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A PaTH to nowhere: Liberal Government's jobs 'plan' in tatters

Barely eight days after it was announced, the Turnbull Government's internship plan is in tatters, with employment law experts questioning the legality of its Youth Jobs PaTH program under the current legislative framework – potentially blowing a \$478 million black hole in the budget.

According to legal advice received by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the implementation of PaTH would require new legislation to legalise a second class category of \$4 per hour workers and remove those employees' basic rights under the Fair Work Act.

"For a Government to change the law to allow big companies to exploit workers on \$4 an hour, while stripping them of protections and entitlements under the Fair Work Act is one of the heaviest betrayals of Australian workers since WorkChoices," said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

"Not since the 1990s has it been legal to pay workers as little as \$4 per hour. This policy takes employment standards in this country back almost 30 years and has the potential to drag down wages and conditions for all workers – not just those in lower paid jobs."

ACTU President Ged Kearney urged all election candidates to block any legislation which attempts to legalise \$4 per hour jobs should they win on July 2.

If a returned Liberal Government was unable to change the law to legalise this program, they could be forced to pay workers in the program at the minimum wage. While this would blow a \$478 million hole in the program budget over the forward estimates, Ms Kearney said this was squarely the Government's own fault.

"The Government's plan is either very badly designed and underfunded, or very well designed to exploit Australian workers and strip them of their legal rights and pay."

Given the Abbott-Turnbull Government's poor track record of managing Senate negotiations, the likelihood that it would be successful in passing controversial legislation so detrimental to the lives of workers is remote, making the PaTH program completely unviable.

Ms Kearney said the Government had proven it could not be trusted on jobs.

"Already we have seen Liberal Employment Minister Michaelia Cash admit the PaTH will not create a single new job and that an employer would have to prove they had a 'real vacancy' before hiring an intern."

"This policy is not even designed to create job opportunities. All it would do is allow big companies to replace real jobs with \$4 an hour workers."

"The real path to secure well paid jobs for young people starts with proper investments in early childhood education, schools, TAFE, universities, genuine traineeships and apprenticeships."

"Unfortunately the Turnbull Liberal government has cut education programs to fund a \$50 billion corporate tax cut."

"Once again this Government is tilting the ledger in favor of big business and against working people."

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