ACTU
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media release

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Australians want workplace laws that provide secure jobs, not greater power for employers: survey

Any further changes to workplace laws should improve job security, rights and protections for the millions of people in insecure work, not hand more power to employers, say unions.

In its submission to the review of the Fair Work Act, the ACTU will propose reforms within the framework of the existing legislation to improve the rights to collective bargaining and the safety net for insecure workers.

The ACTU will release its submission today, along with research that shows its proposals are in tune with the majority of Australians and that the campaign by employer groups against workers is dramatically out of touch with public sentiment.

The survey of more than 2000 people found that 57% believe that any new workplace laws should aim to give employees more reliable work. Just 14% said new laws were needed to give businesses greater flexibility in how they employ people.

Even among Liberal voters, twice as many were in favour of laws to help workers as supported laws that suited employers (49% to 24%).

“There is no public mood to hand over increased power to employers, but more importantly, there is no credible evidence or rationale in the way the Fair Work Act is operating to justify this either,” said ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence.

“Our submission will clearly demonstrate that the contrary to the myths being perpetrated by employers, the Fair Work Act has been irrefutably good for workers and good for the economy.

“The facts show that a record number of collective agreements are being made, industrial disputes are down, the economy is growing at a steady pace, unemployment and inflation are low, and wage growth is solid and sustainable. Profits are close to all-time record highs, while wages’ share of national income is at a 40-year low, so business has nothing to complain about.

“This review is important because it will expose the inaccurate and uninformed statements that are made every day by highly-paid and out-of-touch business leaders such as Westpac CEO Gail Kelly that bear no relation to reality.

“Employer criticism of the Fair Work Act is barely disguised lust for a return to a WorkChoices system. Employers and their fellow travellers in the Liberal Party need to stop living in the past.

“In the last couple of days, we have seen former Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett articulate the employer-Liberal agenda with a call to abolish penalty rates. This would result in a is a significant reduction in the take-home pay of workers in the hospitality, retail and service sectors. We're talking about people on $17 an hour who rely on penalty rates as a significant part of their income."

“The future of Australia’s workplace system is in collective bargaining and a co-operative approach; slash-and-burn, bully boy tactics like those of Qantas need to be stopped.

"If any changes are needed to the Fair Work Act, they should start with strengthening the bargaining system, with an activist role for Fair Work Australia where employers only pay lip service to the notion of collective bargaining and never have any intention of reaching agreement.

"The protections and entitlements of the 40% of Australians in insecure jobs as casuals, contractors or labour hire workers must be improved, and workers should have the right to bargain about job security. Secure jobs that pay decent wages and have workplace rights can be built on our economic strengths."

Mr Lawrence said unions shared the goal of lifting Australia's rate of productivity growth, but warned that giving more power to employers to fire workers or cut pay and conditions would not lead to better productivity.

"Productivity improvements come from the high road of greater levels of trust and co-operation between workers and employers, and from investment in skills, technology, infrastructure and innovation," Mr Lawrence said.

DETAILS OF SURVEY

The ACTU commissioned Qdos Research to investigate attitudes to work and workplace laws in Australia. A total of 2004 people took part in the online survey. They were asked:

Taking into account the good reasons from both sides would you like to see decision makers in Australia enact new laws with:

1. *A greater emphasis on giving employers more flexibility in the way they employ people.*
2. *A greater emphasis on giving employees more reliable work.*
3. *Leave it as it currently is.*
4. *Don't know.*

		A greater emphasis on giving employers more flexibility in the way they employ people	A greater emphasis on giving employees more reliable work	Leave it as it currently is	Don't know
	Total	14%	57%	14%	15%
Gender	Male	16%	54%	16%	14%
	Female	13%	59%	12%	17%
Age	18-34	12%	56%	14%	18%
	35-54	14%	56%	14%	16%
	55+	17%	60%	12%	11%
Employment status	Full-time	16%	53%	16%	14%
	Part-time/casual	12%	59%	12%	17%
	Other	13%	59%	12%	16%
Voting intention	Labor	9%	69%	13%	9%
	Coalition	24%	49%	17%	10%
	Greens	6%	66%	11%	17%
	Other/unsure	11%	56%	12%	20%

The ACTU submission to the Fair Work Act review is available at www.actu.org.au

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