

Thursday, 8 March 2012

## Unions seek to improve workers' rights and ensure skilled workforce through better Awards system

Workers' rights and the pay and conditions of apprentices can be improved through further changes to awards, say unions in an application to Fair Work Australia's Modern Awards Review.

The unions' submission to the review will focus on a positive agenda for all workers, in contrast to employers who are seeking to slash the take-home pay of hundreds of thousands of Australians and worsen their job insecurity, said ACTU Assistant Secretary Tim Lyons.

The key components of the union submission are to standardise public holiday entitlements for all workers, and to increase apprentice completion rates by lifting training wages. Mr Lyons said unions would seek public holiday equity for employees who work non-standard hours, and often miss out when they are rostered on a public holiday.

"The current system is weighted against employees who work a non-standard week," Mr Lyons said. "At present, many of these workers are not entitled to the same number of days off in a year as employees who work a typical Monday-Friday roster. This is because if a public holiday falls on their rostered day off, they are then not entitled to a day off for compensation.

"These workers still only get two days off across a week that includes a long weekend. This is extremely inequitable and unions want to ensure these workers receive the same number of days off as their counterparts working standard hours."

Unions are calling for changes to the awards system that ensures these workers can choose to receive either an additional day's wages, an alternative day off, or an extra day of annual leave.

"This inequity is particularly evident at Christmas, especially when the holiday period falls at the weekend, which it has during the last couple of years," Mr Lyons said.

The ACTU is also calling for Fair Work Australia to establish a new, fairer safety net for hundreds of thousands of apprentices by ensuring that all adult apprentices earn at least the minimum wage in their industry, benefiting more than 200,000 workers.

"Our positive agenda will help ensure we have a skilled workforce into the future, in a workplace system that is fair and equitable," Mr Lyons said. "In contrast, employer groups' applications to the review is yet another example their concerted campaign against hard-working Australians."

Mr Lyons said that in the retail sector, employers want to slash pay rates, increase the irregularity of employees' hours and cut their penalty rates, overtime and allowances.

"The awards review process has now also exposed employers' plans to replace permanent teaching roles with more insecure contract work. These attacks are not limited to teaching and retail sectors, with attempts to slash the take home pay of hospitality workers, cull the entitlements of local government employees, decrease allowances in the pharmacy industry and force construction workers to pay for their own safety equipment.

"Unions will vigorously fight this latest campaign against workers by employers because the only way to create a stronger and more skilled workforce is to improve entitlements and conditions, not take them away like we saw under WorkChoices."

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