

Tuesday 23 July 2019

## Calombaris gone after #MasterTheft outrage

A Network 10 decision to pull the plug on the contract of George Calombaris is the right call after increased pressure from working people and their unions who have ramped up pressure on the most notorious wage thief in the country.

Network 10 said in a surprise statement that it would not renew a contract for all three judges after 10 months of negotiating and being unable to reach a commercial agreement.

Calombaris was exposed as one of Australia's most notorious wage thieves, stealing nearly \$8 million from his workers, and receiving a slap on the wrist with a \$200,000 "contrition payment".

While anyone else would face prison time for theft of millions of dollars, employers routinely steal huge amounts from working people and get away with simply returning the money they have stolen and paying a poultry fine.

This is not an isolated incident; wage theft is systemic across entire industries including hospitality.

Workers need access to union representative to make sure they are being paid properly and our laws need to change to ensure working people can get back their stolen wages back easily and have access to justice. It should not take years for workers to get back what was stolen from them. In addition, penalties for wage theft need to act as a true deterrent.

A petition by former Calombaris worker Orlaith Belfrate demanded the celebrity chef be booted from the show. It was signed by 26,000 people and social media was awash with outrage from across the community at the tiny fine he was given.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"Working people have had enough of their wages being stolen and their rights being ignored, especially when those involved have made their fortunes off the back of their workers. Network 10 have made the right decision to axe George Calombaris as a judge on MasterChef.

"We need better role models in the hospitality industry. There are plenty of good business owners who respect their workers, these are the people we should be seeing on TV.

"This is a win for working people who have worked tirelessly for years to expose the rampant wage theft and exploitation on which Calombaris built his empire.

"Wage theft is systemic across entire industries. Workers need easy access to unions to ensure they are being paid correctly and our laws need to change so it is quick and easy to get stolen wages back, along with meaningful deterrents for employers.

"Instead of acting to stop wage theft, the Morrison Government is focused on attacking unions who are the very people with fairer laws, could put a stop to it.

**Quotes attributable to Orlaith Belfrage, Hospo Voice member former worker at Hellenic Republic:**

“Woohoo! This is fantastic news. George being dumped from MasterChef is a huge win for hospitality workers and our fight against wage theft.

“We don’t need people like George Calombaris representing our industry. He built his empire and massive profile from stealing wages from his workers, including me.

“I want to thank the 26,000 people who signed my petition, demanding George be dumped from the show.

“This shows the power of hospo workers when we stand together in our union and fight for justice.

“We need people who will be real leaders of this industry and will stand up for fairness and respect for their workers.

“We also need Scott Morrison to stop attacking unions and get serious about breaking this wage theft business model.

“Unions like mine actually fight wage theft. What’s Scott done to fight wage theft? Zero.”

ENDS

**Media contact: Kate Shuttleworth 0447 418 726 or ACTU Media: 03 9664 7337**