



*United Voice is one of Australia's largest unions
with over 120,000 members*

news release

6 May 2019

WAGE THEFT IN ELECTION SPOTLIGHT: MELBOURNE EAT STREET THEFT

A complaint has been filed with the Fair Work Ombudsman raising alarm at extreme levels of wage theft on Chapel Street, one of Melbourne's premier restaurant and hospitality strips.

Hospo Voice, a digital union for hospitality workers, has investigated hospitality businesses along Chapel Street in Melbourne and uncovered evidence that at least 12 venues are stealing wages, with one venue paying as little as \$10 per hour.

The investigation uncovered cash payments, tax fraud, superannuation theft, and at one restaurant, three international students allege they have not been paid for some weeks they worked.

Dozens of Hospo Voice members will march down Chapel Street in protest at midday today.

Today the McKell Institute, an independent public policy institute, is also releasing a report commissioned by Hospo Voice revealing that hospitality workers in just one electorate* are likely to have lost \$45 million in stolen wages, stolen super and cuts to penalty rates over the last six years of the current Liberal Government. The report uses ABS data and Fair Work Commission audits to model the impact of wage theft on workers.

Jobs and wages are central issues in the Federal Election campaign, with the Labor party committing to clamp down on wage theft by making employers pay a fine triple the size of a worker's underpayment.

Quotes attributable to Jo-anne Schofield, National Secretary of United Voice:

"Under the Morrison Government whole classes of workers have experienced regular and systemic exploitation. The revelations from Chapel Street highlight how mostly young staff are systemically underpaid in the hospitality industry.

"The revelations of extreme wage theft on the eve of the Federal Election at many Chapel Street venues come to light at the same time as wages have been a central issue in the election campaign, with Federal Labor committing to clamp down on wage theft by making employers pay a fine triple the size of a worker's underpayment in the face of Scott Morrison's continued inaction.

"It's bad enough that the Coalition government has voted eight times for penalty rate cuts that will cost Australia's workers \$2.9 billion over the next three years.

"These revelations show that some employers simply choose to ignore all their legal obligations.

"The Chapel Street revelations have come to light as the McKell institute has revealed that Australian workers in just one electorate have lost \$45 million in stolen wages, stolen super and cuts to penalty rates over the last six years of the current Liberal Government.

"Voters have a clear choice at the upcoming Federal election – a vote for penalty rate cuts and wage theft inaction under the Coalition, or a vote for Labor to restore and protect penalty rates and stand up to wage theft."

Quotes attributable to Ben Redford, Acting Secretary of United Voice, Victorian Branch:

"Over the last two months we've spoken to dozens of workers from Chapel Street and what we've found is the full catastrophe. You have every type of hospitality business, engaged in every type of wage theft. It's ground zero for wage theft on Melbourne's south side.

"We found worker paid in cash, as little as \$10 per hour. Super is being stolen. International students have had whole weeks' worth of wages stolen.

“All of this has happened under our current workplace rules. For hospo workers, these rules are a raging trash fire. They need to change. What has Scott Morrison done to change those rules? Nothing. And what will Mr Morrison do if he is re-elected? Nothing.

“Hospo workers deserve a government that will come down on wage thieves like a ton of bricks.”

Quote attributable to “Dave”, a current La La Hospitality Group bartender:

“I get my pay in an envelope stuffed with cash. I’m paid \$22 per hour, no penalty rates, to work on weekends and into the early hours of the morning. They are stealing about \$16,000 a year from me. I was shocked to learn how high that figure is.

“Long term employees I work with would have had this amount money stolen from them, year in year out. I don’t understand how a company of this size keeps getting away with stealing so much money from its workers.

“What has the watchdog done to enforce the current rules? Hospo workers feel like we’ve been left to fend for ourselves by this government.”

ENDS

About: Hospo Voice is Australia’s first digital union. Hospo Voice combines online tools to empower hospitality workers, along with worker-led campaigns and protests to name and shame employers that mistreat staff. Hospo Voice is also pioneering a Netflix-style membership of \$9.99 per month, with the first month free. Hospo Voice is a project of United Voice, and is backed by the ACTU.

Media opportunity today: Hospo Voice’s Chapel Street rally will start at **12:00pm at Prahran Town Hall** and will march on to two La La Bar Group venues. Labor Higgins candidate Fiona McLeod will speak.

Link to McKell research [here](#)

*Higgins

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