

Saturday, 14 October 2023

Dutton's Liberals tear down historic referendum

ACTU reaffirms commitment to justice for First Nations peoples

The ACTU tonight reaffirms our strong, unwavering support for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we stand in solidarity with them in their ongoing fight for justice, and against discrimination and profound disadvantage.

The union movement has stood with First Nations peoples throughout this campaign, as we have for recognition of citizenship, an apology for the Stolen Generations, the return of stolen wages, and in struggles for land rights.

We thank First Nations union leaders, and the tens of thousands of union members, from all industries and from around the country who accepted the offer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to walk with them in this campaign.

We acknowledge that as a country we have unfinished business in recognition, respect, and equality for Australia's First peoples.

The ACTU understands that people voted no for many reasons, including some wanting more change, those who wanted more information, as well as those opposed to change.

The ACTU also recognises that the outcome of the referendum was set on April 5th, when Peter Dutton and the Liberal Party publicly announced they would campaign against recognition and the Voice, and became the political leaders of the No campaign.

On April 5th the referendum was turned into a political campaign **by** Peter Dutton and **for** Peter Dutton. The Liberal Party stood behind their leader and sanctioned a campaign that promoted fear and division for their own political interests.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"To the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this country, the union movement stood with you during this campaign, and our support does not end tonight.

Union members have turned up in their tens of thousands to campaign, and those people and their passion will be there tomorrow and in the future for what comes next. We have engaged and enlivened a generation of activists and supporters on this issue – particularly young people desperate for change. On behalf of our members, across so many industries and in so many places, we offer our continued support to the aspirations and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

I want to warn those looking for complex reasons - this referendum was lost on April 5th - the day Peter Dutton announced that the Liberal Party would campaign against the referendum.

April 5th is the day that turned a positive invitation for change into a political and partisan campaign. This loss belongs to Peter Dutton and the Liberal Party. They will call it a victory, but they turned away from their own commitments, and they put their own political needs before this profound moment for Australia.

Peter Dutton has shown us what he uses leadership for: to say no, to divide, to offer no solutions and to offer no positive view of the future.

Again, the ACTU sends its strongest support to First Nations Peoples tonight.

ENDS

Media: Gareth Hathway 0499 878 782