

Poverty, penalty rates and equality

Letter to Canberra Times

In Anti-poverty week the BCA, the AHA, the Chambers of Commerce continue to cry in unison for the small business bosses who groan that if it were not for penalty rates they would be in millionaire heaven. However the truth that I have learnt from a wage earning life in small businesses as a cook, is that many of us did not then, and still do not now, get paid penalty rates. The wage scandals of 7/11, and the fruit picking industry are just two fine examples of the daily swindles and indignities that beset so many of us at work, and especially those of us who do not have any organised voice.

As a full time wage-earning adult I had to help raise a child and pay the rent on less than \$45K a year. Often that gross did not deliver in equivalent benefits, such as super contributions, because of the many 'inventive' pay arrangements on offer. Many family-owned businesses do cash-in-hand payments off the books. Many students running between studies and work are forced into dodgy deals because of their precarious budget juggle. Not really the win-win for the boss and worker that we are told, the only loser, and in many ways, is the wage earner. A ghost has no protection and does not get compo. I learnt my lesson and I want to prevent my daughter having to do so.

We are told weekends are the same as every other day. PM Turnbull obviously has not cooked 400 breakfast covers on the busiest day for many restaurants, Sunday. Most threatened by big business's wage cutting campaign are those of us on \$40K dollars or less. Penalty rates can make a difference of up to \$100 a week more. The corporations' cash backs their aim at a soft target, the most isolated workers and unorganised sectors, retail and hospitality. Big business knows that a local café owner crying poor, supposedly because of penalty rates that they rarely pay, plays more easily to our emotions and creates confusion. Far better media than workers in casinos full of high rollers, or the emergency services and nurses for that matter, having their penalties cut. What they want is a precedent set and we must stop it. And continue on, convincing each other that we can make a more equitable Australia.

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