

Thursday, 22 March 2012

New laws to give vulnerable workers more secure jobs and better conditions: unions

Australian workers have taken two major steps towards secure jobs this week, with the passage by Parliament of two Bills to improve the pay and conditions of some of our most vulnerable workers, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said truck drivers would no longer have to work long days with many unpaid hours just to get the job done, thanks the Road Safety Remuneration Bill passing the House of Representatives earlier in the week.

And the entitlements and protections of textile, clothing and footwear workers will also be strengthened by the Fair Work Amendment (Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industry) Bill 2011 which was passed this afternoon.

“The two pieces of legislation which have been passed in Canberra this week highlight the plight of insecure work, which now affects 40% of the entire Australian workforce,” Ms Kearney said.

“Truck drivers and clothing outworkers endure some of the worst effects of insecure work, with the fear they will not have a job in the morning prompting them to work long hours, risk their safety and sacrifice valuable time outside work just to make a living.

“The situation of these workers clearly illustrate how insecure work is all about generating profits and shifting any risk from employers to employees.”

Ms Kearney said workers in both industries were often too afraid to speak out about exploitation because they feared for their jobs.

“Truck driving is one of the most dangerous jobs in Australia, with many drivers facing unrealistic pressure to deliver goods to major retailers within certain timeframes, forcing them to load and unload in their own time,” she said. “The vote to award these workers fair pay and conditions will make them safer and their jobs more secure.

“Many home-based outworkers work 12-hour days or longer, for just \$5 an hour – less than one third the minimum wage - sewing items of clothes that earn distributors and retailers huge profits.

“The amendments to the Fair Work Act will mean contract outworkers in the textile, clothing and footwear industry will be covered by most of the Act and will ensure nationally consistent provisions across Australia and a critical safety net of terms and conditions for workers in the TCF industry who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

“Fittingly, these pieces of legislation are on the table at the same time the Howe Inquiry is wrapping up six weeks of public hearings across Australia as part of its investigation into the issue of insecure work.

“The inquiry will present a report to the ACTU in May, which is expected to include solutions to the problem. Unions are pleased the Government is already taking action to improve the plight of workers engaged in insecure work but we know that more needs to be done.”

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