

Thursday August 2, 2018

Turnbull must act on broken work visa system after shocking wage theft allegations

Allegations of shocking wage theft from a chef in Nowra on the New South Wales south coast have raised serious questions about exploitation of people on temporary work visas and the inadequacy of the laws that are meant to protect the rights of all people working in Australia.

Indian national Midhun Basi came to Australia on a 457 visa. Mr Midhun says he was paid less than the legal minimum for a 38-hour week, and worked more than 70 hours a week in the restaurant over a period of 18 months. It's estimated by South Coast Labour Council that if the claims are proven Mr Basi could be owed up to \$220,000 in unpaid wages.

It's also alleged that during his time at the restaurant Mr Basi was required to give cash to his employer which his employer said was to cover rent and bills at the restaurant.

This case is the latest in a series of high-profile wage theft allegations in the hospitality industry around the country.

Workers who come to Australia on temporary visas like Mr Midhun's are uniquely vulnerable to exploitation, due to their isolation in the community and an employer's ability to effectively cancel their visa by firing them.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

"The Turnbull Government is overseeing an exploitative temporary worker program that is out of control. There are no caps, no effective measures to stop exploitation and the system is driven by employers and big business.

"More than one million people – one tenth of the Australian labour force – is on a visa with work rights. All of them are uniquely vulnerable to exploitation because of our weak laws.

"These broken laws, introduced by John Howard, stopped working peoples representatives being able to inspect pay records and inform people of their rights. Thousands of cops were taken off the wage theft beat, and now bad employers know they can get away with exploitation and abuse.

"We need to change the rules to end the uncapped temporary visa system that enables exploitation. We need to let working people's representatives inspect pay records so bosses don't feel like they can get away with stealing wages.

"And we need to change the rules make sure there are meaningful penalties and quick, accessible justice for people like Mr Basi."

"Working people need the support of their representatives – especially vulnerable temporary visa holders. We need to change the rules to stop wage theft."

Media contact: ACTU Media 03 9664 7315 or Lachlan Williams 0447 682 027

<http://www.actu.org.au/actu-media/media-releases>