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## From laneway cafes to temporary workers, wage theft is Australia's shameful business model

The peak body for working people has called for the industrial umpire to be given the power to order backpay for victims of wage and superannuation theft after yet more revelations of the shameful practice.

A United Voice survey of Melbourne's upmarket Degrares St found that at least half the venues were stealing wages, with people being paid as little as \$11 per hour. The United Voice survey found that this was up to \$20,000 for some workers.

And a landmark study by researchers at the University of New South Wales and the University of Technology Sydney has found that temporary visa holders are likely owed more than a billion dollars, with a third paid less than \$12 per hour – less than half the legal minimum for casual workers.

Those who've had their wages stolen are left unable to get their money without embarking on a costly, protracted and complicated process in the Federal Court.

The researchers said that only three percent of temporary visa holders whose wages were stolen took their complaint to the Fair Work Ombudsman. More than half of those who did go to the ombudsman recovered nothing.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

"Everyone who works in Australia should have basic rights, including the right to a fair wage.

"Right now our system is out of balance. Big business has too much power and working people don't have enough. Wage theft is a business model in Australia.

"Bad business owners steal wages because they know they'll get away with it, and business owners trying to do the right thing are forced to compete with crooks who are exploiting people to get an unfair advantage.

"When a snapshot of one of Melbourne's most iconic dining strips and a large-scale survey of temporary visa holders both show rampant wage theft, you know things have gone badly wrong.

"We need to make it easy for people who've had wages stolen to get their money back, and we need to put workers representatives back on the wage theft beat and give them the power to inspect the books to make sure bosses aren't stealing.

"Those employing people on temporary visas should be made to register and everyone who comes to Australia to work should receive information on their rights and access to representation in their native language."

**ENDS**

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