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Employers should not use the new award system as an excuse to cut pay: unions

Employers should not use the new award system as excuse to rip off workers and cut their pay and conditions, say unions.

Unions are concerned that some unscrupulous employers are gearing up to cut pay and conditions following the introduction of the modernised award system.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said unions were determined that no workers would be left worse off and will pursue every possible avenue to maintain wages and conditions, including legal action.

“The modernisation of awards is a significant step forward from WorkChoices that in the long run will deliver a solid safety net of wages and conditions for all workers,” Mr Lawrence said.

“There is no other reason apart from sheer greed for employers to cut pay because of the modernised award system. Most employers will do the right thing, but there are some who see this as an opportunity to boost their profits.

“There is a long tradition of above award wages in Australian workplaces and we would expect reputable employers to maintain workers’ pay under the new system.

“But where employers take advantage of the transition arrangements to the new modern awards, the legislation is quite clear that employees should not suffer a cut to take-home pay.

“The legislation has remedies for unscrupulous business behaviour and unions will vigorously pursue legal action, including Take-Home Pay Orders to maintain workers’ pay. Any workers who find their pay reduced should contact their relevant union for help and advice.

“Workers should also consider collective bargaining to safeguard and improve wages and conditions.”

Mr Lawrence said workers were far more worried about what the Tony Abbott-led Liberals have in store under their planned new version of WorkChoices.

Mr Abbott has vowed to slash away at penalty rates and to abolish safety net standards such as minimum hours of work in his plans to reintroduce WorkChoices and would seek to abolish the award safety net entirely.

Mr Lawrence said a proposed High Court challenge to the award modernisation system by the National Retail Association was derisory.

“The NRA is being deceptive about the impact of modern awards on jobs and the costs of running their businesses,” he said.

“Businesses should just get on with the job of operating in the new system and stop wasting time on frivolous exercises like this proposed High Court challenge.”

Media contact:

Mark Phillips ph (03) 8676 7266 or 0422 009 011 mphillips@actu.org.au