

Friday, 20 March 2015

Big business makes a grab for wages, conditions and rights at work

Unions have always said the Productivity Commission inquiry into workplace relations was a Trojan horse to bring back WorkChoices and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) has provided the proof.

The BCA submission aims to cut people's penalty rates and wages, make them work longer hours and weekends for less money, make it easier to sack people and take away their rights at work.

A panel comprised of a retired Judge, a Professor of Labour Law and an economist reviewed the Fair Work Act just three years ago and found our industrial relations system works – but yet again we have an extremist employer lobby group trying to dismantle the system and take away rights at work.

Key facts:

Working patterns have not substantially changed as the business lobby claim:

- In 1997, 69.7% of Australians worked from Monday to Friday; in 2012 this figure was 68.9%. The fact is that the majority of Australians work Monday to Friday.

Some of the most vulnerable employees rely on penalty rates in Awards to make ends meet:

- 1.86 million Australians are reliant on Award wages
- Almost 40% of workers on Awards are employed in retail, accommodation and food services – the industries where employers are trying to cut penalty rates first
- Senior staff in retail and hospitality would still receive less than Australia's average full time weekly earnings even if they worked a full time week at double time for every hour worked

WorkChoices gave the employers all sorts of 'flexibility' and in the case of AWAs – individual contracts - most removed basic award conditions:

- 65% of individual agreements removed penalty rates
- 70% of individual agreements removed shift loading
- 68% of individual agreements removed annual leave loading
- 50% of individual agreements removed public holiday pay

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver

“The BCA wants to cut people's penalty rates and wages, make them work longer hours and weekends for less money, make it easier to sack people and take away their rights at work.

“Flexibility is just the word employers' use for cutting wages and conditions and workers know this.

“Cutting penalty rates or the minimum wage has nothing to do with job creation or productivity - it is about cutting people's pay packets.

“Unions have always said the Productivity Commission inquiry was a Trojan horse to bring back WorkChoices and here is the proof - an extremist employer lobby group trying to dismantle Australia's entire workplace system to take away people rights and slash their wages.

“There are millions of Australians who cannot afford the sudden pay cut that will come with having their penalty rates and wages cut.”

Media contact: Kara Douglas, 0418 793 885 or Carla De Campo 0410 579 575