

Thursday, 4 March 2010

## Unions endorse action plan to ensure that workers are protected under new award system

Employers must give commitments that they will not use changes to the award system to rip off workers' pay or conditions, say unions.

Unscrupulous employers that fail to provide an undertaking and then plan to cut wages and conditions can expect to face legal action, including Take-Home Pay Orders, says the ACTU.

A meeting of unions in Melbourne today has endorsed an action plan to ensure that workers are protected, with a strong focus on collective bargaining to safeguard existing pay and conditions in enterprise agreements.

The union plan seeks to both preserve existing pay and conditions, and to improve on the new award safety net that began operation in January.

Unions expect that most employers will want to do the right thing by their employees, and will seek to secure commitments that will safeguard current pay arrangements.

Where undertakings are not forthcoming, unions stand ready to obtain Take-Home Pay Orders to redress any loss of pay.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said unions were closely monitoring the implementation of the new awards and were determined to ensure that the existing rights and entitlements of workers were preserved under the new system.

"It has been our position since day one that the modernisation of the award system should improve labour standards and must not result in a reduction of take home pay or overall conditions for employees," Mr Lawrence said.

"Workers will benefit from the streamlined award system, which provides a stable and secure safety net and will enhance compliance by employers. In many cases, the review of awards has resulted in increased take home pay and better conditions for workers.

"But there is no escaping the fact that there have also been some disappointing decisions which should have delivered a better result for low-paid workers. Nevertheless, this should not be a green light for any employer to cut pay and conditions.

"The legislation makes it clear that it is not intended that any current employee ends up worse off. If employers dodge this commitment and go ahead undercutting wages and conditions, we will vigorously pursue collective agreements, Take-Home Pay Orders and other legal remedies."

Mr Lawrence said it was important that workers were aware of their rights and employers of their obligations not to reduce take home pay. He said the award system was an ongoing process, and in future reviews unions will seek to extend and improve the safety net.

"The award system provides an important safety net, but the best way for workers to protect and improve on their pay and conditions is through collective bargaining," Mr Lawrence said.

"We will explore all options, including the low-paid bargaining stream, to help workers end their reliance on awards and improve their job and income security under enterprise agreements."

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