

Thursday, 5 March 2020

Statement on coronavirus and proposed stimulus

Statement from ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

There are 3.3 Million Australian workers with no access to paid leave. These are the people who face the greatest health and economic risks from the spread of the Coronavirus.

Yet the Morrison government has made no reference to any measures that would support them through this crisis. These workers are in many of the industries most exposed to the health and economic effects of Coronavirus.

The grim reality is that if these workers become ill they will either attend work sick, be stood down by their employer without pay or potentially be subject to self-isolation regimes, imposed by the Morrison government, again without means to pay their bills.

Without a proper, detailed economic support package for the 3.3 million people who have no access to paid leave there is not only an economic impact on those workers but also a significant health risk to the broader community.

We agree with the Morrison government that the economic response to this situation should be targeted, scalable and measured.

We note that the Conservative government in the UK has taken steps to provide some financial support to workers who must be isolated while still not addressing the issues associated with the British equivalent of casual employees.

Australia has a much larger percentage of our workforce without any access to paid leave, 13% in the UK as opposed to 32% here, and the consequences of failing to address this issue would likely be widespread.

Workers without access to paid leave will be placed in the impossible position of choosing whether to attend work while suffering symptoms, possibly infecting others, or self-isolating without any means to pay their bills.

While the undoing of Scott Morrison's cuts to the retirement savings of teachers, nurses and public servants and others in the form of changes to the deeming rate will be welcomed any attempt to implement a permanent tax cut for big business during a temporary health pandemic would be a gross politicization of the situation.

With roughly a third of Australian's enjoying a Labour Day public holiday on Monday, we urge the Morrison government to ensure that whatever economic package it does announce next week places the needs of the 3.3 Million workers with no access to paid leave at the centre of our nation's response.

ENDS

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