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Bargaining must be simple, fair and accessible for all

After a decade of flatlining wage growth and deep real wage cuts, the Jobs and Skills Summit provides an opportunity for a review of a bargaining system which has not been updated to reflect changes in Australian workplaces and is no longer delivering the wage growth that working people need.

Our bargaining system is overly and un-necessarily complicated. It no longer provides an even playing field for workers, and has become inaccessible, with huge parts of the economy – especially those industries dominated by women and small workplaces - effectively locked out of bargaining.

We need a bargaining system which is simple, fair and accessible for all.

To achieve this we need more options for collective bargaining, including multi-employer or sector bargaining, which would allow multiple workplaces to make an agreement together. This would improve access to bargaining for large sections of the workforce.

We have had a system based on enterprise bargaining as the only real option for 30 years. As times change, our bargaining system needs to as well. Now only 14 per cent of the workforce are on current agreements, wages growth cannot be restored without the bargaining system being restored.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

“We cannot fix wages growth without fixing collective bargaining. It is absolutely necessary for it to be modernised so that it delivers sustainable wages growth for today’s workforce.

“Our current system was designed 30 years ago where we had a completely different economy with many more large workplaces. Our economy is now dominated by services and care industries. As the economy has changed, our bargaining system needs to as well. People in smaller workplaces and care sectors which are often dominated by women also need access to the collective bargaining system.

“Allowing workers to band together across workplaces to bargain is an essential way of getting wages moving again after a lost decade of flatlining wages and real wage cuts. It should be unacceptable to all of us that real wage cuts are projected year upon year.”

“It has been the task of every generation to respond to their particular challenges and take action to address them so that the living standards of Australians rise. We believe this is what the Jobs and Skills Summit is about. Without modernising our wage bargaining system, real wages will not grow. Wages are not growing with productivity, profits, or low unemployment, we need to take action to fix it as a matter of urgency”.

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