

Australian youth and workers denounce cuts to Sunday pay rates

Our reporters
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Young people are bitterly opposed to the decision by the Australian government's Fair Work Commission (FWC) last May to reduce the hourly rate for the lowest paid casual restaurant, bar and cafe workers on Sundays to the same as for Saturday.

Expected to save the restaurant and catering industry \$112 million a year, the move will have devastating consequences for tens of thousands of poorly-paid workers, many of whom are students and youth, who rely on penalty rates to meet the rising cost of bills, housing and education expenses.

In line with the employers, the FWC judges claimed that the penalty rate cut will enable small and medium businesses to hire new staff and boost the youth employment rate, which is currently at 57.4 percent, a 20-year low.

The opposite is the case. The pay cut for hospitality industry workers will be used to further drive down conditions and pay for the working class as a whole. Students are especially vulnerable. Two thirds live below the poverty line, on an average income of \$358 a week. One university student told the *World Socialist Web Site* he will lose \$75 a week, or the equivalent of the cost of his text books.

The decision came on top of the Abbott government's federal budget, also handed down in May, which will drastically increase education fees and healthcare charges while slashing welfare payments for students and the unemployed (see: "Budget to cut youth off welfare"). Six years after the global financial breakdown erupted, the corporate elite is using the continued deterioration of the global and Australian economy as a pretext to cut wages and conditions.

Some people who spoke to the WSWS did not want to provide their photo for fear that it could cost them their job. One in five young workers are employed in

casual work, which provides no job security.

Komal, 21, a bar tender and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) student in West Ryde, in Sydney's northwestern suburbs, said the cut was "unfair." He told the WSWS: "I'm very angry as Sunday is my longest shift. At the moment I'm getting \$35 per hour and now I will be getting half of that. Sunday is normally a day for family and leisure but I choose to work so I can make more money.

"The annoying thing is that nobody told us anything about this at work. I found out about it through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

"They are doing this so they can make more profit. I work six days a week. I pay \$280 week rent which will increase up to \$325 from July. All the money I make goes toward rent and other expenses. If I didn't live with my partner I wouldn't be able to study. It's mostly the young that this is affecting, as they are the ones who work casual and on the weekends."

Hide is a parking valet and **Andrew** is a kitchen hand, both in Sydney's Sutherland Shire. "My income will be reduced substantially, by \$150 fortnight," Andrew said. "That is equal to my text book costs at university. Fees for commerce and law will increase substantially. The fee for some law subjects will increase from \$2,500 to \$3,500, which is substantial."

Hide added: "Sunday is the day I get my extra money. I can't sustain my life style if they cut the penalty rate. I think education is a right. It should be available for every one and it shouldn't be dictated by how much you can afford. I am planning to go to university next year... Now that fees are going up, I am thinking whether it is worth going to university.

"I want to expand my knowledge and contribute to society, but if I have to pay so much for year after year and buy a house, it will be very difficult, if not

impossible, to manage it.”

Asked about Treasurer Joe Hockey’s call for “the end of the age of entitlement,” Hide replied: “Of course rich people are entitled to have everything! The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer—it’s how our society works until someone decides to make the change.”

Zoë, 19, works at a café in Lake Macquarie, 120 kilometres north of Sydney, and studies Arts and Law at Newcastle University. Her Sunday shift was cut after she asked for a day off. “Sundays were my main earning day. I would get almost \$20 an hour on Sundays for a 7-hour shift—we don’t get breaks anyway. Today I make around \$14 or \$15.

“I’m not sure if I’m going to be able to move out and work and go to uni. At the moment I’m making anywhere from \$150 to \$300 a week—on average about \$230—so it’s not much at all. I’d have to be working way more because the suburbs I’m looking at moving to are very expensive.”

Zoë commented on Hockey’s call to “end the age of entitlement.” She said: “I think that term is offensive—entitlement. It’s not like we’re not working. We are entitled to certain things, such as an education that everyone can afford, not just certain people.”

Raquel, 22, a clothing retail worker in Perth, explained: “The conditions in retail are terrible. The job I am in now is okay; I like it. But previous jobs I have had were awful. You would never get a lunch break. You are by yourself and given extra responsibilities for little pay.

“The budget is going to take away things that people took for granted, like not having to pay to see a doctor. The only people benefitting from the budget are people who are rich enough. I worry about the future. Where will I be in five years’ time? Will I ever be able to afford a house and get a full-time decent paying job? If I want to go back to study will I be able to afford it?

“Many young people now have to stay at home with their parents. They are scared of the future. I heard that some 75 percent of university students who finish their degrees are not getting jobs. Their knowledge and skills are not being used. I am working casual at the moment and I get enough shifts for now but I know others who work with me and friends who will only get two shifts per week and only four-hour shifts. How are they supposed to survive?”

Ganga, who has worked as a chef for five years in Melbourne, opposed the cuts to penalty rates, even though they do not apply directly to him. “I think it’s not good. Working class people need this money quite a lot. It’s very hard for working people nowadays. Prices are getting very high, but salaries are staying the same. In most cases, people in the hospitality sector work long hours for low pay, often for 50-60 hours per week. Often it is late at night, followed by early morning the next day.

“Social inequality is everywhere today, in Australia and around the world. There needs to be something done to boost the living standards of the working class.”

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