

*** CORRECTED FOR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS ***

Friday, 31 August 2012

Grocon must respect workers' right to representation and agree to peaceful resolution of dispute

Grocon's decision to reject the offer of a 14-day cooling off period has worsened a dispute that will only be resolved through negotiation, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said Grocon's refusal of a recommendation by Fair Work Australia was extremely disappointing and raised questions about whether it wanted to end the dispute.

"Grocon's sites in Melbourne could all be back in full operation this morning if Grocon had accepted a reasonable offer by the construction union to suspend all industrial action for a fortnight," Ms Kearney said.

"The union made the unreserved offer during five hours of talks last night. It would have meant an immediate end to the protest at the Emporium site in the Melbourne CBD and other Grocon projects in Victoria and interstate.

"It beggars belief why Grocon would reject this reasonable offer. Management has shown contempt not only for its workforce but for the independent umpire, Fair Work Australia, and its President, Justice Iain Ross, who personally mediated last night's talks.

"As a result, this dispute is no closer to resolution, and instead hundreds of police were again on the streets this morning. Questions must be asked about what is Grocon's real agenda here."

Ms Kearney reiterated that the company's hardline approach had inflamed an issue that can only be resolved by the two parties getting together to reach an agreed outcome.

"The fundamental issue at Grocon is that management is refusing to prevent workers from having a say about who represents them on health and safety and other issues in the workplace," Ms Kearney said.

"This sort of blacklisting and bans on things like stickers and posters in the workplace does not belong in Australia and is a breach of the rights to freedom of association. Australian unions unreservedly condemn violence or intimidation in any form in any workplace, including in the construction industry. The company won't resolve these issues on the streets of Melbourne.

"Unions are willing and able to sit down with Grocon management at any time to talk through these issues. But Grocon management needs to drop its hardline approach and show respect for its workforce to negotiate a speedy and peaceful resolution to this dispute so that the employees of Grocon can get back to work."

Ms Kearney said the Grocon dispute did not justify political calls to bring back John Howard's Australian Building and Construction Commission.

"The ABCC was set up during WorkChoices as a direct attack on the rights of building and construction workers, and has been rightly consigned to history," she said. "Bringing it back is not the answer. There should be one law for all workers."

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