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PC inquiry into workplace laws is another attack on rights at work

Australian Unions will use the Productivity Commission inquiry into workplace laws to make the case for significant improvements in Australian's rights at work.

The Productivity Commission released five issues papers for the inquiry on its website today.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said there is no doubt the Abbott Government initiated the inquiry as a tool to pursue its obsession with workplace relations and issues like penalty rates and individual contracts.

"The Government wants this process to take workers backwards but we are determined to push for improvements.

"The Abbott Government has four bills before the Parliament that aim to strip away rights and conditions for Australian workers," said Ms Kearney.

"The ACTU wrote to Employment Minister Eric Abetz just yesterday urging him to shelve the government's workplace relations legislative agenda until both the Heydon royal commission and the Productivity Commission inquiry into the Fair Work Act are completed," Ms Kearney said.

"It's ludicrous for the Abbott government to be wasting the time and resources of the Senate trying to pass four workplace relations bills before the Productivity Commission has even really started, let alone finished, its inquiry.

Ms Kearney said the Productivity Commission's issues paper also recognises this issue:

The Commission notes that the Australian Government is proposing a variety of changes to the FWA via a number of Bills that are before Parliament. The inquiry's primary focus will be on the preferred structure for WR in Australia and it is unlikely to directly assess amendments to relevant legislation, although it may indicate how these arrangements may need to be revised, if that is necessary, to conform to its proposed policy recommendations.

Ms Kearney said unions will use the inquiry to advocate for improvements to minimum and award wages, and to reduce poverty and inequality.

"Unions will oppose any move to cut wages, while measures to stop the lowest paid Australians from falling further behind the middle will form part of the ACTU's submission.

Ms Kearney said this is in line with what is happening around the rest of the world, which is moving away from austerity measures.

"Six years on from the global financial crisis and both the US and Germany are seeking to increase their minimum wage while other countries in Europe have realised the folly of cuts to public services and extra costs for households.

"Since coming to office the Abbott Government has been focussed on cutting the living standards of all Australians, whether through the GP co-payment or higher university fees, and unfortunately this inquiry looks like more of the same."

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