

# COMMENT

## THE AGE

### Spare a thought for the person serving you

In the final countdown to Christmas, we are all out late, scrambling for those last-minute gifts or rolling home from end-of-the-year festivities. And so all the shops are now open late into the night to cater for a level of consumer demand that has finally reached fever pitch.

But those of us pushing through the crowds at the local mall should realise that, no matter how stressed we feel as we navigate the aisles, the person behind the counter is under a great deal more pressure.

This is a make-or-break week for most retailers, and you may be certain that any extension of opening hours during the festive season means big tranches of overtime for the person ringing up your gifts or bringing your drinks.

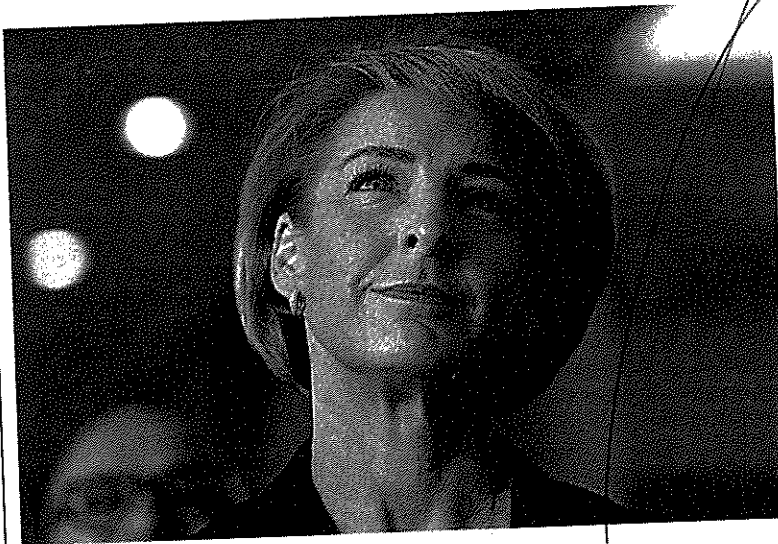
We would hope that the smile with which you are greeted is always genuine, and informed by the terrific penalty rates that these monster shifts should attract at this trying time. But after so many Age investigations into underpayment and mistreatment of staff, we suspect many of those who are serving you are not being treated fairly. Just on Monday,

reporters Adele Ferguson and Sarah Danckert revealed that a franchisee of food giant Retail Food Group was negotiating various forms of underpayment with a potential employee, all of them well below the minimum wage.

Stories throughout the year have exposed similar patterns of underpayment, often paired with demands that employees work overtime, within many different retail and hospitality businesses.

"Underpayment still goes on everywhere," a source known as Jon told *The Age*. "We are getting more than we used to but we still

*It has become increasingly clear how common it is for retail and hospitality workers to be underpaid.*



### CABINET RESHUFFLE

## It makes little sense in promoting use of Cash

As employment minister Michaelia Cash was often unwilling to stand up for the rights of many thousands of low-paid workers whose wages and basic conditions have been substantially undercut or ignored by unscrupulous employers across many industry sectors. Instead her main ministerial efforts focused, loudly and insistently, on a succession of long-lasting union bashing initiatives and associated punishments.

Her reward for this less than satisfactory performance is a dressed-up "super" jobs and innovation portfolio, the first half of which she should have been expected to deliver on robustly over the past two years. Let's hope she is now able to show interest in and can help develop meaningful additional work and training opportunities for the many under-employed and unemployed, including older members of the workforce, without expecting them to engage with merciless and corrupt businesses whose employment practices have been exposed as both illegal and immoral.

Sue Dyer, Downer ACT

## LETTERS

### Rotten growth

Nearly 80 heritage trees along St Kilda Road are facing destruction, with the consortium building the \$11 billion Melbourne Metro Tunnel having lodged an application for their removal.

This imminent destruction of a significant part of Melbourne's green urban heritage is symptomatic of the larger scale destruction of Melbourne's green amenity. Eminent arborist, Dr Gregory Moore, the chair of the National Trust of Victoria's Register of Significant Trees, has stated that trees in Melbourne are being lost at a rate of around 1.5 per cent a year.

A lamentable, but inevitable loss in the pursuit of progress? Not so. Rampant population growth and city building, while filling the coffers of property, construction and financial interests, has become a politically lazy substitute for genuine national economic renewal. The major political parties are now witless captives to such amenity-destroying dumb growth. While creating the impression of economic prosperity and for short-term jobs creation, it in fact does nothing to create a globally competitive economy.

Dr Ernest Healy, vice-president, Protectors of Public Lands Inc, Victoria

### The real results

It is time to forget the hubris and self-congratulations that followed the New England and Bannalong...