage to make these extremely low bids and still stay in business? Well, it's simple: they use illegal labor, skate past payroll taxes, and call full-time workers "independent contractors" to beat the system. The NYT Magazine piece goes on:

In 2021, the Center for American Progress estimated that 23 percent of constructor workers — and 32 percent of roofers — were undocumented.

Beginning in the 1980s, but accelerating since the Great Recession, builders slashed costs by subcontracting out almost every facet of their projects. Subcontractors, in turn, were favored for delivering the work at a lower price, which they often accomplished by illegally misclassifying full-time employees as independent contractors or simply paying them off the books. These maneuvers allowed employers to dodge mandatory expenses, like payroll taxes and workers' compensation insurance, and to evade liability for on-the-job injuries.

It's a really easy recipe, folks. This is what happens when you mix cheap illegal labor with no enforcement and regulators who are on the take.

And don't think the entire world doesn't see what's happening.

Watch:

The result of this downward spiral is American workers who are pushed out of the industry, quality standards that plummet, and any contractors left who are actually trying to play by the rules are left in the dust.

Now, the good guys, like Ben Whelan—who refuses to cut corners or break the law—are hanging on by a thread. He's getting outbid left and right by companies that cheat, and the kicker is that this new system is set up to reward the cheaters and bad guys. The NYT Magazine piece continues:

A journeyman carpenter at his company, he explained while holding the union rate sheet, earned at least \$26 an hour. Whelan's minimum cost for that worker, however, was closer to \$50 an hour, because his payments also covered union health care, pension and annuity contributions as well as mandatory Social Security, Medicare and income taxes. He was also required to pay for workers' compensation insurance. Subcontractors in Connecticut who illegally misclassified workers, or simply paid them off the books, also often paid carpenters \$20 to \$25 an hour, but they escaped all the extra expenses — which made it easier for the contractors who used them to beat him on bids.

So, if you play by the rules, you lose. That's the message for small business owners in America.

But this isn't just about wages—it's also about what we're building, and it's not honorable or high quality. Today's homeowners are paying top dollar for cruddy construction that's done by untrained, underpaid, unsupervised (often illegal) labor. The NYT Magazine piece concludes:

Many of these workers are put on residential construction jobs with little or no training and with no experienced tradesman supervising their work. No one teaches them how to run the weatherproofing paper over the metal flashing to prevent water from seeping into a gable's frame. Homeowners depend on carpenters and roofers to know the details of their work, but unlike plumbers and electricians, they rarely have to pass licensing tests to prove their knowledge or skills. In Connecticut, as in most of the country, neither do the contractors or subcontractors who place undertrained workers on jobs.

This is what a completely broken system looks like—gutted by open-border globalists from both sides of the aisle. From progressive Dems to spineless Republicans, greedy developers, and a corrupt government that rewards cheaters over craftsmen.

Let's face it, illegal labor, corrupt subcontracting, and costly regulations didn't just show up unannounced one day—this was all engineered. And the result of that twisted anti-American plot is a once-respected American trade industry turned into a rigged game where honest workers can't win against cheap, unskilled illegal labor.

Until we get really serious about shutting down illegal labor, punishing crooked contractors, and cutting the red tape that is strangling the life out of small businesses, this Olympic race to the bottom will keep going. And when it finally crashes—and it will—it won't just be tradesmen left in the rubble—it'll be the entire country.