

I wanted to work but the AWA made me pay

WHEN I worked at Chili's Restaurant I was asked by my manager to pay a \$130 bill for a table of dishonest patrons. They had skipped out on their bill and I was made to take the blame. I was just an employee.

I was excited to land a job at Chili's. I understood that I would be working for \$13.44 an hour. Along with a group of about 20 other young people, most of them still in high school, I signed the Australian Workplace Agreement presented to me. I didn't really understand the implications of the AWA at first.

I thought it would not really make a difference to my working conditions. I also believed that the whole fuss about the WorkChoices laws was created by politicians wanting votes.

But I was wrong because the AWA I had signed really did make a difference to the job. Sadly, my enthusiasm and excitement over my new job was quickly dampened by the harsh realities of the conditions of my employment.

Most of the time I was given only two-hour shifts, meaning I got just \$26.88 a night. On several occasions I turned up at the allocated time only to be told to wait around until it got busy enough to work. Sometimes I would wait for up to 45 minutes without getting paid because there were not enough customers in the restaurant.

I couldn't grumble because everyone else was doing the same. It was seemingly an accepted practice. I didn't want to be labelled a whinger. I soon realised I had been put on as a part-time worker but was being given casual hours instead of the 10 hours a week stated in my agreement.

I was also requested to bring my own \$50 float in to work. The \$50 float was carried in my apron with the rest of my takings and would sometimes get up to around \$700.

It is unnerving carrying all that money on you when you are only a slightly built 53kg girl coping with some "mischievous" customers.

Then I was also told to pay for discrepancies in my float. After I was asked to pay the bill for the table of customers that had skipped out, I realised I would have to work for weeks with no reimbursement to pay back the money. There was no resolution so I sacrificed my last pay packet and resigned.

For the people working at Chili's, the Government has created a scheme that is supposed to be "simpler and fairer". I just wonder when it was that I was supposed to have sat down and talked to my employer to work out a fair workplace agreement.